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# ASIAN-EUROPEAN MUSIC RESEARCH JOURNAL

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## BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The Number 7 of AEMR is again a very diverse issue in another sense. We offer papers not only from different fields of research and from different regions (China, Philippines, India, Vietnam, Laos, Turkey), but also important reviews of writings (Moore, Jähnichen) and events (Aniarani Andita & Aditi Krishnan, Aly A.E. Hassan) in Europe and methodologically challenging papers on repatriation (Ling Jia Sui [凌嘉穗]) and musical analyses of border-crossing people (Stefanini, Zhang Xun [张寻], Nguyễn Thế Truyền).

AEMR, also being distributed as printed issue, published by LOGOS Berlin, is striving for higher quality papers and encourages scholars of various fields in music research to submit full papers or reviews of writings, events, or projects. In order to make all issues available online, the publisher has introduced a small section with full previous issues in lower resolution. In case you need a printed version, please, contact the publisher. ISSN Number and layout did not change. There are special conditions for purchases of two numbers.

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# THE TRANSTEXTUAL GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN THE OPERA *MADAME WHITE SNAKE*

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## Abstract

The opera *Madame White Snake* (hereafter *Madame*), co-commissioned by Opera Boston and Beijing Music Festival, premiered at Boston Cutler Majestic Theater in February 2010. It was the first commissioned opera by Opera Boston.<sup>1</sup> Based on the story from the famous Chinese ancient myth *Bai She Zhuan*<sup>2</sup> (in Chinese: 白蛇传), this opera's libretto was created by a Singaporean American librettist, who has shed the story's "traditional skin and taking on modern trappings" (Smith, 2019: 27) on purpose.

When sniffing at male librettists' discourses about female characters' vulnerable and tragic lives in their operas, opera *Madame*'s initiator and librettist Cerise Lim Jacobs argues that women should seize the initiative to make their own decisions in life. The white snake, in her mind, ought to be a whole woman who is powerful and demonic, and yet, is also nurturing and caring, is capable of deep and intense love.

In the first section of this article, I introduce the original legend's background and the story outline in its operatic adaptation; I also trace back the opera's commissioning process. After providing the background information of the story and the operatic version, then, in the second section I analyze the opera in terms of its transtextual figural gender construction in her characterization through comparative studies of the white and green snakes' images from the sources of literary works, traditional *xiqu* scripts and operatic librettos. Referring to Lim's personal growth and migrating history, as well as she and her husband co-founded charitable foundation's missions and its recent IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access) opera grant program partnering with Opera America, I aim to examine her gender construction of the "female" roles in the opera from the perspectives of feminism, interracial marriage; and heterosexual, transsexual, and homosexual relationships.

## Keywords

Opera, Chinese drama, Legends, Gender construction

## MADAME WHITE SNAKE: BACKGROUND

### *Bai She Zhuan*: One of Four Great Han Chinese Folktales

*Bai She Zhuan* (in English: *Madame White Snake* or *Legend of the White Snake*) is an ancient Chinese myth story about a love romance between an herbalist and a female snake demon.<sup>3</sup> It was mostly agreed in the scholarship that the story was first popular among the folk during the

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<sup>1</sup> Opera Boston established in 2003 and ceased on January 1, 2012 for the reason of budget deficit.

<sup>2</sup> The background of the story *Bai She Zhuan* is referring to the intangible cultural heritage project details from the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Website: [http://www.ihchina.cn/project\\_details/12184/](http://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/12184/), last accessed on April. 20, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> The legend has been considered as one of four great Han Chinese folktales. The other three are: *Meng Jiang Nü* (Lady Meng Jiang, in Chinese: 孟姜女), *Liang Shan Bo Yu Zhu Ying Tai* (Butterfly Lovers, in Chinese: 梁山伯与祝英台), and *Niu Lang Zhi Nü* (The Cowherd and the Weaver Girl, in Chinese: 牛郎织女).

time of the Song and Ming Dynasties in the Zhen Jiang and Hang Zhou regions<sup>4</sup> (Gao Yan-fang [高艳芳], 2011: 5; 2014: 3; Zhang Wan-li [张万丽], 2005:3; Zhou Qiao-xiang [周巧香], 2010: 3). The story has been collected and recorded in many treatises and novels, and has also been adapted into many art forms, such as the Chinese *xiqu* and *quyi* since then. It has also been made into film and TV series. The studies of the legend and its artistic adaptations from multiple sources, such as folklore, literature, arts, and drama, have provided the classic legend a contemporary academic prosperity. The countless adaptations have also proven the continuous popularity of the story among the audiences throughout almost one thousand years of history. In 2006, the folktale of *Bai She Zhuan* had been listed as China's national intangible cultural heritage.

## The Commission of the Opera

Cerise Lim Jacobs introduced her reason and commissioning history of her project in the interview: “[In 2005] My husband was having a big birthday [in a few years]. He doesn’t want any ‘thing’, and he loves opera, so I thought I commission a song cycle for his birthday. Turns out a year past, nothing happened, we couldn’t come up with a topic. One day I woke up, [the story of] madame white snake was on my mind. Because I grew up in Singapore, that (Bai) was one of the Chinese operas (Cantonese opera) we watched. The story I was so familiar with, and I love the white snake so much and I find her extremely inspiring. Then I just wrote the first draft of the whole libretto.<sup>5</sup> One morning I showed to Charles (Cerise Lim’s husband) and that was the start of our collaboration to write this incredible Chinese fable into an opera libretto that we could produce in the United States.” (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs, 2019).

In 2007, when Cerise Lim Jacobs, this unknown name among the renowned artists in the big American opera market, dialed the office number of Opera Boston and hoped to talk to Carole Charnow, the former general director of Opera Boston, explaining about her idea of producing a contemporary opera which was inspired by an ancient Chinese legend with the opera company, Charnow quickly called her back and showed her interest to that propose (Fang Bo [方博] and Carole Charnow, 2019). By that time, Opera Boston never had commissioned an original opera before. Moreover, commissioning a “freshman” to rewrite a Chinese story for the American audiences was also full of unexpected challenges. After serious discussions and specific artistic and commercial planning, the “amateur” librettist finally put the propose on the table. Lim and Charnow began to start their artistic team building. “We sent to several American composers, some of them Chinese American, some of them Western-American. That’s how we found Zhou Long<sup>6</sup>, and he said to me at the very beginning: ‘I hear the music’. So, I knew he was the right one.” It was the composer’s idea to expand from that song cycle-based chamber opera to a grand opera. Lim then expanded her one-act-libretto to four acts, with an additional prologue and epilogue. When the Beijing Music Festival heard from Zhou Long that he and Lim were going to create [the operatic version of] Bai, they immediately contacted Lim and expressed their wish to be part of the co-commissioning. Finally, Opera Boston and Beijing Music Festival co-commissioned this opera production (ibid.). The opera premiered in Boston in February 2010 and in Beijing in October 2010.

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<sup>4</sup> Since the story happened during the Song Dynasty, there are also history and folklore scholars arguing that part of the story was generated from legends in Tang Dynasty or even earlier from ancient myth. The specific period of history of the story is still arguable in academia today.

<sup>5</sup> Writing lyrics of a song cycle was her first choice over an opera libretto since that was her first literary work after her 25 years legal career. Thus, Lim wished to write a song cycle at first.

<sup>6</sup> Zhou Long (1953-) is a contemporary composer. He composed the music to the opera *Madame White Snake*.



## **Brief Story Outline of the Opera *Madame White Snake***

Madame White Snake is a transformation myth. Xiao Qing is half-snake and half woman. Many eons ago, she was a man and her mistress Madame White a woman. Xiao Qing loved Madame White and tried to take her by force. He was defeated and forced into exile. When they died, both were reincarnated as snakes (Madame White was reincarnated as a white snake and Xiao Qing as a green snake) in punishment for their evil ways. God took pity on Xiao Qing and made him a female snake so that he could forever be with his love. The white snake demon yearns to be human to experience love. After one thousand years of meditation, god grant her wish. While she is transformed physically into a beautiful woman, her essence remains unchanged – she is still a snake and a demon to boot (although many maintain she becomes truly transformed by love). Madame White falls in love with an herbalist [Xu Xian], marries him and becomes pregnant, thus violating all traditional taboos – racial, ethnic, cultural and religious. But an Abbot [Fa’hai] sees through her human form to the snake and, not surprisingly, disaster strikes. Her husband betrays her, and in the moment of betrayal, she is transformed back into a snake. At last, Madame White has a fight with the Abbot. She raises the waters to drown the Abbot. The world is engulfed by floods; millions die (Lim Jacobs, Cerise. Synopsis and Librettist’s Note. 2019. Program Booklet of the Opera *Madame White Snake*. Hong Kong Arts Festival, 8<sup>th</sup> March: 16-21).

The four-act opera is structured with the four seasons of life, which enables the composer to make his music both poetic and dramatic, and also makes the librettist’s operatic storytelling to be philosophically cosmopolitan.

## **THE TRANSTEXTUAL FIGURAL GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN THE LIBRETTO**

### **Previous Studies on Figural Gender Construction in the Story of *Bai She Zhuan***

As mentioned in the previous section, the countless literary and artistic adaptations of *Bai* have been studied from multidisciplinary approaches in the academia. Among all of those researches on the adaptations, one essay entitled “Lun Lei-feng ta de dao diao” (On the collapse of the Lei-feng Pagoda, 1924) by Lu Xun – one of the most influential modern Chinese litterateurs – has been considered as the pioneer literary work which directly discussed the collapse of the Lei-feng Pagoda literally, and sharply connected the social news with the folktale story of *Bai*. As a revolutionist and one of the leaders of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, Lu’s essay was believed to have “revealed the feudalists’ suppression of the people and praised people’s fighting spirit of that time.” (Li, Meng-de [黎孟德], 2014: 100).

Comparing to the study on the historical and social background of the story since the 1920s to 30s, the study on figural images (from the story) started relatively late. In the 1950s, shortly after the People’s Republic of China was founded, “the artistic adaptation and recreation as well as the academic research on figural image was obviously influenced by the [socialist] art policy of ‘literature and art serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers.’” (Gao Yan-fang [高艳芳], 2014). Thus, study on figural images from the story at that time was mostly from the perspective of social hierarchy (A Ying [阿英], 1951). In the 1980s, more studies analyzed the white snake’s figural image in the background of social conflicts of her time, which put the character and her deeds back in her social and historical context in depth. Since that time, scholars whose study mostly focus on the plot development have categorized the whole story into three periods on the white snake’s transformation – a snake demon; half human half demon; and a snake goddess (Chen Cheng-fan [陈正芳]; 2013). From then on, the studies on the relationship between the snakes’ gender and their body and spirit, have widely started.

It was until the 2000s, the scholars who study on figural image in *Bai* have broaden their research scope and no longer limited on the white snake and the abbot Fa’hai, but switched to

Xu Xian and the green snake, which officially started the academic research from gender studies and feminist perspective of figural image analysis on the female as well as the male characters in the story (Zhang, Wan-li [张万丽], 2007; ; Zhou Feng-qin [周逢琴], 2010; ; Zhao, Qian [赵倩], 2011; Gao Yan-fang [高艳芳], 2014; Geng, Chuan-ming and Yao Ping [耿传明, 平瑶], 2015). Among these figural studies of *Bai*, more and more scholars start to dig into the multiple perspectives of gender construction in different art forms. I will discuss in the following subsections.

### **White Snake: From a Demonized “Outsider” to a “Rebellious Woman”**

Although the figural image and gender construction in the story of *Bai* has been recreated throughout the history once and once again, the core frame of the storyline from the legend in its literary and artistic adaptations remains, which is about the transformation of the snake demon and her love story with the herbalist after her being transformed into a woman.

In ancient China, on the one hand, the animal snake has been described as greedy, evil, and harmful animal in many two-part allegorical sayings and idioms; on the other hand, people also worship the snake as their totem for its mysterious power and extraordinary aggressivity. Thus, some Chinese people fear and revere the snake’s power at the same time. Meanwhile, the snake has also been associated with being female and sexuality. The snake has been given multiple meanings. Because of its biological feature of shedding its skin to refresh the body, it has also been connected to “women’s physiological function of fertility and giving birth to new life.” (Zhou Feng-qin [周逢琴], 2010: 9)

Since the early twentieth century, there have always been scholars from different disciplines who consider that the folktale story of *Bai* was the projection of ancient Chinese folk customs and beliefs (Chen Jian-xian [陈建宪], 1987; Luo Yong-lin [罗永麟], 2007) and totemism (Ma Zi-chen [马紫晨], 2002; Zhou Qiao-xiang [周巧香], 2010) toward the relation between snake and the nature. Thus, its multiple literary or artistic adaptations, ancient or modern, could more or less reflect the litterateurs’, artists’, as well as ordinary people’s attitudes toward women’s social status of the time. In the Tang legend *Li Huang* (in Chinese: 李黄, also entitled *Bai She Ji*), which was mostly considered as the first arguably source of the story of *Bai*, a man Li Huang cohabits with a white snake demon incarnated lady. After their three days cohabitation, Li died extremely brutal, with his body decayed into water and only his head left. In the Song script *Xi Hu San Ta Ji* (The three pagodas of West Lake, in Chinese: 西湖三塔记), a man Xi Xuan-zan saves a girl at the Broken Bridge on West Lake and takes her back to her home. The girl’s mother – a white snake demon incarnated white cloth woman forces him to stay and get married with her so that she can secretly eat his heart and livers. Xi’s uncle – a Taoist priest sees through the demons’ incarnated human body and finally prisoned them in the Pagodas ( Zhou Qiao-xiang [周巧香]. 2010: 11-12; 15-18). These folktales demonize women through warning readers from different layers of aspects: beautiful woman could be evil and cruel demon; women’s sexual attraction and human’s sexual desire could be dangerous, or even mortal; and female who takes the initiative to pursue their favorite man is abnormal and should not be allowed in the feudal society. The reasons of people’s depiction of women’s demonic image could also be derived from the feudalist etiquette of Song Dynasty when the Neo-Confucianism was popular, according to which women should obey men’s order and not to be socially active.

In the time period of the Ming Dynasty, Feng Meng-long’s fiction *Jing Shi Tong Yan* (Stories to Caution the World, in Chinese: 警世通言), volume twenty-eight *Bai Niang-zi Yong Zhen Lei Feng Ta* (The White Maiden Locked for Eternity in the Leifeng Pagoda, in Chinese: 白娘子永镇雷峰塔), the white snake incarnated female also takes the initiative to pursue Xu Xuan and makes schemes of seduction in order to get married with him. In Feng’s literary adaptation, the role of the white snake incarnated woman was known as “White Maiden”. Her image was recreated as a daring woman who truly loves and loyal to Xu Xuan. Although Xu strictly abides

by the feudal ethics and intentionally keeps his distance from the stranger female at first, he eventually been touched by White Maiden and agrees with her proposal (Zhou Qiao-xiang [周巧香]. 2010:21) The heretical thoughts of Song Dynasty's Neo-Confucianism started to propagate gender equality and free marriage in the Ming Dynasty. These thoughts break the feudal ethics on woman's caged physical and mental freedom and liberate their status in love relationships. However, in Feng's depiction, the White Maiden was not completely transformed into human, the demonic side of her was quite obvious. "In the feudal society, women were restrained under the ethics and morality, male desire was also severely suppressed. On the one hand, they longed to release their repressed desires; on the other hand, they were still very much afraid to be condemned by feudal ethics. Thus, they took advantage of their discourse hegemony and made this half human-half demon female image. As a female, she could meet men's desire; as a demon, it could also express men's fear...the half woman-half demon female image just symbolizes the contradiction between human's natural desire and social morality." (Zhou Qiao-xiang [周巧香]. 2010: 23).

In the later dynasties, the story has been continuously adapted or recreated, and also been presented in many art forms. Li Rui and Jiang Yun's novel *Ren Jian: Chong Shu Bai She Zhuan* (Li Rui and Yun Jiang [李锐, 蒋韵], 2007) is one of the contemporary literary adaptations of the legend *Bai*. In their recreated story, the white snake is a demon who yearns to become a human. Although her snake body has been transformed into a human body, her real identity is still in between a human and a demon. Her life choices in the mortal world are all based on the unconditional identifying herself with the human nature; thus, she lives a difficult human life without using her spells, marries to a man and gives birth for the purposes of eliminating the demonic essence on her and gaining the human essence. However, every good deed she practices on earth is invisible in front of the abbot Fa'hai and the villagers. The "truth logic" people believes that: demons are evil, they kill and eat human and never stop hurting human. "Hence, the white snake undoubtedly will die tragically in the mortal world. What if the human truth logic is wrong? What is the unchallengeable human justice indeed? Why is that and who can define it?" Zhao, Qian [赵倩], 2011: 23), "When persecution is under the name of the sacred justice, when massacre transforms into people's carnival, when selfish and cowardice becomes the raft to escape, when hatred and brutality lights up the torch, in this mortal world, what's the reason to live?" (Li Rui and Yun Jiang [李锐, 蒋韵], 2007: 2) The writers try to "take an in-depth test on humanity, and expose the extreme panic of the contemporary Chinese people when confronting of humanity issues," (Geng Chuan-ming and Yao Ping [耿传明, 平瑶], 2015: 52) and these questions have been left for deeper thinking between the lines in this retold story.

After her intensive study on the reception of the legend *Bai* throughout the history, Cerise Lim Jacobs realizes that the figural image and gender construction (of the white snake) has never stop changing. Thus, she decided to write her own libretto, in which she treated the experiences of the lead role of Madame White as a projection of her own life. In my interview with the librettist, I was told that she fully identified herself with the white snake in the opera. Hence, she didn't adapt the character from the previous literary versions of the story. On the contrary, she created the white snake into a woman in flesh and blood, who does not represent the traditional Chinese female from the past.

Cerise Lim Jacobs was born in a Chinese immigrant family in colonial Singapore. Raised in the multi-cultural Singapore, she acknowledged herself and her family culturally Chinese. During her childhood, she was quite likely to enjoy wayang, one of the street opera performances in Singapore. After television has been brought into her grandparents' house, she visited them on each weekend, and they watched TV together. Lim describes: "In the afternoon there will always be Cantonese Opera. Program was very spotty, so they would play the same thing over and over again in the late 1960s to early 1970s." (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs, 2019). That "same thing" Lim mentioned includes a Huang-mei Opera movie (in Chinese: 黄梅调电影) *Bai She Zhuan*, produced by Shaw Brothers HK Ltd. Lim continues, "I loved the very famous Chinese actress from Hong Kong, Lin Dai [林黛]. When I was a child, I just watched

it over and over again, just loving the whole movie.” (Ibid.) Those early memories about the story and the impression of the lead female character Madame White have been rooted in her heart throughout her growing.

Lim says: “I went to a Chinese school first, and later transferred to an American Methodist missionary school. She explains, “everything we read and studied was in English. But under the law, we had to have two other languages, so I studied Mandarin and Malay. But at home, (it) is a different thing, we watch Cantonese TV instead of the others. I have first watched the *Bai She Zhuan* [Huang-mei Opera] movie and Cantonese opera, then I read it (the novel) in English.” (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs. 2019).

When Lim explains her recreation of the story and her different figural images compared to the traditional artistic adaptations, she told me that her husband knew nothing about the story, and he came up with many questions on this ancient Chinese myth: “Charles kept asking ‘Why would she say this?’, ‘Why would he do that?’ to the point that all I could do was flesh out the story in a way he would understand.” (Smith, 2019: 27). Meanwhile, throughout Lim’s own westward travelling history, her outlook on life has been transformed upside down. Fully identified herself with the white snake, she also decided to give her snakes rebellious spirits. “As an immigrant, leaving my country, my heritage and everything, traveling around the world, living all over the world, finally set in America, I really felt like an outsider,” says Jacobs. “I view the white snake as the ultimate outsider, that’s how I feel my whole life has been as an ultimate outsider, fighting to make a place for myself, as a woman, as a minority of color, someone is an immigrant who has no roots in a new society. That’s why I wrote it in a way she is both good and bad, has power and also vulnerability, yearned just to belong. She wants to be human, wants to belong to the human race.” (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs. 2019).

In her way of creating the character of white snake, Lim refuses to make her female characters beautiful but helpless. On the contrary, her white snake, as she describes, is “able to hold her own against an authoritarian patriarchy.” (Smith, 2019: 31). Lim says, “[When I started to do research on the story before writing the libretto,] I found the DVD [of the Huang-mei Opera movie *Bai She Zhuan*] to watch it again, [at that moment,] I couldn’t believe why I love it when I was a child. It was terrible. I am not talking about the acting, not talking about the artistic value of movie. I am talking about the ways characters portrayed. Because the white snake and the green snake, they were both so helpless. They were totally romanticized to the point where they became so weak, helpless objects, not in control of their destiny, no attempt to find the destiny, no attempt to fight against the authoritarian forces. You know, they were just like puppets, subjects to the wins of the society, to Xu Xian and the others. I can’t believe why I thought it was the best movie of the world [when I was a child]. The highly romanticized traditional stereotypical view of what Chinese woman is and ought to be... I discovered that her [white snake] early formation and concept of a white snake when she was all demon, it was really looking at this beautiful demon woman in the mythoginistic term which is as a devil or a demon. As the story went along, especially during the Ming dynasty, when it really became very popular, the people of Hang Zhou [where one of the areas the story happened] really adopted it, this demon became more and more romanticized. So now she is not the evil one, she is the victim. So, it’s now, we totally changed our view of her. Traditionally women are perceived in two roles, ‘bitch’ or ‘angel’. So, she went from bitch to angel. She is now a victim, she is helpless, she is demonized by this evil abbot, so on and so forth. So, is essentially sort of angelic victim. I thought that is insane. That was the tradition out of which that Lin Dai movie was made. I want to create a whole woman, someone who has her evil side, demonic side, as we all do. Who is powerful, and yet, is also nurturing and caring, is capable of deep, intense love, and that is what I tried to do.” (Fang Bo [方博], 2019: 54-55; FIGURE 1).



**FIGURE 1: Madame White. (Picture by courtesy of Jill Steinberg from Whitesnakeprojects.com).**

In her libretto, as she declares in the interview, Lim maintains the sexually attractive image of the white snake and makes her the one who takes the initiative to pursue Xu Xian by serving him her special tea of four seasons. (FIGURE 2) The tea, made by her magic, makes Xu losing his mind immediately and proposing to Madame White. The steps she tries to seduce Xu all work as she plans. (FIGURE 3) However, her request for Xu to allow her to leave with Xiao Qing on one night each month without question or objection becomes a potential cause of the tragic ending of their “unethical” marriage. In fact, Madame White requests her leave so that she and Xiao Qing can go to the river to shed their skin once a month. Not as she wished, later when Xu being asked by the Abbot about how much he really knows who his wife truly is, his pend-up suspicion about that uncommon request suddenly comes to his mind. Since Madame White cannot let him know the truth, she tries to deflect his question by telling him that she is pregnant, which made their relationship worse that Xu even doubts that the child is from her monthly trysts with a lover. Xu flees from his wife, journeys to the Monastery in search of the Abbot for the truth. Fearful of a child produced by a demon and a mortal, the Abbot gives him a potion, advising him to use it cautiously. Madame White feels desperate that her husband has been gone for days; thus, she resolves to tell him the truth when he comes back. Before she can do so, Xu arrives the Broken Bridge where they first met, and tells her that he has been worried about her and the unborn child and has made a potion to help the birth. Madame White knows he has lied, and their love has come to an end. The potion becomes the blasting fuse that makes



Madame White seeing her husband's betrayal and exasperates her brutalization and transforming back into a snake, fighting over the abbot.



**FIGURE 2: Xiao Qing serves Xu Xian special tea of four seasons made by Madame White's magic. (Picture by courtesy of Jill Steinberg from Whitesnakeprojects.com).**

Lim points out: “[the potion] can either be genuinely magical (cue Wagner’s *Tristan chord*) or merely a placebo (see Donizetti’s *Elixir of Love*). In *Madame White Snake*, you don’t really know whether the truth potion she takes in real. When the scholar (Xu Xian) tells her, ‘I mixed these special herbs to help your childbirth’ – which is not in the original myth, by the way – she can tell he’s lying, and both her trust and love die. With nothing to live for, her transforming back into a snake marks her spiritual death.” (Smith, 2019: 31).

Although disagreeing with the stereotypical view of Chinese women as weak and helpless “chattel” to the authoritarian patriarchy, Lim also sees the rebellious aspect through the transformation and reception history of the story. “[What surprise me is that,] the myth of this powerful demon, who was sexually powerful, with her ability control the elements, the rain and water, could survive. [I think] it survived because even for men, she is a symbol of what should have been a pressed victim rising out of that, breaking free to be herself, to realizing her full potential.” Lim continues, “That’s what I tried to do. I am so glad I was the one who wrote the western version [of the white snake], because I am so tired of western opera when a team of men write about the crazy women or evil women, they always die, either been killed or commit suicide, but never been shown as a woman with power and yet vulnerability and also vindictiveness. Because that’s the whole human psyche is. You can look at it [*Madame White Snake*] as my own psyche journey. In other words, I went from loving the traditional view of the white snake, who surely inspired me on a level beyond what the traditional adaptations were, and then many, many years later, when I created her from reflecting the person that I am now,

as oppose to the person I was in the 1960s. What you are seeing is really what I think now of this character and how she reflects what I value and believe.” (Fang Bo [方博], 2019: 56).



**FIGURE 3: Madame White and Xu Xian’s wedding. (Picture by courtesy of Matthew Daniel from Whitesnakeprojects.com).**

As mentioned above, Cerise Lim believed herself to be the first librettist who has adapted the legend *Bai She Zhuan* to a western opera. In fact, the Taiwanese composer Hsu Tsang-houei and librettist Da Huang had adapted that story to an operatic version in 1975. They premiered their four-act, seven scenarios opera *Lady Bai* in July 1978 at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall. The opera has been considered as “the first large scale grand opera in Chinese of Taiwan’s music history.” (Tsang-Houei Hsu Culture and Art Foundation, 2020). According to the composer, he was reluctant to compose a certain grand opera when he was first invited by the famous Taiwan jingju script writer Yu Da-gang to do so. “Concerning of the vocal and orchestral quality, the stage condition and professional staff (of stage management) of that time (in early 1970s when I was invited to compose that opera), I really dare not to try. More importantly, I think I was still not confident enough to compose a modern Chinese opera with quality. This opera must inherit the legend from Chinese xiqu; thus, I cannot one hundred percent copying the western operatic traditions, neither to change the libretto with a Chinese story and to be sung in Chinese. I have been kept searching for the road of Chinese opera. When someday I find out the way, I will compose it.” (Ibid.). Turns out Hsu finally accomplished the opera *Lady Bai*, and it is the only opera he has composed in his composition career. “Learning from western opera traditions, Hsu absorbed Classical and Romantic opera patterns, and adopted the leitmotiv to organize the whole operatic structure from Wagner and Debussy’s operatic composition experiences. He repeatedly uses two leitmotivs in the opera, one is ‘the motif of doom’ and the other is ‘the motif of joyousness.’” (Liang Mao-chun [梁茂春]. 1993: 10). Although Hsu’s attempt to compose a Chinese opera has met both objective and subjective difficulties at that time, the opera has more or less inspired the later artistic adaptations of the traditional Chinese legends. However, as a Chinese composer, who co-worked with another Chinese librettist, Hsu Tsang-houei’s *Lady Bai* did not go very far in reshaping the figural images and retelling the

whole story. His creativeness was clearly concentrated on how to fuse the Chinese music traditions and ancient Chinese cultural representations with the western operatic music, and still makes the opera culturally Chinese.

Started in very different historical periods, socio-cultural backgrounds, and economic systems, Cerise Lim's opera *MWS* is more likely to be a microscopic narrative since her aims and purposes were much more personal than Hsu Tsang-houei's. Not forced to carry the national responsibility of inheriting Chinese cultural heritage, of which the adapters must have to consider about the fidelity to the original classic, Lim was easier to recreate a rebellious white snake from her own understanding and interpretation of the gender constructions of the characters. The other obvious reason for her gender construction to be culturally non-traditional is probably because of her interracial marriage with her Jewish husband.

In the interview, Lim admitted that, she needed to flesh out the story of an ancient Chinese myth that her white husband could understand. As a Singaporean American immigrant, her marriage with Charles Jacobs largely changed her world views and her own lifestyle. Lim mentions that her husband has always been encouraging her to do whatever she feels like to do. When she retired from her partnership from law, she wanted something that could really invest her heart and soul and time and resources into. (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs. 2019). Before she became a lawyer, she was a writer. Thus, she came up with the idea to write the lyrics of the song cycle as the birthday gift to her husband. When she finished her lyrics and searching for the composer, Zhou Long suggested to make the small vocal piece into a grand opera and Charles Jacobs suggested to contact Opera Boston for cooperation. That explains how she coincidentally became an opera librettist.

In the researches of Asian American interracial marriages in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many scholars are more likely to focus on the immigrant population in the new social context. The cultural assimilation among the immigrants and their family status in their marital relationships as well as the changes in their social lives before and after having the interracial marriages in the United States have also been continuously concerned. For instance, in the article "Patterns of Asian American Intermarriage and Marital Assimilation", the authors compare the data of Asian American intermarriages from the perspectives of the Asian Americans' ethnicity, nativity, age and gender, place of residence, education, occupation and income, and index of intermarriage distance. (Lee and Yamanaka, 1990). In another article "Asian American Interracial and Interethnic Marriages: Differences by Education and Nativity" (Qian Zhenchao, Lee Blair, and Ruf, 2001: 579), the authors summarize from their social surveys on interracial marriages in America: "Southeast Asian and Asian Indian Americans have the strongest endogamy of all Asian ethnic groups...Southeast Asian Americans are mostly refugees, poor in educational attainment and job skills, and residentially segregated from mainstream society, which, according to assimilationists, lead to strong ethnic endogamy." Different from the situation mentioned above, Cerise Lim was born in an immigrant family in Singapore, and she herself has also become an immigrant in the United States after finished her study in the Harvard Law School as an international student and get her job in the Judicial Department. "The desalination of the religious, racial, and ethnic differences in the university campus, in turn, promoted the mainstream American society for the transition of their attitudes on the heretic and people from different ethnic groups. Meanwhile, teenagers' self-determination in relationships and marriages also promoted the social respect and tolerance on intermarriage." (Huang Xu-feng [黄虚峰]. 2002: 23). Although her interracial marriage has also been opposed by her family members, she has become more and more independent and self-determined after studying and staying out of her homeland for decades. Despite of their racial background and cultural differences, Cerise Lim was very clear that she didn't care about the objection from the other, but to follow her heart and marry the one she loved. The one who took the initiative to pursue her own happiness with someone from



the different racial/species background, that's truly how Cerise Lim created the character of Madame White as well as how to live her own life in a multicultural society.

### **Green Snake: From A Male Snake Demon to A Transsexual Servant Girl**

The supporting female character in the opera – the green snake Xiao Qing, played another important role in the librettist's storytelling. Same as her recreation on the figural image and gender construction of the white snake, Lim was also determined to have her green snake different from most of the previous adaptations. "(In the other adaptations) She is another victim (of the feudal society)," says Lim: "beautiful but helpless woman." (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs. 2019).

The legend, as mentioned above, has been adapted to diverse art forms in the ancient Chinese history, and the story has also been transformed and changed in both folk legends and literature in each of the adaptations. In the literary materials *Xi Hu You Lan Zhi* (Diary of the West Lake Tour) by Tian Ru-cheng from Jia Jing Reign in Ming Dynasty and *Bai Niang Zi Yong Zhen Lei Feng Ta* (White Maiden Locked for Eternity in the Leifeng Pagoda) by Feng Meng-long from Wan Li Reign in Ming Dynasty, there were no green snake but a green fish in the story, whom also played the role as Madame White's servant girl. In the later adaptations of the legend has Xiao Qing been adapted to be a green snake. Same as Madame White, Xiao Qing transformed to be half-demon-half-human after 500 years of meditation. She is a brave and loyal servant girl to Madame White. Meanwhile, she still maintains her demon's evil and cruel essence being in the human world.

The Chinese resources mostly discuss Xiao Qing's demon essence to be sexually evil in the male-dominated society as well as her sustaining of demonized superpower instead of her human right as a woman to fall in love with a man. Her quests to being as human and experience love have been largely neglected in most of the Chinese xiqu and drama adaptations. Both her demon and servant' identities make Xiao Qing lack of power in men's world and hardly being an eyes-catching character. On the one hand, she is "a dowry servant girl who is subordinated to the White Snake. Hence, her beautiful look and loyalty is the reflection of people's anticipation on her role instead of her own happiness." (Zhang, Wan-li [张万丽]. 2007: 1). On the other hand, however, in all the literary and artistic adaptations of *Bai She Zhuan*, although she cannot get away from her demon and servant' identity, "Xiao Qing is never a totally domesticated character. She was born to be aggressive and unruly." (Ibid.). Thus, the complication of her social identity as well as her gender identity in different texts give the librettist the chance to explore Xiao Qing's figural image in a transtextual context and provides her more freedom and possibilities to recreate such a role in her adapted libretto.

In 'modern jingju' [现代京剧] *Bai she zhuan* adapted by playwright Tian Han, the mythological folktale has been largely modified for the purpose of disseminating newly founded PRC's socialist values, such as anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism. Under certain socio-historical context when Tian's reformed modern jingju *Bai she zhuan* was created, "Xiao Qing's essence has been 'purified' in order to better reveal her heroine image," (Zhang, Wan-li [张万丽], 2007: 29) and clearer her anti-feudalist fighter's wishes and deeds. "Tian's *Bai she zhuan* was considered to be one of the modern jingju masterpieces which reflects Chinese women's spirit of anti-feudalist oppression and pursuing free marriage" (Huang Jing-feng [黄静枫]. 2018: 6-7). However, Tian didn't develop her character from this free woman's default figural image in his script, and even "totally avoided Xiao Qing's own searching for her life destination and spiritual demands." (Zhang, Wan-li [张万丽]. 2007: 30). The recreation of the "free women's images", thus, was an adapted version of *Bai She Zhuan* from the socialist feminism. Its meanings of liberating women's free wills and lifting their social status were more or less

theoretically hypothetical and not has been fully developed from the practical aspect of concerning women's specific needs and wills.

Lin Hwai-min, the founder and resident choreographer of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, has also choreographed a piece of modern dance drama *The Tale of the White Serpent* (1975). In this dance drama "Lin choreographed two dance scenarios, one for the white snake and the green snake, the other for Xu Xian and Fa'hai. The first one is the opening scenario in which the two snakes intertwined with each other's body; the second one is in the scenario when Fa'hai takes Xu Xian away with his arms enfolded Xu's body. These two dance scenarios reveal the homosexual emotions between the female snakes as well as the male mortal roles" (Chen Cheng-fan [陈正芳]. 2013: 341). Besides, Lin also changes the green snake's figural position in between the white snake and Xu Xian's love relationship from the legend *Bai She Zhuan*. In his adaptation, both the white snake and the green snake love Xu Xian; thus, they compete with each other in order to win Xu's heart. "Lin fulfills the green snake a more comprehensive personality like a normal female would have...On the one hand, the green snake feels gloat over the white snake's defeat in the fight with Fa'hai; on the other hand, she also feels mercy on the white snake's suffering and choose to defend her." (Zhang, Wan-li [张万丽], 2007: 34-35).

Li Pi-hua's novel *Qing She* (1986) subverts the traditional legend's storyline and breaks the illusion of Madame White and Xu Xian's love romance. In this novel, the green snake incarnated beautiful young lady Xiao Qing is no longer a supporting role. On the contrary, she fully experienced human love and all the emotions in the mortal world through her own rethinking on Madame White's and her own deeds. "Li Pi-hua intentionally tells the story from the 'supporting role's' perspective and leads the whole novel's storytelling. It is based on the female consciousness from the original text. It also speaks for both women and the subordinate class." (Chen Cheng-fan [陈正芳]. 2013: 354). Meanwhile, Li's novel also discloses the inconspicuous romance between the green snake and the white snake. "In the text from the novel, Li didn't intentionally bring up the queer topic, only to expose the difficult situation of this unacceptable homosexual relationship as to refer to the unethical love between a demon and a mortal from the original story." (Ibid.). Compared to Lin Hwai-min and Li Pi-hua's half-disguisedly representation of the homosexual love between the characters, another Taiwan playwright Tian Chi-yuan stepped forward on the queer interpretation on the characters' relations in his Avant-guard theater production *Bai she zhuan* (1993). Different from the previous artists who use their underlying artistic language to depict the homosexual emotions, Tian choose an all-male cast to play the roles, include the white and green snakes. In this production, "the green snake hates Xu Xian not only because of her identity, as a servant girl, has her responsibility of protecting Madame White when Xu betrays her, but also for her own love to the white snake." (Zhang, Wan-li [张万丽]. 2007: 36). In the 1980s, Tian confessed to the administrators in college about his queer identity and the fact that he has AIDS. He then has been expelled from the university and has been heavily reported on media. The discrimination on him since then firmed his courage to create drama works that can lead the local audiences together to face the most controversial social issues. He founded Critical Point Theater with Jan Huei-ling in 1988 and he himself served as artistic director. Concerning his queer interpretation, "Tian's gender switch in this drama clearly shows his questioning towards the unreasonable social bias on queers in the real life." (Li Guang-zhu [李光柱]. 2012: 29). Thus, this drama has been considered as the most direct and bold representation to observe the homosexual relationships from the original legend. Since this "Avant-guard" adaptation appeared in front of the public, scholars started to dig deeper into the homosexual relationship of the major characters in the legend *Bai She Zhuan*.

In her characterizing of Xiao Qing, Lim was hoping to adopt the version of the green snake to be born male, and later being forced to transform into a female snake. Lim explains: "Chen Yi

(Zhou Long's wife) told me the story, kind of the prologue of the Si-Chuan opera<sup>7</sup> about the green snake being a man in the past. The moment she told that to me, I knew that my green snake has to incorporate that. I have been thinking on the Greek mythology about Tiresias, who is the only person who has fully experienced what it was like to be a man and a woman. So, when I heard Chen Yi talked about the Si-Chuan opera story, I immediately said that's (going to be) my story. I adopted the history of the green snake as a man who is now transforming to be a woman, and I modified the story." (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs. 2019).

In fact, in many different Chinese regional xiqu traditions, the green snake was male first, and tried to force the white snake to marry him. Beaten by the white, the green was finally willing to be her servant girl. In the Si-Chuan opera tradition, "the green snake is alternatively performed by an actor and an actress in different genders...the female Xiao Qing is considerate and vivacious. She is the matchmaker of Madame White and Xu Xian; The male Xiao Qing is loyalty, brave, and determined, who has always hidden his love to Madame White. He is more of a tragic role." (Zhou Feng-qin [周逢琴]. 2010: 43).

Besides Lim's characterization of the role in her libretto, the casting process on the character of Xiao Qing was also a complicated task. In the interview when I asked her about their concerns about the casting of Xiao Qing, Cerise Lim admits that: at first composer Zhou Long was searching for a *Qian Dan* actor (falsetto cross-dressing actor in Chinese xiqu traditions, in Chinese: 乾旦) to play the role of Xiao Qing. Zhou Long went back to Beijing several times selecting different *Qian Dan* actors to audition and rehearse, however none of them can read five-lines notation, hardly reach the wide range of pitches in Zhou's score for Xiao Qing, neither can they read or sing in English accurately. After many discussions with Zhou, Lim suggested him to consider about having a male soprano casting this transgender role. Finally, Lim introduced a male soprano Michael Maniaci to Zhou Long and convinced him that he could fulfill Zhou's anticipation on the vocality of Xiao Qing. (FIGURE 4).

In the interview, Lim says: "I have heard Michael Maniaci before I fell in love with his voice. Because it's very beautiful, and somewhat otherworldly. You can tell it's not quite soprano, but it's neither a tenor, nor a countertenor." (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs. 2019). Turns out casting a male soprano to play the role of Xiao Qing was not only different from the composer's first imagination of the "beautiful and demonized" image, but also recklessly challenged most of the Chinese audiences who has their earlier impression of Xiao Qing as a beautiful servant girl in the legend. Regardless of the change from the composer's idea of casting a falsetto cross-dressing jingju actor to the librettist's propose of casting a male soprano for the role of Xiao Qing, the result seems have reached Cerise Lim's purpose of "injects another tension into the story because of his unrequited love for the white snake. All of a sudden, he sees for the first time in his life, someone else has mysteriously fall in love (with Madame White), the one thing he wanted for his entire life, but wasn't for him. It makes him or her into a truly tragic figure." (Fang Bo [方博] and Cerise Lim Jacobs. 2019). Although not have mentioned much about her comparison on the transgender snake image of Tiresias with her characterization of the transgender green snake in details, she did mention that the emotions between the white and green snakes from heterosexual to homosexual relationship did change from "lovers" to sisterhood, but it did not change much from the inside that the green snake still loves Madame white after been transformed into a female. The "pity" from gods who made him a female snake can either be a way of hiding his love to the white snake and continuously accompanying aside Madame White as a servant girl, or a punishment for him to never get a chance to really be with his beloved one as socially accepted lover. Although not directly explained in her libretto since the green snake's hidden emotions for the white snake is not

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<sup>7</sup> Si-Chuan Opera, also entitled Chuanjü, is one of the traditional Chinese regional xiqu genres which is popular among the Southwestern Chinese regions, such as Si-Chuan province and partial areas of Yun Nan and Gui Zhou provinces.

frequently shown by words in the scenarios, Michael Maniaci's performance is much clearer that she (Xiao Qing) is jealousy and painful in the plot when Madame White and Xu Xian just got married and are suggested to be having sex through Xiao Qing's descriptions (off the scene). With the most complicated emotions happening at the same time, she finally spills out her envy words: "No trace of the ferocious warrior who hungered for supremacy. Where are you now, my queen?" (Lim Jacobs, Cerise. 2019b).



**FIGURE 4: The role of Xiao Qing played by male soprano Michael Maniaci. (Picture by courtesy of Matthew Daniel from Whitesnakeprojects.com).**

Cerise Lim is now serving as the president of a charitable foundation that her husband Charles Jacobs and her co-founded. She also “endowed the Charles M. Jacobs Fund for Equal Rights and Social Engagement at the University of Chicago Law School and College. She is a founder of White Snake Projects, a company which commissions, develops and produces original opera of the highest production values, combined with social activism.” (Ibid.). Supported by her charitable foundation, OPERA America<sup>8</sup> has launched an IDEA Opera Grants. “IDEA Opera Grants are OPERA America’s first grant program designed with a racial equity lens... It is committed to promoting equal rights and social justice through education, music and the law. This new program provides support for the promotion and development of new works by artists of color who may not have worked previously in the field.” (Ibid.) According to OPERA America, the definition of “IDEA” stands for:

**Inclusion:** authentic representation, empowered participation and a true sense of belonging, beyond numerical diversity.

**Diversity:** breadth of representation; it can mean different cultures and ethnicities, gender identities, ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, geographies, budget sizes or works presented.

**Equity:** recognizing that not everyone is starting from the same point, but ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

**Access:** equitable admittance to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience.

Under the cooperation with OPERA America and their own charitable foundation, which also is supported by *the Charles and Cerise Jacobs Charitable Foundation* (OPERA America Inc., 1995-2021), Cerise Lim’s opera company is able to commission new opera productions which explore “current issues relevant to our times” (Ibid.), especially to concern about the hardly seen humanity corners. Meanwhile, Lim also hopes to provide a platform for the artists from ethnic minorities, whom resemble of herself in the multicultural American society. For instance, the company has launched “a multi-year community-based project, Sing Out Strong (SOS), that commissions composers and writers to create songs based on themes that flow from our operas.” (Ibid.). In 2019, their project was Sing Out Strong: Immigrant Voices, which was based on the theme of newly changed immigration policies under President Donald Trump from their 2019 premiered opera *I am A Dreamer Who No Longer Dreams*. (Whitesnakeproject, 2020). In 2020, the project was Sing Out Strong: DeColonized Voices, which is based on the theme of the future Space colonization from their ongoing 2020 opera *Cosmic Cowboy*. (Ibid.).

## FINAL REMARKS

Reading through the historical materials and different adapted artistic forms of the Legend *Bai She Zhuan*, it is evidentially that writers and playwrights from different period of time had their specific perspectives of view on women, and female characters in all kinds of play they created had been portrayed quite differently. The development process of how the creators reshaping the leading female characters, such as the feminine characteristics of Madame White, the gender construction of Xiao Qing, is also an intriguing aspect to examine gender issues in different ages. From an evil snake demon to a beautiful and daring woman, from a subordinate servant girl to a fearless woman warrior, the female image and humanity have been given more positive voices in terms of gender equality in most of the adaptations of the legend. However, when confronted with the authoritarians, the male dominated society, the male dominated family

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<sup>8</sup> OPERA America leads and serves the entire opera community, supporting the creation, presentation and enjoyment of opera. OPERA America Inc. (1995-2021). <https://operaamerica.org/content/about/index.aspx>, last accessed on 10 April, 2021.

relationship, both Madame White and Xiao Qing lost their voices and power indeed.

In her way of recreating the images of the characters and reshaping the gender discourse in the legend, Cerise Lim decided to shed the story's traditional skin and taking on modern trappings. Although it is not a radical departure from the traditional story, in her opera, Madame White's rebellious spirit and anger to revenge, Xiao Qing's transsexual character setting and her quest for Madame White's love, have all been boldly revealed to the male characters in the opera as well as the opera audiences. Speaking for the ethnic minorities as well as the gender minorities in their multicultural society, and yet, embracing the diversity of demographic composition and supporting the equality of human rights, Cerise Lim continuously practicing as a social activist after her law career. If founding a charitable foundation with her attorney husband could be considered as the step to serve the society where she absorbed all the experiences from her profession, then founding an opera company on her own could be seen as her independent move to fulfill her dream that was based on her life-long interest of being a writer. In her creating of the opera *Madame White Snake*, I believe that as an immigrant and a female, Lim's self-identification with the role of white snake she recreated for this opera breaks the stereotypical views of the Chinese female demon in both Western and Chinese audiences' minds; moreover, it is Lim's past working experience in the judicial branch and her current duties in the charitable foundation and the opera company that encouraged her to sing out strong for the "unprotected" or "less concerned" individuals as well as promoted herself and her Chinese legend-based opera within the transnational opera markets.



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# SYMPHONIES, STATUS AND SOFT POWER: THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF INDIA

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## **Abstract**

The Symphony Orchestra of India (SOI) is India's only professional symphony orchestra. In this paper, I explore the roles and meanings of the SOI. First, I situate it locally within its home city of Mumbai, positioning it within discourses of social class, status, and globally-minded aspiration. I argue that local values and ideologies surrounding professional musicianship compromise attempts to embed orchestral musicking in the city. I then move on to place the SOI within discourses of nation building, questioning the role of the orchestra as a marker of national development. I suggest that Mumbai's transnational middle class and elite communities, as well as the SOI's multinational corporate donors, consider investment in an orchestra a part of India's wider political and economic development. I point to tensions that are created as India's local and national government resist the notion of the orchestra as a marker of modernity and instead champion Indian arts and cultures as foundational to India's nationhood. Finally, I explore the SOI's transnational networks, looking at its role within cultural diplomacy and soft power. I show that, whilst the SOI has made significant steps in 'reaching out' and finding a place within transnational cultural networks, its efforts are hampered by its failure to 'stand out'; to forge its own national identity as an *Indian* symphony orchestra.

## **Keywords**

Orchestra, India, Mumbai, Soft Power, Cultural diplomacy.



**FIGURE 1: The Symphony Orchestra of India (By courtesy of NCPA 2016).**

## **THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF INDIA: A BACKGROUND**

The Symphony Orchestra of India (in the following SOI, FIGURE 1) was founded in 2006 by the National Centre for the Performing Arts (in the following NCPA), a large arts centre located in South Mumbai. It performs two concert 'seasons' per year as a full symphony orchestra in

February and September<sup>1</sup>, as well as more regular small chamber concerts in the off-season periods. A core group of musicians make up an SOI chamber orchestra and are resident in Mumbai all year round; freelance musicians are employed to make up the full symphony orchestra during the seasons. The full-time musicians are a mix of Indian nationals and foreigners (mainly from Eastern Europe), whilst the freelance visiting musicians are from various international locations, often Kazakhstan or the UK<sup>2</sup>. The SOI employs a resident conductor, Zane Dalal<sup>3</sup>, and invites a guest conductor for each season.

Repertoire generally focuses on canonic works from the late classical and romantic eras<sup>4</sup> and includes symphonies and larger scale orchestral works, concertos with invited soloists, and smaller chamber concerts or recitals. NCPA chairman Khushroo Suntook, together with orchestral manager Xerses Unvala, conductor Zane Dalal and Music Director Marat Bisengaliev, decide on the repertoire for each season, with input from British advisor Edward Smith.

In an interview taken in 2014, I asked Suntook about the orchestra's repertoire, and about the tastes of the audiences in Mumbai: "If you have opera or ballet, you are full! Oh, they love it, they love big things. Opera is a passion for them. We did a *Butterfly*, we did *Tosca*, we have done *Cavalleria Rusticana*, lots of things. And full house, you can charge as much as you want. Very popular, they love it. Because it's really an extension of Bollywood you know." (Suntook 2011. Personal communication, 10 September)

Tastes tend to be rather conservative in Mumbai, as Suntook highlighted in our conversation, which took place just before a concert in the September season: "Tonight, it is going to be a difficult program; Britten and Bartok. They like a traditional concert, basically they do love their Bach, Mozart, Haydn Beethoven, Brahms. But that's true of everything. When you go to festival hall if it's a Beethoven concert it's sold out, but if you are going to do all Bartok or all Berg, basically you can get tickets." (Ibid.).

The origins of the SOI are somewhat hazy: during a period of fieldwork in Mumbai in 2014, I was presented with varying accounts and narratives. The official version posited by the SOI is that Suntook heard Kazakh violinist Marat Bisengaliev performing in London in 2004. Impressed by the performance, Suntook invited Bisengaliev to come to Mumbai and help to start India's first professional orchestra, which he did in 2006. They advertised for players and

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<sup>1</sup> 2020 seasons were interrupted by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> Marat Bisengaliev, Music Director of the SOI, was from Kazakhstan and often reached out to the community of musicians there to fill orchestral seats. NCPA Chairman Khushroo Suntook, meanwhile, had many contacts in the UK. At the time of research, the NCPA employed a British orchestral manager, who also facilitated the sourcing of musicians from the UK.

<sup>3</sup> Zane Dalal is a British conductor from a Parsi family. He has worked with the SOI since 2006, as Resident Conductor and, from 2014, as Associate Music Director.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'canonic work' refers pieces of music from a particular historical era or a particular genre that are generally considered by persons in some educational circles to be great, important or even iconic. The late classical and early eras in the history of Western music date from around 1800 to around 1910. Examples of canonic works from this time include (but are not limited to) Beethoven's 5th Symphony (composed in 1808), Bruch's violin concerto number 1 in G minor (composed in 1866), and Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade (composed in 1888). All of these works have been performed by the SOI.

auditioned local musicians, filling gaps in the orchestra with professional musicians invited from abroad, many from Bisengaliev's home country of Kazakhstan.

An alternative narrative was put to me by a British musician who had spent many years as guest player with the amateur Bombay Chamber Orchestra (BCO)<sup>5</sup> and, later, with the SOI. She suggested that the idea and the initial funding came from a small group of UK musicians who had spent time in India playing with the BCO. The SOI was planned by these musicians as an educational institution first and foremost, with the majority of time and effort to be put into local education projects, supplemented by concerts. The goal, my informant suggested, was that the music education projects would result in the SOI being 50 per cent Indian in membership by 2015, something which was then side-lined in favour of producing concerts of international standards through an ongoing practice of employing foreign musicians (Jessica, 2014. Personal communication, 1 September).

Now, the Symphony Orchestra of India is in its 13th year and is very much embedded within the Western Classical Music scene in the city of Mumbai. What are the roles and meanings of the SOI for its local audiences, for its Indian musicians, and for Mumbai's wider communities?

### LOCAL MEANINGS: THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND SOCIAL CLASS

The home of the SOI, the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), stands on the edge of the Arabian sea overlooking the lights of a grand sweeping bay locally dubbed 'the Queen's Necklace'. It is arguably the centre of the Western classical music scene in Mumbai; it is certainly the most high-profile venue, with the most funding and the most prestige.

The NCPA is a large multi-venue arts centre comprising three large concert halls alongside two smaller venues, a cafe, a restaurant, an office block, a library, a practice block, accommodation for staff and several car parks. The complex is home to an organ donated by the German government, a classical harp and several Steinway grand pianos. Built on land reclaimed from the sea, the NCPA's size, the style of its buildings, its decor, and its location create an impression of wealth and status. From its plush red carpets to its glimmering chandeliers, air-conditioned rooms, high-end restaurant and the price of its tickets<sup>6</sup>, the NCPA's opulence situates it firmly within the social spaces occupied by the middle and upper classes. It also reinforces associations between Western classical music and the middle or upper classes, associations rooted in European social and musical development and praxis (Gramit, 2002; Small, 1987; Nettle, 1995; Bourdieu, 1979), associations which have been present in colonial India (Farrell, 1996; Leppert, 1987; Woodfield, 2000) and which continue to be felt in various transnational global sites (Kraus, 1989; Yoshihara, 2008; Morcom, 2002; Yang, 2007).

Western classical music in Mumbai had historically been bound up with middle class socio-economically elite Parsi and Catholic communities (Marsden, 2019), although before the SOI

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<sup>5</sup> The BCO is Mumbai's longest running amateur orchestra. It was founded in 1962 by local Parsi violinist Jini Dinshaw, who continues to run the orchestra at the time of writing. More info can be found at <http://bcoindia.co.in/>

<sup>6</sup> There is some debate as to the relevance of ticket prices to classical music audience demographics. Andrew Mitchell has compiled evidence showing that opera tickets prices in the UK are in fact lower than many other cultural, sporting or tourist activities (Mitchell, 2015). In Mumbai, the cost of ticket to Western classical music concerts does exclude a larger portion of the city's residents than comparable prices in the UK would (recently estimates suggest that 44 percent of Mumbai's residents live in slums). J.P.E Harper Scott, meanwhile, frames concert attendance within discourses of social class, pointing to football tickets as an example of high-priced events popular with working classes (Harper Scott, 2012).

these communities did not have access to a local professional orchestra<sup>7</sup> and as such their opportunities to practice their taste cultures within their locale were limited. The SOI's 2014 concert season brochure, though, highlighted ongoing and deliberate connections between the NCPA and Mumbai's middle / upper classes. The following passage is taken from its 'Overview' page:

### AUDIENCE PROFILE

“The NCPA presents more than 600 events each year, encompassing the full range of Indian performing arts traditions, as well as international stars from a diverse range of genres including drama, contemporary dance, orchestral concerts, opera, jazz and chamber music. Audiences for these events comprise the cultural cognoscenti from across Mumbai, typically drawn from the city's educated professionals and business people, academicians, government employees, celebrities from the arts and entertainment sectors and students.” (NCPA, 2014:5).

Here, the intentional outlining of the middle and upper classes as the NCPA's core audience indicates both a celebration of this strata of society (perhaps there is an element of flattery intended, as this brochure was intended to be read, in English, by those attending the SOI season) and a lack of inclusivity with regards to less privileged audiences: the NCPA makes no claims of egalitarianism. This is in contrast to initiatives in many Euro-American sites, whereby orchestras actively attempt to reach out to, engage with, and include diverse communities from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (Ramnarine, 2012).

I attended several concerts, during which I observed that audiences at the NCPA were predominantly English speaking, affluent and from the older generation, perhaps aged 50 years and above. Parsis<sup>8</sup> were in the majority, although Suntook and Unvala stressed that this was slowly changing. Unvala described the audience profile to me as follows:

“There is a knowledgeable group who have travelled the world going to concerts. They are the core and have been there from the start.” (Unvala, 2014: Personal communication, 20 August).

A musician who had played in the SOI and who regularly attended concerts corroborated Unvala's assertion that audiences were affluent and internationally-minded, telling me, “Sometimes people go for concerts of Western classical music just to prove that they are international, that they have travelled abroad.” (Malhotra, 2014. Personal communication, 2 September). Many audience members were influential within spheres of business and politics; I observed business leaders and foreign ambassadors at several concerts and after-parties, their presence was encouraged by the SOI as tickets were reserved for corporate sponsors.

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<sup>7</sup> By ‘professional orchestra’ I refer to orchestras made up of professional musicians who are paid a salary, and which exist to perform orchestral music at the highest level, usually to paying audiences. Amateur orchestras, by contrast, are usually made up of unpaid musicians for whom music is a hobby or a personal passion rather than a job.

<sup>8</sup> The Parsi community in India follow Zoroastrianism, a religion originating in Persia. From the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, Zoroastrians in Persia were persecuted and fled to India, settling in the western coastal state of Gujarat. They began migrating to Bombay from the 1640s onwards. The Parsis in Bombay prospered during the British Raj. They spoke English and collaborated with the British on a plurality of business, education and cultural projects, which often made them unpopular amongst the rest of the Indian population (Bamboot, 2015). Due to their prosperity, however, the Parsis shaped Mumbai enormously. Today the Parsi community is tiny in number: there are only around 60 000 Parsis in India, most of whom live in Mumbai (Murphy, 2014). The Parsi community has strong links with Western classical music, and are integral to the Western classical music scene in Mumbai.

In his 2004 research on concert attendance in London, Stephen Cottrell argues that quasi-ritualistic orchestral concerts scaffolded by a mythologically enhanced belief system provide a space in which attendees accrue symbolic and cultural capital. For Cottrell, this symbolic and cultural capital was synonymous with musical knowledge and activities: in attending concerts audiences could hypostatise their membership of a community of sophisticated imbibers of cultural production (2004). Here, I echo Cottrell and suggest that orchestral concerts at the NCPA provide a space in which attendees accrued and displayed symbolic and cultural capital. In Mumbai this is synonymous with social status, and signifies membership of an elite transnational musical community, an extension, often, of a transnational identity and lifestyle (with regards to education, travel, and business).

To insist, though, that to be involved in Western classical music as a listener or a performer is to be a member of the middle or upper classes is problematic as it often disregards the social experiences of the musicians involved. This has become particularly evident in recent years where scholarly and ethnographic focus has started to be levelled more at the musicians involved in performing and teaching Western classical music rather than at composers or audiences. Mari Yoshihara and Cottrell both highlight the discrepancy between the cultural status of professional musicians and their actual position in their local class systems (Yoshihara 2008; Cottrell, 2004). Yoshihara, whilst admitting that the initial stages involved in becoming a professional (Western classical) musician – childhood lessons, expensive instruments - probably signifies some degree of established family wealth, points out that the economic lives of most classical musicians working in the USA are fraught with contradictions. Musicians are, 'at once members of the cultural elite and workers selling their labour, they possess skills and expertise but generally have limited control in the workplace' (Yoshihara, 2008:131). She highlights a contradiction common in the case of many musicians - they are high in cultural capital but low in economic capital and as a result, their status as members of the middle classes is ambiguous.

In Mumbai, the status and class of the audiences is entirely different to that of the musicians. Audiences are, according to my observations, almost all middle-class elites (English speaking, able and willing to afford the high cost of attending concerts), transnational in both ideology and lifestyle. Musicians, meanwhile, are not in the same social sphere, as evidenced by their low pay and reputedly poor working conditions. This differentiation was outlined by Furtados Music Store<sup>9</sup> director Anthony Gomes, who told me:

“Western music is prestigious. Not being a Western musician. So, learning music is prestigious, going for concerts is prestigious, but unfortunately it is, you’re on the lower rungs of society if you are a Western musician, if you are a musician, period.” (Gomes 2014. Personal communication, 14 February).

Whilst in some transnational sites Western classical musicians may enjoy high levels of cultural, if not economic, capital (Yoshihara, Cottrell), the musicians of the SOI are bound by very local notions regarding the status of musicians within society, as outlined above by Gomes. To gain further insight into the social status and socio-economic backgrounds of Indian SOI musicians, I interviewed Deon, the youngest and newest Indian musician to be recruited to the SOI. A 25-year-old viola player from a distant northern suburb, Deon was a serious and committed musician. He was not from a wealthy family and was not a typical attendee of orchestral concerts: he had never seen an orchestral concert before the age of nineteen. Deon

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<sup>9</sup> Furtados Music Store is Mumbai’s oldest music store. It was established in the city 1865, and now operates across the nation, with outlets in all major Indian cities. It stocks a wide array of instruments and tech equipment. In Mumbai, it is particularly well known for its piano showroom.

had taught himself the violin (there were, he informed me, no teachers available to him throughout his childhood), before switching to the viola when he joined the SOI. He had grown up listening to Bollywood and Indian classical musics and had cultivated an interest in Western classical music at church, where he had sung and played the piano as a child (the family could not afford a piano; church provided Deon with opportunities beyond his own economic reach).

Deon had studied sociology at college but had decided to make music his career after meeting some UK-based visiting musicians who had provided him with inspiration and encouragement. Deon's family were, though, unhappy with his musical aspirations. For them, worries about the financial insecurities of professional musicianship were compounded by locally-rooted notions of the social status of musicians, as Deon explained:

“They think I'm playing on the street basically. They say, “why are you wasting your time?” Even my parents think that. [...] In India to think about playing music and earning money is not very common. Very few people like me do it. It is all about studies. You finish your degree and you work in the office, in front of the computer. That is a job. This is not a job. This is what an Indian thinks.” (Deon D’Souza 2014. Personal communication, 22 December).

As the youngest of the nine Indian musicians in the SOI, Deon was the only one to have begun his career by playing Western classical music. The rest had all started out in the Bollywood film industry, working as session musicians in Bollywood's signature large string sections until digital sounds replaced live orchestras and work dried up. Being a Bollywood musician carries additional stigma, both from audience members and from local amateur musicians themselves: many of my informants in Mumbai expressed their disapproval of Bollywood music; it is considered to be of poor quality, with lyrics of questionable taste. The late-night lifestyle that has historically been associated with being a Bollywood musician (with many sessions stretching into the early hours) adds to its shady reputation. Whilst the cultural capital associated with playing in symphony orchestras is somewhat higher than that of Bollywood orchestras<sup>10</sup>, the SOI players continue to exist within a similar social sphere as their Bollywood colleagues, a sphere almost entirely disconnected to that of their audiences.

The disconnect between the social spheres of audience and musician was, during my research period in 2014, becoming problematic for the SOI, particularly with regards to its struggles to recruit Indian players (it was regularly criticised for its lack of Indian players and reliance on foreign musicians to fill empty seats, particularly in the wind, brass and percussion sections). The NCPA had opened a small music school with the aim of training Mumbai's young musicians to professional standards, in the hope of producing a generation of local musicians able to join the orchestra in the future, thereby increasing the number of Indians in the ensemble without compromising on performance ability. The school was naturally attracting the children of regular SOI audience members; people with a keen interest in Western classical music who resided near to the NCPA (in the most affluent part of Mumbai), with the disposable income necessary to afford the school's high fees. When I asked Zane Dalal, the SOI's resident conductor, what these parents would think if their child decided to become an orchestral musician, he responded as follows:

“I think they would be distraught. Indian parents, most parents actually, it's wrong of me to generalise, but specifically Indian parents, are very keen on their children getting ahead and

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<sup>10</sup> One of my informants, a musician who played both Bollywood and Western classical genres and does not want to be named, told me that, when describing his work to new people, he took pains to stress that he played in a symphony orchestra rather than a Bollywood orchestra. He believed that Bollywood orchestras were associated with poor quality music and low performance skills and was keen to disassociate himself as much as possible from film musicians.



being successful. And the proven fields, psychologically left by the British, are to be lawyers, doctors and mathematicians, accountants, scientists. And music does not get a fair shot in terms of the psychological ranking it has. And for this reason, even the Indian music masters, who are amazing icons, have a sort of secondary ranking in society. They shouldn't but they do." (Dalal 2014. Personal communication, 3 February).

Dalal's response suggests that the low status of musicians is not only deep-rooted, but unlikely to change, even if the employer is the SOI, with all its markers and signifiers of class, wealth, and status. Professional musicianship in India is associated with neither economic nor cultural capital; it signifies economic instability and low social ranking. Those moving in social spheres associated with concert attendance do not consider musical performance as a career option. For Dalal, this was all part of, "the differences and difficulties of setting up an orchestra in this environment" (ibid).

Local discourses are thus impacting on this very transnational practice, and tensions are occurring as ambitions to cultivate Indian performers of international standards<sup>11</sup> are met with local ideas of status, class and cultural capital.

### **"EVERY GREAT COUNTRY SHOULD HAVE A SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA": NATION BUILDING AND THE SOI**

An NDTV<sup>12</sup> newsreader smiles into the camera as she reads the final piece of the day: "Ten years ago, a group of Western classical music lovers got together and wanted to achieve the impossible: Give India a symphony orchestra it could call its very own. Now, a decade later, they are a close-knit family with musicians from around the world. Here's their story." (NDTV: 1 October, 2016).

A video begins playing, an introduction to NDTV's regular 'Art Matters' segment, followed by a shot of an orchestra rehearsing. A close up of a bow being drawn over a violin string fades into a wider shot of a cello section playing together with gusto. A voice-over is heard: "Every great country should have a symphony orchestra, a simple thought that led to the founding of the Symphony Orchestra of India." (ibid).

Should every great country have a Symphony Orchestra? What does the symphony orchestra signify to the global community? How can we locate the orchestra within discourses of national development?

Some scholars have linked Western classical music with processes of nation building, which is often discussed within a lexicon of 'modernisation' in developing countries<sup>13</sup>. Anne Rasmussen, for example, has noted that, 'The arts are used as tools for both nation building and for diplomacy throughout the world' (Rasmussen 2012: 64). She links initiatives by Sultan Qaboos of Oman to import European art music with 'similar projects of Europeanisation as a prerequisite to modernisation' (ibid). Rasmussen here echoes critiques of colonialist ideologies placing European society as the pinnacle of modern social progress and European culture as the pinnacle of cultural progress (Chakrabarty 2000).

The NCPA in Mumbai was originally conceived with an agenda of nation building, but with a

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<sup>11</sup> By international I refer to the employment standards set by globally renowned orchestras from a multiplicity of sites – Europe, America and Asia.

<sup>12</sup> New Delhi Television.

<sup>13</sup> Green, 2002; 2011; Huang, 2011; Kraus, 1989; Kok, 2011; Mach, 1994; Nettle, 1985; Philips, 1969; Pieridou-Skoutella, 2011; Small, 1996; Yandi, 2012; Yang, 2007; Yoshihara, 2007.

mission to preserve and promote *Indian* performance arts and culture. It was founded in the late 1960s by two Parsi industrialists: JRD Tata and Jamshed Bhabha<sup>14</sup>. At the time of the NCPA's inauguration, Tata wrote, "The decision to establish the NCPA was promoted by the recognition of the pressing need to preserve for posterity and develop India's rich legacy in the arts, particularly those like music which depend for their survival on performance and oral traditions" (JRD Tata 1969).

In the aftermath of colonialism, when the newly emerging independent nation of India was in the process of re-establishing cultural identities and pushing back against the Euro-centric cultural hierarchy established by the British (Dwyer, 2000, Booth, 1996), it was in-keeping with the political sentiment of the time to focus on national arts. Bhabha, writing in 1969, stressed the need for a focus on national music in particular: "The art [Indian music] has been handed down by oral tradition and kept alive for centuries by teachers and masters [...] This category of hereditary teachers is fast drying out and disappearing [...] Thus, the proposed National Centre for the Performance Arts is necessary for the survival and preservation of a great heritage of music, dance and drama." (Bhabha, J., 1969).

One of the first tasks the NCPA undertook between the years of 1969 and 1974 was to record for posterity a large number of performances of leading Hindustani and Carnatic musicians, and to create an archive holding of these recordings. During these years, visiting Western ensembles were invited to perform, although only at a rate of around one per year, according to the NCPA's website (NCPA, 2013).

In the last ten years, though, the NCPA's musical programming appears to be leaning towards the Western classical genre, with more Western classical music concerts programmed than any other genre, a departure from the centre's original mission of preserving and promoting Indian arts and music. Was this shift in focus to be interpreted as an indication that nation building was no longer a part of the NCPA's remit?

A SOI promotional video made in 2012 suggests that nation building does indeed to play a part in the NCPA's activities, but situating the orchestra, not Indian classical music, within visions of Indian nationalism. 'Come and hear the new voice of India', reads a caption, over a video of seemingly 'ordinary' Mumbaikers singing along to the finale of Beethoven's Ninth symphony. SOI concert brochures communicate a similar message. The following passage is taken from a brochure that I picked up at a concert in 2014:

"As India continues to establish itself as a global economic power, the creation of first-rate cultural institutions working towards international recognition will be a vital component of the nation's growing prestige on the world stage. In creating the SOI, the NCPA is leading the initiative to develop India's international cultural profile alongside countries such as China, Korea, Malaysia and Singapore, all of which have established symphony orchestras." (NCPA, 2014).

In my discussions with the managers of the NCPA, it became clear that they considered the arts centre as still very much entwined with India's progress as a developing nation, as well as with Mumbai status as an emerging global city. The SOI's orchestral manager, Unvala, pointed to a shift in musical focus rather than a move away from national objectives, with orchestral music now being considered as a major part of national development and as synonymous with India's economic growth. Unvala told me: "With any major donor for anything, it's just sharing the vision and seeing the importance of having an orchestra the need to have an orchestra and the

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<sup>14</sup> JRD Tata was the chairman of the Tata group, a multi-national business conglomerate founded by his uncle Jamshedji Tata in 1868. Jamshed Bhabha was the brother of Homi Bhabha, India's famed nuclear physicist.



value of having an orchestra in India. And it goes parallel, as India has grown internationally, brand India has grown. I think alongside that, alongside the economy the culture grows as well and gets a more international outlook as well, so, we try to balance at the NCPA, because of course one of our main missions is promoting and preserving Indian arts and culture, which is a never-ending mission, I mean it's so vast and rich. But I also think that we have to have an eye to the international arts too, and form both sides.” (Unvala, 2014. Personal communication, 3 February).

Conductor Dalal similarly stressed the role of the SOI as a signifier of Mumbai's status as a global city. In the quote below, he draws parallels between the orchestra and developments within the city's extra-cultural spheres of trade and finance: “The idea of the SOI certainly was, why don't we have a professional standard orchestra in the city, as all these other global cities do? The global nature of the last 15 years has suggested that each of the cities from Mumbai to Osaka need to not be provincial island bound viewpoints, they need to be nodal hubs of trade, finance, in a sort of global setting. And it was a good idea to have a symphony orchestra. And we are going to talk in a little bit about how it is a symphony orchestra at odds with the ground it stands on. But it was worthwhile to say that if Mumbai was to be a global city, and a financial capital and a node point in South Asia that people would recognize as a modern city looking into the new millennium, then why doesn't it have an orchestra?” (Dalal, 2014. Personal communication, 3 February).

Links with finance highlighted by Dalal were tangible by the SOI's corporate sponsors. International banking conglomerate Citibank provide the primary source of funding for the orchestra, supplemented by other corporate sponsors from the world of business and finance (NCPA, 2014). Businesses interested in India's economic growth are, it seems, also interested in supporting the NCPA's mission to cultivate what it considered to be a transnationally recognised cultural marker of economic development.

Dalal also noted the presence of orchestras in other post-colonial and developing nation states as indicative of modernisation, telling me, “Singapore has one and Bangkok has one, and certainly there are three in Japan and twenty-three million in China, and Australia” (ibid). Dalal's comparisons with orchestral praxis in other countries of Asia and the world, place the orchestra firmly within discourses surrounding modern nationhood. For Dalal (as well as for many other supporters of the SOI), modernity and economic development were signified by the presence of a symphony orchestra. The presence of the SOI is to be celebrated; it legitimises Mumbai as a global city and confirms the success of India as a fast-growing global economy.

Dalal, in our conversation, hinted at some local resistance to the SOI, noting that the orchestra may be considered “at odds with the ground it stands on” (ibid). Neither the local Maharashtrian government nor the central Indian government provide support in any capacity for Western classical music, indeed, they appear to many to be resistant to it. The SOI are subject to taxation regulations of 25% on every ticket sold (down from an initial 50%), as are any other Western classical music performances in the city. There is no government funding for Western music education projects. There is no discernible presence of local government personnel at concerts (in contrast to the afore-mentioned presence of many members of the business community). Some members of the Western classical music scene in Mumbai regularly voice frustration at a perceived persecution of their activities by local government, one going so far as to dub the local Shiv Sena ruling party ‘Maharashtrian Chauvinists’ (Masani, 2014). Does the government of India then not recognise the value of the orchestra in projects of modernisation and nation building?

There has been some scholarly discussion about the role of the nation state within spheres of nation building and culture in India. The emphasis however, has been firmly on the

development of India's own music cultures, with the classicisation of Hindustani and Carnatic music (Weidman, 2009; Moro, 2004) leading to it 'functioning as one of the key emblems of the nation's cultural inheritance' (Subramanian, 2008:76). Lakshmi Subramanian has suggested that a re-imagining of Indian classical music<sup>15</sup>, from entertainment within princely courts to high art concert music located among middle class public spheres "not only appealed to the incipient nationalist imagination, it also gave the nation state an agenda of sorts for self-conscious cultural engineering that provided its citizen subjects and its diaspora with a concrete set of markers to invoke images and imaginings of the nation" (2008:76).

A focus on indigenous Indian cultures within nation building has been criticised by Indian economist and historian Amartya Sen, who writes, 'The growing tendency in contemporary India to champion the need for an indigenous culture that has resisted external influences lacks credibility as well as coherency. It has become quite common to cite the foreign origin of an idea or a tradition as an argument against it, and this has been linked up with an anti-modernist priority' (Sen, 2005:131). However, could the Indian government's reluctance to embrace Western classical music not be interpreted as an attempt to move away from colonial-era notions of cultural legitimacy? As Thomas Metcalf has pointed out, Indian music cultures under the British Raj were subject to denigration as one of many strategies used by the British to justify their rule over India (Metcalf 1994), whilst Subramanian suggests that nationalist's focus on Indian classical arts and culture during a period of classicisation was marked by a backlash against 'colonial critiques of native deficiency' (Subramanian, 2008:76). Metcalf and Subramanian's work chime with wider critiques of the role of Western classical music within narratives of nation building and modernisation in developing and/or post-colonial countries as demonstrative of ongoing cultural hegemony rooted in historical ideologies regarding Western culture as the peak of civilisation. To draw in more contemporary case-studies from other global sites, Yoshihara has suggested that Japan's post-war adoption of Western classical music was indicative of Japan's need to seek recognition by the hegemonic West by mastering Western arts and culture (Yoshihara, 2007), and Yang has argued that, "Modernisation in Asia entailed negotiations not between class and ethnicity, although there are certainly elements of these as well, but even more, between colonising and local practices, and between the foreign and the indigenous" (Yang, 2007:27).<sup>16</sup>

Following on from Yoshihara's and Yang's research, the SOI could be re-framed within discourses of post-colonial anxiety, characterised by Sankaran Krishna as attempts by elites to 'fashion their narrations in the image of what are considered successful nation-states. Both the past and the future become an imitative and thankless quest to prove that supremely unworthy maxim: "we are as good as" (Krishna 1999: xix)? This prompts the question: is the SOI a means by which Mumbai's elites attempt to demonstrate that India is as good as other nations with established orchestras?

I discussed the issue of post-colonial anxiety with Joseph, a former SOI musician. His response suggests that Western classical music in Mumbai is a site in which nuanced and overlapping positions of post-colonial anxiety and of national pride were negotiated. Joseph told me: "We actually, you know, want to compete with the West in many fields, we do value their recognition as well. At the same time, Indians have kind of too much pride, because of the colonisation and that, we don't want to be that Stockholm syndrome country." (Joseph, 2016. Personal

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<sup>15</sup> What is referred to by 'Indian classical music' are the Hindustani tradition from Northern India and the Carnatic tradition from Southern India.

<sup>16</sup> These arguments by Yoshihara and Yang speak to debates surrounding Western classical music and notions of autonomy, rooted as they are in assumptions of Western classical music as synonymous with European cultures.

communication, 2 September).

The role of the Symphony Orchestra of India within India's nation development is a complex one. Whilst its proponents argue that an orchestra serves as a marker of modernity and of economic development, historically rooted ideologies of Western cultural hegemony must be inserted into critical discourses. It appears, for the time being at least, that whilst Mumbai's transnational middle class and elite communities and the SOI's multinational corporate donors consider investment in an orchestra a part of India's wider political and economic development, India's local and national government continue to resist this particular signifier of modernity, championing instead Indian arts and cultures as foundational to India's nationhood.

### **SYMPHONIES AND SOFT POWER: THE ORCHESTRA AND CULTURAL DIPLOMACY**

The SOI, as I made clear in the above sections, is about more than just music. Whilst for those involved in the running of it, and for its audiences, a genuine love and appreciation for orchestral music is always made clear, local pressures and questions constantly compel it to justify its presence on a plurality of levels. It is not enough for the orchestra to provide Mumbai's Western classical music aficionados with regular concerts, it has to serve extra-musical purposes for its critics to be convinced of its usefulness, particularly in light of the high cost of running the orchestra. Why were funds being directed towards Western music instead of Indian music? Why are concert halls being given over to Western performances rather than Indian? These implied (as well as sometimes, direct) questions are often asked accusatorially, eliciting a defensive response, as I noted in my interviews with Suntook, Dalal and Unvala.

As I discussed above, one of the means by which the SOI justifies itself within Mumbai is to argue that the symphony orchestra is a marker of modernisation, and is recognised and celebrated as such transnationally. However, during one of our discussions, Suntook pointed to the SOI's role in further extra-musical spheres: soft power and cultural diplomacy:

“It's not a money-making business, it's something that's a part of your soft power as we call it. You've got to have an orchestra. You've got to have shall we say an attraction for the international community to come here. And so many of our German and Italian consular friends and business friends say, “Thank God, we would like a posting in Bombay because they have got the NCPA!” They really love it.” (Suntook, 2014. Personal communication, 10 September)

#### **What Is Soft Power?**

Often considered as intertwined with cultural diplomacy, the term soft power was coined by Joseph Nye in 1990 to describe the ability of a nation state to attract and co-opt rather than coerce, use force or give money as a means of persuasion (Nye, 1990). Nye suggests that soft power has three key sources: culture, political values and policies. It has been argued that culture is the most important of these three (Mazrui, 1990).

Soft power can be either governmental or non-governmental in nature, with some suggesting that the role of non-state actors could overtake that of governments (Thussu, 2013). Governments value soft power immensely, as evidenced by their funding of soft power quangos, examples being the British Council, the Goethe Institut, the Alliance Francais, and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Examples of non-governmental soft power could include national cuisine, educational institutes, entertainment industries, sports, transnational corporations, celebrities, and the creative and cultural industries (Thussu, 2013). Soft power can be considered essentially as things which communicate a positive message about a nation to the world, making that nation more desirable and attractive and increasing its status and influence. The term soft power has acquired global currency and is widely and routinely used in policy and academic literature (Thussu, 2013:4).

A recent report by Kings College London made a distinction between cultural diplomacy and soft power. Cultural diplomacy is characterised as 'reaching out', whereas soft power is 'standing out' (Doeser and Nisbett, 2017:14). It is helpful to break down discussions of the orchestra into these two sub-categories.

### **Cultural Diplomacy: Reaching Out**

James Doeser and Melissa Nisbet, authors of *The art of soft power: A study of cultural diplomacy at the UN Office in Geneva* (2017), suggest that cultural diplomacy, 'reaching out', has four foundational goals: 'unite, socialise, communicate and educate' (Doeser and Nisbet, 2017:15). How do orchestras play a role?

Graham Sheffield CBE, Director of Arts at the British Council, has described orchestras as, 'a strange medium in which to conduct contemporary international cultural relations' (Sheffield, 2016). Orchestras are, Sheffield points out, large, unwieldy, expensive, often playing repertoire unconnected to the orchestras themselves, and often disassociated from the community in which they appear (ibid). Despite this, orchestras have played, and continue to play an important role within transnational cultural relations. They have been discussed in relation to European youth integration in the Baltic Youth Philharmonic (Ramnarine, 2014) and the European Youth Orchestra (Sheffield, 2016), as well as in relation to conflict resolution in the Middle East (Beckles Wilson, 2009), and attempts at fostering goodwill between the USA and North Korea (Wakin, 2008). These examples all conform to at least one, if not several, of Doeser and Nisbett's notions of cultural diplomacy: they provide spaces for transnational unity, for socialisation, for cross-cultural communication, and for education.

The role of orchestras within diplomatic relations, though, is subject to similar critiques as to that of its role in nation building, in that it goes towards maintaining ideologies of Western cultural hegemony and superiority. Orchestras from nation states with comparatively newer or smaller traditions of Western classical music are in a disadvantaged position, forced to conduct cultural diplomacy within the cultural paradigms of hegemonic states. In this critique, cultural diplomacy is re-imagined, as developing nation states employ the orchestra as a tool to impress and to communicate their own cultural progress in a comparative sphere, echoing Krishna's notions of post-colonial anxiety (1999), discussed earlier in this paper. This is highlighted in a 2016 article by the Financial Review, which criticised a concert in New York by the China Philharmonic Orchestra as 'not yet at Western levels of quality' (The Economist, 2016), the Chinese promoter commenting, 'our tours are a way of showing our orchestra's standards, to show our colleagues in Europe that we're getting better and better' (Wu, 2016 in The Economist, 2016).

India has been on the receiving end of orchestral cultural diplomacy; in 1993 Israel sent the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Mumbai born conductor Zubin Mehta, to India following the two countries formally establishing diplomatic relations in 1992. Mehroo Jeejeebhoy, director of the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation in Mumbai, was a part of the organising committee, and described the magnitude of the event: "This was the first important event. The Israel Philharmonic are like the ambassadors of Israel. The first important event was bringing this orchestra to India" (Jeejeebhoy, 2012. Personal communication, 19 August). In 2014 the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra were in Mumbai as part of a cultural diplomacy tour of India organised in the lead up to the Commonwealth Games, which were to be held in Glasgow the following year. Accompanied by violinist Nicola Benedetti, the orchestra performed at the NCPA and ran several educational and outreach sessions across the Mumbai. The tour was funded by the British Council, the BBC and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, with some contributions from India, and was much lauded, both in India and the UK. Commentators from the media and from the orchestra itself stressed the communicative nature

of the event, pointing to attempts made at cross-cultural collaboration; Indian musicians had, prior to the orchestra tour, visited Scotland to participate in collaborative musical exchange, and a commonwealth youth orchestra featuring musicians from Scotland, India and Kenya was planned for the following summer. Sheffield, in an article written about the exchange, suggested that, 'It was a concerted attempt to reach as many people through the collaboration as possible; and to share traditions from east and west' (Sheffield, 2016).

I spoke with Gavin Reid, director of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Reid situated the orchestral tour within spheres of cultural dialogue and exchange, and was keen to highlight the communicative, social, and educational (as outlined by Doeser and Nisbet, 2017) elements of the trip, as indicated in the following quote:

“I certainly wouldn't like this to sound like the Brits coming into India, far from it, and we have always viewed this as an exchange, because we have learned so much by just coming here. It's a life-changer for many people. But we also wanted to make sure that we were bringing something back to Scotland, which is why the opportunity to bring Rahman and his students and his music, which, to the best of our knowledge, there had never been an evening of AR Rahman's music in Scotland before.” (Reid, 2014. Personal communication, 6 April).

The role of the orchestral tour in building relationships between Scotland and India was further highlighted by BBC journalist Mark Tully, who reported, 'After the final concert the British Council, who generously assisted the tour, gave a reception at which it was widely agreed that this success should be the beginning of a lasting relationship between India and Scotland' (Tully, 2014).

For its part, the Symphony Orchestra of India is taking steps to integrate itself within networks of transnational dialogue and exchange on a more proactive level. It is a member of the Alliance of Asia Pacific Regional Orchestras, thereby situating itself within Asian cultural integration. It has toured abroad, firstly to Russia in 2010 for a performance at a festival of world orchestras, followed by visits to Oman, Switzerland and the UK. In terms of cultural diplomacy, these tours are indicative of the positive diplomatic relations between India and the countries visited. The NCPA has fostered direct links with a number of international cultural centres, including the Kennedy Centre in New York, the New York Metropolitan Opera, the National Theatre in London and the Russian Bolshoi Ballet. It also had established relationships with several embassies in Mumbai, including the British Council, the Alliance Francais and the Goethe Institut.

The SOI and its home, the NCPA, have over the years, then, been able to play a role in fostering cultural relations with a multiplicity of cultural centres, aiding transnational and cross-cultural projects of unity, communication, socialisation and education (Doeser and Nisbet, 2017). Whilst their role is still perhaps a small one, it is imbued with potential. As Unvala noted, “With the SOI at least our role as sort of cultural ambassadors is still growing” (Unvala, 2014. Personal communication, 30 October).

### **Soft Power: Standing Out**

Doeser and Nisbitt discuss soft power - standing out - as having four sub-categories: Power, Business, Leadership and Identity (2017). Is the SOI effectively standing out as a purveyor of Indian soft power?

In his book *Communicating India's Soft Power*, Thussu comments, “Parallel to its rising economic power, is the growing global awareness of India's soft power – its mass media, popular culture, cuisine, and communication outlets” (Thussu, 2013: 2). Thussu suggests that whilst the first two decades of globalisation enabled 'the expansion of largely Western culture

and consumerism around the world' (2013:3), in the second decade of the twenty first century, Indian cultures, “from Bollywood cinema to Bhangra music. From mobile telephony to online communication” (Ibid.), were steadily growing in visibility, volume and value.

The cultures that Thussu suggests make populations in other countries highly receptive to India are characterised as nation-specific: Indian cuisine, Bollywood cinema, Indian spirituality, yoga and Indian classical music are all given as examples (Thussu, 2013). Indian politician and former diplomat Shashi Tharoor has also spoken about India's soft power. He argues that discussions surrounding India as an economic super-power or as a military or nuclear power should re-refocussed on India's 'power of example, the attraction of India's culture' (Tharoor, 2009). Tharoor, like Thussu, gives examples of soft power which carry markers of a very recognisable Indian identity: Bollywood movies, ayurvedic medicine, yoga (Ibid.).

For Thussu and Tharoor, Indian soft power is bound up in cultures rooted in India, cultures recognisable as Indian to the rest of the world. Their arguments suggest that it is the fourth pillar of soft power - identity - the ability 'to give a sense of identity, to reflect your identity, to identify you as a country' (Doerer and Nisbitt, 2017:15) which enables Indian cultures to 'stand out'. It is here that I suggest the SOI's role as a purveyor of soft power is most problematic.

Many local voices in Mumbai (and according to Bombay Chamber Orchestra founder Jini Dinshaw, many transnational audiences) question the Indian identity of the Symphony Orchestra of India, with a lack of Indian musicians<sup>17</sup> and a perceived reluctance to invite Indian or Indian-origin guest soloists, being key complaints. I asked Suntook why the SOI employs so few Indian players. He replied:

“You don’t get in just because you are Indian – we have a certain standard and we interviewed God knows how many, dozens and dozens, of players and all I got from my Marat [Bisengeliiev, music director of the SOI] was “niete, niете, niете, niете”, because you have to be good. And now we have got eleven really good players. They can play string quartets, they are really very good. [...] We have constituted a world-wide search for Indian players. We have put it on the net, we have advertised, we have spent a lot of money. The problem is that we don’t offer a full twelve-month job to people who are only willing to play in the orchestra. A lot of people say, “we will only come back for the season”. But that’s OK, just to show the face to the public that we have more Indians. But we would like to have them as permanent employees, which they don’t want to do.” (Suntook, 2014. Personal communication, 10 September).

As this quote shows, for Suntook the quality of musical performance is more important than the national or ethnic identity of the players. His local audiences are, he went on to say, more interested in hearing music of international standards than seeing more Indian musicians in the orchestra: “Everybody should hear this music. And when they hear it they are quite stunned. But it has to be well played, and that’s been the problem here in India, because if it is badly played it is not nice. We want to maintain a certain standard. And that standard has to be international. We have got very good players from London orchestras, from Eastern European orchestras, our players are very good.” (Ibid.).

Suntook was supported in his views by Dalal, who told me the following: “We wanted to remain with a quality-based thing, and that is extremely important to us. A lot of people say why don’t you have more Indians in the orchestra, this is not an Indian orchestra, and of course, it’s not a photo-op either, and it’s not a football club either, so people need to turn around and go away.” (Dalal, 2014. Personal communication, 3 February).

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<sup>17</sup> At the time of writing there were eight Indian members of the orchestra.

Other voices in Mumbai suggest that even if there must be a minority of Indian players, the SOI should perform more works by Indian composers. This was something which, again, the SOI management appear reluctant to do, citing their own tastes for Western classical pieces as well as the preferences of their core audience. Dalal told me, “I don’t think fusion works” (Dalal, 2014. Personal communication, 2 February).

When touring abroad, however, the SOI are obliged to perform Indian identities, as evidenced by Suntook, who informed me, “And that is what the West wants when we take it for tour in Europe. They want a complete Indian first half” (Suntook, 2014. Personal communication, 10 September). In order to satisfy these wants, the SOI's management have commissioned special works to perform outside of India. For their 2013 tour of Oman, the SOI performed a triple concerto with Indian tabla player Zakir Hussain, American banjo player Bela Fleck and American bassist Edgar Meyer, and had commissioned a further tabla concerto from Zakir Hussain for a 2016 tour to Switzerland, which was performed again in the UK in 2019. Unvala explained:

“So, we were trying to come up with a program that would have an Indian element in it. We have done these international performances, but this will be our first big multi-city tour. We thought that having an Indian composer and an Indian musician with us was important for that. And Zakir Hussain is arguably today one of the biggest Indian names in the music world and personally I think one of the greatest living musicians today across all genres. So, we were discussing of ways of how we get that India element in and Zakir's name came up.” (Unvala, 2014. Personal communication, 30 October).

Expectations that national pieces be included in a touring orchestra's repertoire are by no means uncommon; for their concert in Mumbai the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra played an arrangement of Scottish reels, thereby bringing to their performance a cultural specificity reflective of Scotland and Scottish musical cultures. Suntook, though problematised the notion of 'Indian' Western classical music, pointing to ambiguities and difficulties created in fusion compositions, as quoted: “That’s true because if you have a Japanese composer or if you have a Chinese composer they are not really, they compose in the Western style, some of them don’t even do that, they have their own... well but the notation is Western let’s put it that way. So, it’s really international music.” (Ibid.).

Suntook's conclusion here that orchestral music is 'international' hints at a reluctance to attach national specificity to pieces of music based upon the nationality of composers. Whilst this reluctance may chime with values of his Mumbai audiences, it has the potential to undermine efforts to create an Indian orchestral sound. It also speaks to wider debates surrounding notions and ideologies of Western classical music as universal and autonomous, or as culturally and nationally specific.

Efforts by Suntook, Unvala and Dalal to incorporate Indian-ness into the SOI appear to be led by foreign demand rather than local protest or personal choice. Could their reluctance to cultivate an Indian identity, either in terms of ethnicity of players or in terms of repertoire, compromise the SOI's role as an effective purveyor of soft power? Do their values retard the SOI's ability to stand out, to reflect India's identity as a country?

Whilst the SOI appears to be finding a place within transnational networks of cultural diplomacy, its struggle to carve out an Indian identity suggests that it has yet to become a significant facet of India's soft power. The SOI does not 'stand out', the key criteria for success within soft power were hampered by ongoing tensions regarding its uniqueness of any identity. It does not, despite some efforts, reflect the identity of India in a manner that could 'shape, alter and impact the ideas and opinions of public communities' (Varma in Thussu, 2013:128). Ideologies of universalism have shaped an orchestral praxis which fails to communicate a

specificity of India's cultural prowess. To do that it would first have to become what local critic Jini Dinshaw suggests: a truly *Indian* symphony orchestra (Dinshaw, 2014).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Throughout this paper, I have discussed the roles and meanings of the SOI, firstly in relation to social status and prestige within its locale, and then within transnational frameworks of nation building and cultural diplomacy. These roles are newly established and still evolving, as the orchestra continues to find its place in India and to shape its identity, both locally and within the transnational sphere.

For some, the presence of the SOI is a cause for anxiety, a signal that Mumbai's elite communities subscribe to narratives situating hegemonic Western cultures as synonymous with modernisation and development, legitimising a notion that India is somehow culturally 'behind' other developing Asian nations, and must 'catch up' as it establishes itself as a global economic and political superpower.

However, it is possible to consider an alternative interpretation and frame the SOI within processes of decolonisation. Holton has argued that the development of global cultures has moved away from a colonially-rooted core-periphery model, and is now driven through the emergence and interests of a cross-national global elite (Holton, 2000). Cultural power has therefore become decentralised and multi-centred. Applying Holton's theory to the Indian context would lead to an understanding of the SOI as an example of the interests of cross-national global elites based in India, and as an indicator of Mumbai's position as a nodal city within cross-national cultural powers. Most optimistically, one could argue that the proliferation of professional symphony orchestras in Asia, of which the SOI is the only example, helps to decentralise orchestral praxis, which may in turn lead to a destabilisation of the West's historical cultural hegemony.

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# GENRE LOCALIZATION IN CURRENT POPULAR MUSIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the process of genre formation in the evolution of popular music of the Philippines'. From the phenomenon of the perception discrepancy of popular music genres among different stakeholders, this paper gives to attention at providing an alternative theory to explore how the Philippines' popular music genres have been established. Applying Joe Peter's theory of cultural hybridism, this paper specifically attempts at exploring how foreign genres have been fused with local cultures and musical components, aiming at a vocality of expressing the Philippines' national identity, which is key in articulating Philippines' popular music genres in their actual sense. Rather than a parodic emulation of foreign music products, genre fluidity is a unique reflection of the artistic wisdom of Philippines' musicians in the pursuit of forming a voice of their own, a continuation of their nationalist movement in their popular music idioms.

## Keywords

Cultures of the Philippines, Genre, Popular music, Localization

## INTRODUCTION

Popular music genres have been among the most elusive, flooring, and confusing concepts in musicological researches, especially when dimensions such as culture, gender, market, music behavior, and other dimensions are leveraged into the definition and boundary towards a specific and concrete theoretical construct. This paper looks into this subject matter from the perspective of genre and national identity in the Philippines. In doing so, especially due consideration is given as to how popular music genres emerged and advanced in this historically colonized country and how the role of the sentiment of nationhood developed within the cultural and spiritual movement that has been causing an impact on the population of this region.

Different theorists tried to define the term 'genre' from different angles and viewpoints. In a 1981 article for *Popular Music Perspectives*, Italian scholar Fabbri defined musical genres based on shared social understandings. For Fabbri, a musical genre is "a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules" (Fabbri,1981:1). Fabbri classifies the generic rules of genre identification as formal and technical rules, semiotic rules, behavior rules, social, and ideological rules and economic and juridical rules. Later on, Fabbri further defines genre as "emerg(ing) as names to define similarities, recurrences that members of the community made pertinent to identify musical events." (Fabbri,1999:10).

However, Drury (2000) refutes such a definition identifying the concept of "radical contingency" as pertinent to such exploration. He states that the culture's dominant ideology dictates the values about genre. Furthermore, they are dependent on the socio-political framework of the culture being primarily used to create dividing and defining lines between groups rather than to any basic transcendental human meaning, any intrinsic connection to human experience, perception, or psychology (Zorn, 2000: 336).

Music is a clear “cultural case” rather than an “empirical case”: when dealing with different types of music, within a framework of cultural norms, a reference point is needed (Fabbri, 1999:1). However, such information becomes clouded as music can also denote technologies and economies as well as composers, managerial choices, and aesthetic elements. (Kemp, 2004). Kirss (2007) states that the definition of a genre can vary from community to community, and they constantly evolve. Characteristics or criteria ascribed and acknowledged by a community may define a Music genre. Their definitions are connected with codes, which support communication in the community. Therefore, the problem to define a genre is its subjectivity.

The term subjectivity denotes that music can be approached from a variety of dimensions, as a cultural agency, political enfranchisement, sexual autonomy or expressive freedom. For example, in the case of early female blues singers, voice used to be treated as a metaphor for textual authority and denote the reclamation of female blues singers' own experience. Their cultural self-expression, music lyrics and subjectivism of their existence as artistry of embodiment, forge a subjectivity in the milieu of their racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination within the social context, to reach out to their own identity. As concluded in Silverman, “the self as difference is read as fragmented and decentered, affirming multiple values rather than a single set of unitary self-determination; the subject is embodied ontologically, gendered, and culturally charged” (Silverman, 1993: 4).

As observed so far, the term ‘music genre’ is approached from different angles. For Fabbri, genre is a social, conventional, and a rule-based entity that is used to depict musical events. This indicates that the term genre is applied to describe groups of similar music events separately. Whereas for Kirss, a genre is encompassed within the boundary of a community and it aims at communicating, Drury understands genre as a culture and a value-based term, which cannot be separated from its social-cultural milieu. Regardless of the perspective, all (genres?) allude to a perception discrepancy phenomenon towards the popular ‘music genre’ to be analyzed later. To bridge the gap of perception discrepancy of popular music genre in the Philippines, a new theoretical model should be established. This measure clarifies that the localization process, which is key to understanding any popular music genre formation, is to promote the genre perception in a scholarly sense as well.

## PERCEPTION DISCREPANCY IN POPULAR MUSIC

From radio formats and record store bins to the graphic interface for iTunes and the way musicians and fans talk about music, categories of music genres play a central role in the production and consumption of popular music. Many of these categories, for example, R&B and country, connote a demographic group usually assumed to be the primary audience for that type of music. Yet the use of these categories, back then and today, highlights numerous contradictions, foremost of which is their inconsistency in musical terms, as many recordings/songs that are musically, similar are classified differently. Furthermore, the audiences for a given category often do not match their demographic connotations, and members of a given demographic group often have divergent musical tastes. (Brackett, 2012). The discrepancy in the perception of music genres has widely been approached from a somewhat ‘static’ perspective, which presumed certain established categorical schemas as emphasized above. However, the term ‘music genre’ is also diachronically developing. This made the socio-environmental situation of music perception more complicated. As a categorical depicting term for musics, music genres have also been in constantly ongoing and a changing status, during which numerous sub-genres, sub-sub-genres, and fusions of these genres pop up to the fore.

To Adorno, popular music is characterized by its market orientation and commercialism, and consumerism as being a core value and foundation of its systematic operation. Adorno criticized modern pop music as being produced by an organized monopoly (Adorno, 1991). In other words, popular music can be regarded as a standardized product with interchangeable parts, and follow the rules and conventions which were laid out by the monopoly's powers over the popular music industry. This is especially true in the case of the Philippines. Genre labeling has been a market strategy for the power players in the scene of the local popular music industry. It left the consumers to be easily manipulated and put at loss and confusion.<sup>1</sup>

The term 'genre' in daily life has been practiced as how the meaning of music is shared and communicated. Social media have been playing an important role by providing the platform for such discussion and communication of mass consumption. This can be well exemplified by numerous online fan forums, fan zines, as well as online music retailing outlets. The complexity during the whole transmission process creates a high perception discrepancy among various stakeholders making any definition of popular music genres a challenging task.

The music, as an art, has its independent route of development. Nevertheless, neither a new music genre can be incorporated into the social communication completely, nor an act can properly be categorized into a certain type of genre. For that, the mechanism of differentiation among the stakeholders in the popular music industry, their perspectives, and perceptions about the music genre due to their own interests and positions needs to be taken into consideration. In other words, popular music genres can be considered as a culturally shared cognitive scheme consisting of associations between the sound of the music and the corresponding extra-musical concepts. Understanding the similarities and differences in concepts associated with various genres may improve the efficiency with which music genre is used for communication. An undistorted communication should be ideally based on a shared and mutual understanding towards the semiotics of the music taxonomy, which demands a certain level of stability. However, such taxonomic stability seems to still remain as a polemic issue for a theoretical as well as an empirical discourse.

Such taxonomic instability confuses the industrially necessary labeling process. For example, an artist, or a group of artists such as Metallica may be categorized as thrash metal by the consumer owing to the original incarnation of the artists. Rock is categorized by the retailer utilizing a marketing category in which to place the artists, whereas pop might be categorized by the journalist identified through the number of records of a new product sold over a short period. Although such multi categorization distinguishes the range of possible markets, it confuses the musical community as a whole, as in this case the use of identity nomenclature for the consumer, for marketing purposes by the retailer, and for ease of access by the journalist. So, this all confuses the issue of clear genre boundaries (Kemp, 2004).

Any music genre, as a reflection of the understanding and perception of a certain music type, correlates with emotional, cultural, social, and political aspects. Humans are unique information in retrieving and process systems. They have different constructs of these factors, which leads them to the scenario that the approach to defining music genre seems to be based on individual preference. (Fabbri, 1999: 2-4). In other words, categories of music (and people, for that matter) are neither true nor false, but rather 'ideological' in that they speak to a shared, tacit understanding. The implication of such arguments prompts the urgency to clarify and unify our current understandings of the fluid nature of popular music genre.

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<sup>1</sup> This point was further referred to in the written account of Kemp, Kris (2004) 'Towards a Holistic Interpretation of Music Genre Classification'.

Musical genres are constantly in flux as Mitchel (1996) points out in his work exploring the popular music of the last two decades. Consequently, he writes: “In the years since 1986, multiple diversifications of pop music formations and genres have continued to proliferate, often recombining in the process in new hybrid formations, so that by 1995 the range of popular music sub-genres is constantly being extended, and this has become almost impossible to quantify”. (Mitchell, 1996:11).

McLeod (2001) sheds new light into such a social process of the establishment and acceptance of new genres and sub genres that may be categorized as follows:

- *Stylistic evolution*: the new genre is stylistically different from other existing genres.
- *Marketing issues*: New genres can rather be marketed as ‘the next big thing’ than old genres. Therefore, the definition of a new genre may help to promote the more or less innovative new genre.
- *Cultural differentiation*: Genre terms help to differentiate them from other genres, even if it is only a cultural differentiation when the musical or stylistic variances are not sufficient to divide these genres.
- *Accelerated consumer culture*: Electronic music is highly innovative. This also causes that consumers always expect new styles, sounds and inventiveness.

Robert Walser identified commercial mediation as a propeller of industrial mechanism for popular music genre perception discrepancy among different stakeholders like fans, musicians, historians, record clubs, fan merchandisers, commercial marketing strategists, outside critics, and censors (Walser, 1993).

This intriguing scenario leads us to a clear notion that music genre perception, especially in the setting of a complicated and subtle music creation, should be treated as a discursive formation, which carries a heavy load for its philosophical, historical, social, political, cultural, and economic interpretations and integrations. Different societies with different social conventions, rules, codes and power stratification matrix may contribute to different sets of the way people perceive the music genre as an indicator of both musical and extra-musical meaning. In terms of Philippines’ popular music, genre fluidity has been showing a more complicated, radical, ephemeral and epidemic pattern, which need to be examined from the investigation of genre formation in a specific cultural milieu.

## POPULAR MUSIC GENRE PERCEPTION DISCREPANCY IN THE PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, the genre perception discrepancy seems to be more problematic. This is especially true to the house band industry. In addition to the previously listed causes, historical colonization and the country’s cultural heritage provided artists with bountiful sources to forge their popular musics.

Especially important is the task of how to develop a theoretical framework used to define Philippines’ popular music genres as a process that is anchored through musical and cultural hybridity as well as the circulation of discourses about music and national identity. There are two main reasons for arguments.

Firstly, there has been a high degree of heterogeneity in Philippines’ popular art scene. As a historically colonized archipelago, which was culturally, invaded by Spanish, Japanese, and especially American, the popular music of the Philippines is a mixture of a variety of North American, Latin American, European, other Asian countries and their impact on indigenous cultural features musical elements (Castro, 2001). Meaning to say at the time of constructing a multi-faceted Philippines’ popular music culture, these elements of impact have imbued the



Philippines' popular music with different conventions and codes, which makes categorizing a rather difficult task. A single popular song in the Philippines can show the characteristics from several of the above-mentioned cultures, thus a hybrid genre or a crossover appears, which goes beyond geographical and historical imaginations of boundaries. As Irving contends that the active appropriation of music and dance by the indigenous population constituted a significant contribution to the process of hispanization. Sustained "enharmonic engagement" between the Philippines' and Spaniards led to the synthesis of hybrid, syncretic genres and the emergence of performance styles that could contest and subvert hegemony (Irving, 2010:12-15).

Secondly, as a nation with its richness of musical tradition, the desire and struggle to establish an idiosyncratic voice and music representation of a united national identity<sup>2</sup> and fighting off the cultural colonization has been always strong and enthusiastic.

The sentiment of nationhood has been playing a key role in constructing an own vocality of the people. The uncompromising endeavor to re-establish its national identity through new popular musics after WWII has been motivating Philippines popular musicians to transcend the seduction of simply copying Western sounds and genres in their own style and through experimenting with Western popular music advancements as a means to enrich their sound properties.

Without this understanding, the topic of the Philippines' popular music genre taxonomy may easily be misused by political spokespersons rather than academically explored. After having had a closer and deeper look into this mechanism of genre establishment through hybridity, there might be a better understanding of the nature of genre fluidity in the Philippines, and the information behind the different types of new sound around the people which may lead towards a new localized popular music genre categorization scheme. In short, a new paradigm of cultural hybridism in explaining music genre formation serves as a strategy for unifying the genre discrepancy gap in the Philippines' popular musics.

## **GENRE HYBRIDISM IN POPULAR MUSIC HOUSE BANDS OF THE PHILIPPINES AND SOME REMARKS ON NATIONALISM IN THE PHILIPPINE'S MUSIC**

The Philippines may be described as a nation in search of its identity. Because of the long occupation of the country by colonizers, the Western influence is so deeply rooted. Hence, one would presume that they may have changed their own identity to some level. This is simply observed in the naming practice/system that is predominantly westernized. The national identity has long been an issue for anthropologists and other researchers because of the many

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<sup>2</sup> National identity is a person's identity or a sense of belonging to one state or to one nation (Ashmore et.al, 2001). As a collective phenomenon, national identity can arise as a direct result of the presence of elements from the "common points" in people's daily lives: national symbols, language, the nation's history, national consciousness, and cultural artifacts. It is the sense of "a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language (Kelman, 1997). Sorensen defines nationhood in the context of the modern state as a people within a territory making up a community based on citizenship including political, social, and economic rights and obligations, and on a 'community of sentiment'. In other words, I refer to a common language, and a common cultural and historical identity based on literature, myths, symbols, music, and art. (Sorensen, 2004). Nationhood is about land, language, and culture (McAdam, 2015). Especially for a nation with a long history of colonization, the loss of its cultural traits calls for an urgency to revitalize its national norms and traditions to reestablish its ideological independence. Music, as a social transformation power, can serve this role perfectly.

resemblances and similarities between their culture and that of others like those of the Spanish, American, and neighboring Asian cultures.

Sorensen defines national identity as the community of citizens sharing linguistic, cultural and historical bonds that distinguish them from other groups (Sorensen, 2004). National ideology, as a system of ideas and ideals, forms the basis to establish the nation's unique economic and political mechanism and provides the unifying power to define the cultural superstructure that makes its people distinct. Cultural nationalism, in which music nationalism is a central part, is a key process towards Philippine's nation-building movement and it leads to 'epics' that depict a modernist history (Castro, 2001). Popular music is a tool for local artists to look for a way to expedite that nationalist movement and to construct their music narratives that capture the essence of the nation-building. It furthermore, tells a story of the people's enthusiastic search for national identity.

Nationalism, seen as a tradition in the Western context refers to that "great romantic movement," which happened in the nineteenth century, from 1825 to 1900, during which period the people were engaged in a struggle for liberation (Winold, Delone, & Christ, 1976). In terms of style, this particular tradition is distinctive due to its individuality and "intensity of expression," compared to the "classically mannered, measured and poised" style of the preceding period (Winold, Delone, & Christ, 1976). However, music has the power to convey an epistemology of national identity and nationalism through specific aesthetics (Castro, 2001).

Essentially then, nationalism in music was an "ideal, involving the use of folk and traditional elements in an attempt to create an atmosphere or a mood alluding to the composer's native land" (Hila, 2004). Hila defines the nationalist tradition in the Philippine music as a heritage that was formulated by musicians such as Francisco Santiago (1889-1947), Felipe D. de Leon (1912-1992), Antonio Molina (1928-1992), Nicanor Abelardo (1893-1934), Lucio D. San Pedro (1913-2002), and (Hila, 2004). Ramon Santos' essay on Nicanor Abelardo in his book, "Tunugan" discusses how Abelardo, who is rooted in European art music stands out as a nationalist who is composing in a genre of "the Philippines' classicism", so, definitely in the realm of classical music (Santos, 2005). The concept of the nation and expressions of nationalism should be considered as potent interventions to Philippine identity (Castro, 2001).

The birth of the nationalist tradition in Philippine music was a much welcome development. At a time when the cultural fabric of the mass was facing the threat of oblivion, the shaping of such tradition was a heroic, relevant response to the cultural and political circumstances that as a result of the colonial experience. This tradition has afforded meaning to the collective cultural life of the people, providing them a strong sense of belonging and national pride that triumphed over the threatening dominance of colonial culture. Today, this tradition is still forming an active part of the Philippines' contemporary national cultural life.

### **LOCALIZATION AS PART OF THE NATIONALIZATION PROCESS**

From a geographical perspective, a region is not a nation. However, a nation as a political concept consists of its parts in a region. From a cultural perspective, nationalism happens in various parts of a territory, and all the local endeavors contribute to nation-building. In this sense, music localization in a regional scope should be regarded as part of the cultural nation-building since the outcome will be shared and appreciated by the people in the nation. The local concept does not only apply to the nation as a whole but also to the various parts of the nation (Muhlstein, 2014).

Subsequently, I will firstly present the "cross mode" of popular music genre formation consisting of three processes, namely hybridizing foreign genres as genre transplantation, genre transformation, and genre transmutation, which shows how Philippines' musicians imbue and combine foreign popular music genres with local music and social cultures through creating new

popular music genres. Then, the discussion will further present the “mix mode” which carries two dimensions of formulating the new Philippines’ musics based on its traditions. Both of these two access discussions show a coexisting duo process as can be observed in the popular music genre development of the Philippines.

### “CROSS” MODE AS REFLECTED IN THE PHILIPPINES’ POPULAR MUSIC GENRE FORMATION

Peter talks about the cross mode, but he did not elaborate on how this happens specifically in musical life. He rather discusses a broad cultural perspective. The popular music development in the Philippines can be better, presented from a genre formation framework that follows the row: genre transplantation-transformation-transmutation. Some terms dealing with ‘in-loading’ and ‘trajectory’, will be discussed in the following section. In Peter’s model, Philippines’ popular music can be realized in this manner. It is necessary to be cautious about this matter, since it is not a simple depiction of Philippines’ popular music history. It is rather an observation of the ideological contextualization of influencing popular music genres into a localized cultural representation with a reinforcement of the Philippines’ national identity as the final target. In this sense, it is a framework, which is based on epistemology rather than being mechanically sequenced.

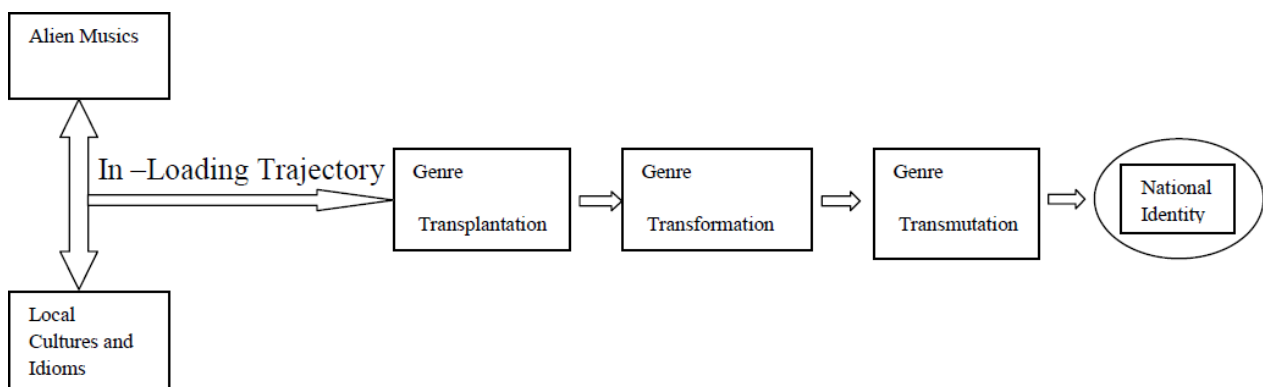


FIGURE 1: “Cross” mode in Philippines Popular Music Genre Formation. (Scheme by the author).

### Genre Transplantation

This is a stage of learning, copying, and emulating of the foreign cultural language and artistry. An originally alien (especially following an imagined western) popular music genre which to some extent can be regarded as a certain phenomenon of cultural colonization to the National Ideology or a cultural force of “westernization”, is firstly copied or covered by the local talents. During this stage though, mass media provides the Western version of original material and texts of listening.

The local cover bands play a vital role in providing the very first “localized” version of such genre to the local folks. The question to what extent the cover bands or “house bands” have been contributing to the installment of certain alien popular music genres as well as to the new locus of cultural reformation and colonization in the Philippines setting remains. Nevertheless, without a doubt, we need to accept the fact that a local “cover band” industry should be treated as the first stage of the contextualization of foreign popular music genre into the local culture consumption system of the Philippines, through the image and the voice of its own people. The reason lies in the fact that it has been blossoming since the end of American Colonization to become the driving force on Asian popular music stages today.

## Genre Transformation

The second stage of genre transformation is the taking over and implementing of genres known through historical contacts and mass media as the Philippines' genres in a developmental sense. In other words, at this stage, the emphasis is on the "changes" brought to the existing genres that are foreign to the Philippines. This showcases a clear picture of national identification with the 'otherness'.

First of all, the lyrics are often in Tagalog or any other language native to the Philippines. One example is a mix of Tagalog and English which local folks called Taglish<sup>3</sup>.

As mentioned previously, language is a pivotal part to define nationhood. By using local languages (Tagalog as the most representative), the localized version of popular music genres was imbued with the traits of immediacy and an imagined authenticity of expression which are indispensable in the construct of the national identity of the Philippines. Most of the people in the Philippines use their mother tongue in everyday life. The local lyrics make, i.e., songs more approachable to the mass, bringing the 'nearness' and 'ownership' to them and making it their own.

Through the native forms of lyrical expressions, the new localized genres were able to transcend the predicament of being translation-dependent. They led the audience in an artistic experience of roots and existence, which would never be detached, from the sense of national identity. We can see this in either rock or country music. Two of the most widespread rock genres distinguished by local dialects are Bisrock (Bisaya Rock) and Kapampangan rock.

The former uses Visayan dialects in their lyrics. The term Bis came from the Cebuano word for Visayan. This subgenre started in the 1980s and was popularized locally by musicians from the University of San Carlos to call for the awareness and support of the Cebuano rock scene. It gathered considerable popularity in Cebu and Mindanao until the genre faded out in 2009.

The latter draws on Kapampangan dialects that are widely used throughout central Luzon. Inspired by what the locals call 'Kapampangan cultural renaissance', Angeles City-born balladeer Ronnie Liang rendered Kapampangan translations of some of his popular songs such as "Ayli" (Kapampangan version of "Ngiti"), and "Ika" (Kapampangan version of "Ikaw") for his repackaged album. In terms of country music, even in Cordillera Region, one can see such genres as Benguet Country, Ibaloy Country, Kankanaey Country, Igorot Country (Fong, 2007). Fong illustrated two approaches in this linguistic localization process in the Cordillera region (Ashcroft et al, 2002; Fong, 2007). Appropriation is the use of the colonizers' musical language to convey one's own spirit. Abrogation happens in the Cordillera musicians' total disregard of copyright in the use of tunes, translated or adapted lyrics and even recorded accompaniments (minus one). The songs then serve as forms of self-representation, as "revelations" of local, contemporary cultures. The song lyrics serve as a rich cultural resource on the contemporary life and psyche of a group of minority indigenous peoples who have also been appropriated and misrepresented by others (Fong, 2007).

Secondly, rendition-wise stylistic changes have been greatly prompting the musical sound to be more easily identifiable to the mass as coming from their 'own' people rather than from

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<sup>3</sup> However, despite the growing clamor for non-Tagalog, and non-English music, and greater representation of other Philippine languages, the local Philippine music industry, which is centered in Manila, is unforthcoming in venturing investments to other locations. Some of their major reasons include the language barrier, small market size, and socio-cultural emphasis away from regionalism in the Philippines. Multiculturalism advocates and federalists often associate this discrepancy with the Tagalog-centric cultural hegemony of the capital city of Manila.

‘outsiders’. Both vocalists and instrumentalists have been experimenting with new performance techniques, like intonations, phrasing, breathing, or pronunciation, to make the music sound more familiar to the Philippines.

Thirdly, the local talents of the Philippines will incorporate another dimension of musicality in an imagined Western tradition, usually by instilling the use of a local music language and other cultural traditions to enrich their own musical environment. In the case of rock music, even as early as in the 1950’s, the instrumentation of a ‘combo’ has been coming with a catchy and hippie phrase. On top of a basic electric guitar, bass guitar, and drum lineup, the combo tended to use unusual instruments for rock music such as non-electric ukuleles. Unique floor-bass made of a gas tank, bongos, and maracas were used.<sup>4</sup> The establishment of combo groupings had proliferated at the start of the Philippines’ rock scene and the ‘Battle of the Bands’ got established amongst the combos in Metropolitan Manila, Pasay City and as far as Cavite areas from the 1950’s to the present time. More recent attempts have been observed by incorporating indigenous instruments, like Djembe, Udan-Udan, Gabang, P’tadjong, Bidjang, Kubing, Budjong, Gangsa. This branch of genre transformation brought about the movement of the Philippines’ ethnic-rock. Well-known bands in the Philippines can exemplify the stylistic traits.



**FIGURE 2: The group KADANGYAN. Members: Bhava Mitra - Vocals, Mityapi, Plawta, Gangsa, Kubing Bhakta Raja - Djembe, Udan-Udan, Gabang, P’tadjong Saryo - Drums, Tukatok, Agit – Bass, Govinda - Djembe, Bidjang, Kubing, Budjong, Gangsa. The Cebu-based group Kadangyan continues the legacy of the Philippines ethnic-rock movement with members hailing from different regions of the country (Cebu, Iligan, Tacloban & Ifugao Mt. Province), this group could very well represent the Philippines’ diverse cultures and languages in one entity. They combine local ethnic instruments with western, eastern, and African instruments and come up with rhythm-dominating songs topped with hypnotic chants that aim at putting their listeners into a trance. (Photography open source, promotion material).**

Most recent development of this genre transformation branch can be observed from some more expanded and composite works like ethno-rock musicals, such as the ‘Ibalong’. This is an ethno-rock musical, a dance-theater musical interpretation of the Bicolano epic adapted for the stage by



Rody Vera. While Tuxqs Rutaquio is director, Carol Bello and Alden Luginasin are musical and choreographic directors.

More examples can be observed through several other genres that are also growing in popularity in the Philippine music scene, including a number of alternative groups, and tribal bands promoting cultural awareness of the Philippine Islands. Artists such as Joey Ayala, Grace Nono, Bayang Barrios, Cocomjam, and Pinikpikan are also reaping relative commercial success while utilizing the traditional musical sounds of many indigenous tribes in the Philippines.

Fourthly, the themes of the lyrics are more reflective of the local living styles. One example is the Cordillera country music. In contrast to the Nashville or the Manila sound, the local musicians came up with Batawa sound, which is a word in one of the Cordillera languages referring to the yard or space outside the house. Batawa is also a song title that has become popular and has been recorded by several local artists. For several years, capitalizing on the popularity of the song, Batawa became the name of a country music bar in a street in Baguio, which became a central space for people to listen to Igorot musics. The lyrics of this genre, serving common themes like love in its lyrics, depict various aspects of how local people living in comparatively isolated mountainous regions deal with modernity and changes. The songs express their thoughts and feelings on education, religion, economics, marriage and family, and the various configurations of such institutions. The experience of change and development is often, evaluated about a certain past, such as when a song persona was younger, or when life was once either simple or hard (Fong, 2007). All these elements cast a local identity as Igorots and national identity as that of the Philippines, in contrast to the ‘American’ dreams as in the ‘Americanization’ age.<sup>4</sup>

### **Genre Transmutation**

This stage is a highly creative phase of the Philippines’ musician at mastery of several localized types of genres and mix into a new hybrid or branch of music genres which at the higher artistic level aims to be reflective of the Philippines’ national identity. Genre crossover, fusion, and hybridity is the main characteristic of this stage of musicality development.

### **GENRE HYBRIDITY**

The Philippines’ folk-rock is such example. Philippine musicians hybridized the Philippines’ rock music with Philippines’ folk music, leading to the 1978 breakthrough success of Freddie Aguilar. Aguilar's ‘Anak’ (Child), his debut recording, is the commercially most successful Philippines’ recording, and was popular throughout Asia and Europe. It has also been translated into numerous languages by singers worldwide. Another example can be observed from a Philippines’ jazz-rock bands like Dream Carousel that combined and directed two genres, namely jazz and rock into a set of final music events of a Philippines’ identity.

There have been local musicians experimenting with combining more localized types of genres and mixing them together into a new hybrid or branch of the Philippines’ music genres. A recent development is the fusion of spoken-word and jazz, and rock, chiefly attributed to the Radioactive Sago Project. Other notable names are Bob Aves with his ethno-infused jazz-rock. In 2006, the Philippines’ band Kala, appeared in the music scene with its retro-sounding first single, ‘Jeepney’,

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<sup>4</sup> In the realm of rock music, one of the first hits composed by Bobby Gonzales, one of the first popular rock stars of the Philippines, is ‘Hahabol- Habol’. The song depicts a strategy of courting a local lady, who holds a cultural nature of being ‘pakipot’ [pretending to be uninterested]. Even though musically the song is a parody of early rock and roll music, the national identity was well captured by its focus on the depiction of Philippines cultural norms and life in the lyrics.



which became a major hit. According to the Philippine Inquirer, the band revived and redefined the Manila Sound genre through their funk-rock-hip music.

These examples of stylistic hybridity can be regarded as an ecumenical orientation of the Philippines' popular music genre formation, which treats the foreign and local elements on an equal weight while creating new genres being considered as the Philippines' identity. This is a 'cross' mode that is deliberately aimed at creating a new product. The in-loading trajectory can be observed as the two parts of impacting an already existing speak about that work in a by-partisan fashion to achieve a common goal, which is expressing a national identity of the Philippines.

However, there coexists another tendency which exposes an even harder stance in defending national identity in the area of popular musical arts. Hybridising music events happen when the Philippines' music traditions should be treated as the over-arching barrier while the western music genres and technology are rather treated as a servicing role, only to enhance the variety and performance of such events. The mix-mode is pertinent in explaining this process of genre hybridity due to its goal of maintaining the Philippines' music tradition in the main music discourse.

### **MIX MODE AS REFLECTED IN THE PHILIPPINES' POPULAR MUSIC GENRE FORMATION**

As previously stated, the 'mix' mode is whereby the new musical language rides on the power and propulsion of the main language. This mix-mode creates an on-loading trajectory, with one half bearing responsibility for propulsion of the whole. Under this trend, the new genre is riding over the Philippines' local cultures and music traditions, which bears the main stylistic development responsibility. The foreign genres only serve as the spicing or serving part in this cultural fusion in procuring the music being associated with national identity.

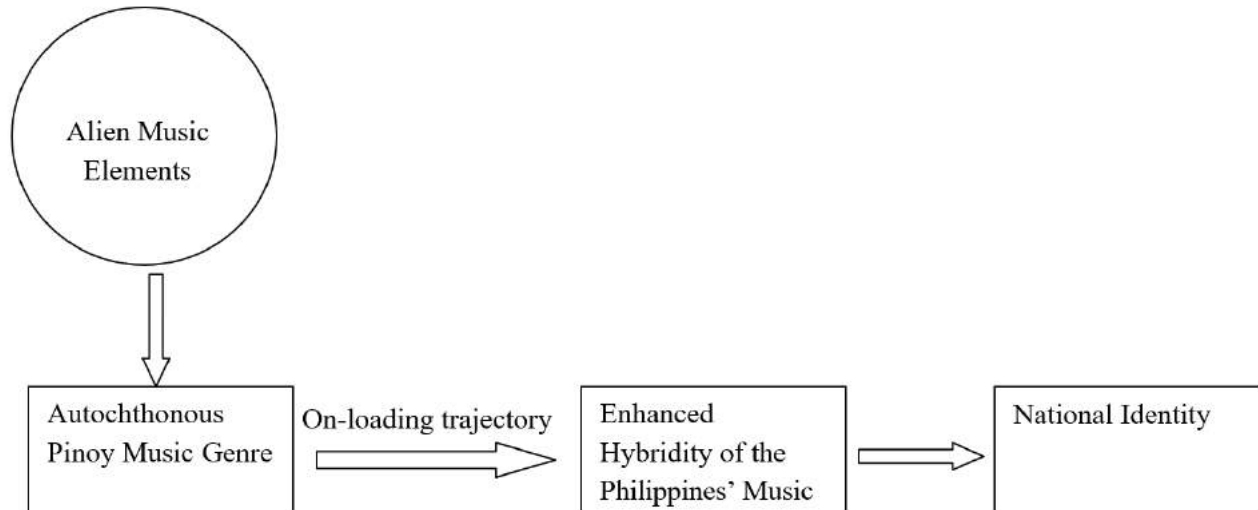
Researches have been conducted about how western popular cultures were adapted and installed as a major industrial standard categorization of genres in the Philippines' mass and youth culture. Yet especially after the spread of Western bands to the local Manila music scenes, for instance, The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, or others, we may note that this is only a small portion of the whole story. The antithesis is that the Philippines had also its own popular cultural tradition with its peculiar independent track of development. Although this development was enriched by western popular stylistic advancements, its cultural function as the narrative voice for the nation's cultural and ideological identity of the nationhood, has never been lost. This creates the Mix-mode of the Philippines' popular genre formation, whereby the new music rides on the power and propulsion of the main music language which is the Philippines autochthonous music idiom, such as Kundiman. This mix-mode creates an on-loading trajectory, with one-half (Philippines local music genres) bearing responsibility for the propulsion of the whole. A rediscovering and exploring how such local tradition has been maintained and expanded will play the key role of revamping the Philippines popular music history being impacted by an invaded and colonized one to a culturally independent and self-sustained one.

With the ushering of various Western popular music genres, the hybridity of local music genres such as 'Kundiman'<sup>5</sup> and the Western music idioms, produced a unique "mix" mode, or "on-loading" trajectory of the Philippines' popular music. This is characterized by utilizing Western musical elements and language to enrich the color of original music idioms, and finally became a new type of the Philippines' popular music genres. The musicians maintain the main stylistic

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<sup>5</sup> One kind of local love song/s found in the Philippines.

traits laid down by such types of genres through its historical traditions and evolution, but imbue their renditions with new western music exposures and advancements. The end product is a hybrid type of music which is anchored mainly on local idioms as the main language while the foreign idioms function as an auxiliary force. This process of “mix” mode can be graphed as follows:



**FIGURE 3: “mix” mode in the Philippines’ popular music genre formation (Scheme by the author).**

This mix-mode or “on-loading” trajectory produces enhanced Philippines’ autochthonous genres which happen through two dimensions.

Firstly, the musicians use directly traditional elements or some local music or recombine the melodic parts from different local tunes. However, such kind of revamping takes place through a sophisticated “fit” between the stylistic traits of the local Philippines’ materials and western popular music genres.

Secondly, the musicians come up with their own material which is based on their imagined national music genres and traditions. The syntax, phrasing and modes are all alluding to their native land, but the melodies are new and combined with modern western popular music elements and production techniques. Both of these two dimensions were historically, supported by the Philippines’ nationalism of musical arts. Hence, they should be understood as its modern time continuation in the area of popular music.

### **KUNDIMAN**

As argued earlier, besides the “cross” mode of the hybridity of Philippines’ popular music genre formation there coexists a “mix” mode of hybridity, which was solidly, based on different types of autochthonous music genres. The Philippines’ popular culture has been following its own development, by incorporating stylistic technologies as an aiding stylistic mechanism and to enrich their own traditional culture.

One example can be looked at closer. Kundiman is a local idiom of a traditional Philippine love song, which gained popularity and effectiveness as a medium of personal and social expression from about 1915 to 1935 (Hernandez, 1978). Stylistically, it was written in a 3-beat triple-time rhythm pattern and a two parts musical form. The melody is characterized by a smooth, flowing, and gentle rhythm with dramatic intervals. Politically, this genre has been tightly connected with the Philippines’ patriotic movements.



### **Bayan-Ko: Kundiman as Approached in Pop/ Smooth Jazz**

In July 1987, a revival version featured pop/jazz singer Jo Anne Lorenzana. The nationalistic campaign, spearheaded by the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT), was aired on radio and television for the first anniversary of the People Power Revolution.

Later on, she again sang this at the Inauguration of President Fidel Ramos in 1992 as the 12th President of the Philippines. Her jazz background provides her stylistic skills as a jazz musician in order to fuse the kundiman with a soulful voice of good quality. The introduction paves a groove and funky rhythmic background laid by drums, electric bass, and keyboards. Significant changes can be observed from her freely inserted improvisational phrases on “Bayan Ko” towards the end of the rendition, against the backup chorus and syncopated funky bass line, which leads to the climax.<sup>9</sup> This ‘call and response’ technique that has been featured in American blues and jazz idioms works seamlessly with the kundiman melody, while greatly enhancing the listening experience of the kundiman and making the lyric title “bayan ko” unforgettable.

### **Bayan Ko: Kundiman as Approached in Folk Rock**

Bayan Ko was also rendered in the folk-rock style by Freddie Aguilar and Asin. Both versions were regarded as classics by music journalists and audiences. They provided the kundiman large popularity, which went beyond the boundary of the country. Following this time period, many kundimans became the carrier of patriotic movements.

The Philippines’ folk-rock icon Freddie Aguilar’s cover is one of the most famous renditions of the song; an often-overlooked detail is that the instrumental section of this version is actually another Philippines’ patriotic hymn: ‘Pilipinas Kong Mahal’.

Asin is a folk and folk-rock band from the Philippines. They started as a trio in the late 1970s, and were originally known as the ‘Salt of the Earth’. They later changed their name to "ASIN", which means salt in a modern Tagalog language. Asin's rendition of Bayan Ko included another work, ‘Kay Sarap Mabuhay Sa Sariling Bayan’, as a preluding stanza to the main lyrics. Sung mostly by Leftist groups, the stanza is included either as the prelude or the bridge replacing *Pilipinas Kong Mahal*.

### **Second Dimension: Composing New Musics in New Genres which use Autochthonous Genres of the Philippines as Main Stylistic Foundation**

The creativity of the Philippines’ musicians makes them not only directly using the autochthonous material, but further they come up with their own material which is often based on their national music genres and traditions that express a deep sentiment of nationhood. One example can be observed through the establishment of the Philippines’ rock music and kundiman.<sup>7</sup>

This genealogical relationship can be manifested by the first Philippines’ internationally acclaimed band of the Philippines rock music, the ‘Juan de la Cruz Band’. The desire of the Philippines’ pop musicians to produce music they could find which they hoped would get support among the youth first bound expression in Joey “Pepe” Smith and the Juan de la Cruz

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<sup>7</sup> Alfredo P. Hernandez identifies that the kundiman has changed, its origin and influences fusing into what it is now, called a distinct ballad of the Philippines. All of these sounds, the Philippines’ rock, as it is labeled now, trace their very beginnings from the kundiman. Also, De Leon observed that most of the successful rock songs written by local musicians are those that carry melodies of the kundiman type. The Philippines’ composers like Hanopol, Florante, Heber Bartolome, or Freddie Aguilar used the rock rhythms to enliven the Philippines kundiman to become a rock type of music (Hernandez, 1978).

Band's experimentation with hard rock which used plaintive local lyrics. "Ang Himig Natin" (Our Music), performed extemporaneously by the band in 1973, may be considered the first Philippines' slang for a Philippines' rock piece. The song bewailed the lonely struggle of local musicians to have their music accepted by an audience attuned and addicted to foreign music. But it likewise voices the conviction that people of the Philippines would find unity only when they learn to appreciate and sing their own songs.

## GENRE FORMATION AS AN AGENT OF INSTALLING NATIONAL IDENTITY

The national identity of the Philippines reflects the needs, values, and norms of grass-root people. By looking for the music as the representations of cultural symbols that people of the Philippines can identify with, popular music genres were transformed into a discourse of the Philippines' nationhood. The perception of such musical experience can be translated into the categorization of the new genres as a symbolic agent, which aims to produce a narrative of the nation, tell the origins and continuity of the nation, the traditions and the ideas of the original and genuine people of the nation.

The metaphorical implication of 'music' as a narrative voice in the representation of national identity has been a politically sensitive topic. Music and 'nation' can be considered as discursive formations. Their relationship can be viewed as a network of meanings upon a context. Music that has transformed from locally evolving to highly hybridized genres may have to be considered more sophisticated components of genre ingredients. It is through discourse and experience that music can be defined in its characteristics of a people or a nation, which leads in rare situations to essentially elementary characteristics.

Yet it seems clear from historical examples that, while meaning is unstable, music has the power to convey an epistemology of national identity and nationalism through specific aesthetics. In other words, people not only come to know something about their nation through music, for instance, through the lyrics of patriotic songs that are paired with rousing marching music, but they also learn how they should experience nationalism as they make, listen to, and remember music. The question of how music might sound out nation, then, is a "gateway to the history and sociology of a given people". (Castro, 2010: 9-10).

## CONCLUSION

This paper tries to shed new light on the genre formation process in the Philippines' popular music. I believe that a clear understanding of how genres have been formulated is the key to a new paradigm in redefining the Philippines' popular music, thus solving the perception discrepancy of genre categorization among the different stakeholders in the Philippines. Drawing on Joe Peter's cultural hybridism theory, there two modes were presented, namely the "cross" mode and the "mix" mode that historically coexists in the popular music of the Philippines. This can show a highly sophisticated process of musical hybridity as a cultural phenomenon in the society, which has been a reflection of this nation's historical and social milieu and ideology. The framework illustrated in this paper is not exclusively thought to serve the Philippines, rather those developments may also be observed in other post-colonial nations such as South Africa, Indonesia, or Malaysia. The musical hybridity contributes to the genre perception discrepancy among the different stakeholders, on top of the commercial meditation causes as elucidated by previous scholars such as Walser, (1993). However, the overarching propelling motivation behind such complicated hybridity phenomena denotes an uncompromising and ardent enthusiasm of the Philippines' popular musicians in pursuits of their national identity and people's voice. This is namely a sound that is reflective of culture they may call 'their own', history and idiosyncrasy as

Philippine culture, to recoup their pride, international standing and visibility through sound and mainly text. The Philippines' musicians held this nationalistic tradition diachronically along their political struggle during colonization periods, and this tradition has been inherited and further expounded by the upcoming generation of popular musicians as a tool against westernization. The genre fluidity phenomenon is, rather than a parodic emulation of the foreign musics, a unique reflection of the artistic wisdom of local musicians in the pursuit of forming a voice of their own.

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# WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT SOME MUSIC FEATURES AND SONG LYRICS OF THE KHMER LIVING IN THE SOUTH OF VIETNAM?

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## Abstract

In this article, the author will present some research issues as follows: Musical expressions of love for the homeland, Love among men and women, family affection, and attachment to work. The Khmer inhabiting South Vietnam practice all these expressions.

In another short section, common characteristics with the music of other ethnic groups in Vietnam include similar instrumental music, scales used and rhythmic structures applied.

Thereby, the author reviews categorizations undertaken in the past demonstrating that Khmer music strictly belongs to one ethnic group in the country. Also, musical instruments have been categorized in similar ways, using the Hornbostel-Sachs descriptive tools: Chordophone, Arephones, Idiophones, Membraphones, which are using a variety of scales and modes. It is also said that the inheritance and promotion of the typical values of Khmer music into social life, was a very pragmatic fact, which needs more attention. The use of the term “Folk Music” is only reflecting on a certain approach supported by cultural policies toward minorities from the 1970s to 2010.

## Keywords:

Khmer music, Khmer instruments, Khmer songs, Southern Vietnam.

## INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, between 1970 and 2010, the study of music has made certain achievements that need more attention in order to review current outcomes and applications. Research issues regarding some musical features of each ethnic group, including the music of the Khmer living in Southern Vietnam, called the Southern Khmer, still require further studies and clarification.

Some studies of the South Vietnamese Khmer music deriving from the 1970, 80s are found in the following sources:

*Kien Giang folk songs* by Lu Nhat Vu, Nguyen Van Hoa, Lê Giang (1985); *Hau Giang folk songs* by Le Giang, Lu Nhat Vu, Nguyen Van Hoa and Minh Luan (1986). *Kien Giang Folk Songs*.

The authors also categorized Khmer folk songs into different genres, mostly based on their lyrics: *bompêkôn* (lullaby), *oumtick* (boating), *xaccrova* (chants), *phlêngka* (wedding music), *lam* (singing), *môhôri*, *bot chriêng*, *kômara*, *kômarây* (songs for children).

*The Hau Giang Folk Songs*, is a book primarily containing songs and lyrics of ethnic groups living in this region, including the Khmer followed by the collection of 100 Khmer folk tunes, which Nguyen Van Hoa collected (2004).

There are also monographs referring to the Music of the Southern Khmer and some Musical Instruments found in Soc Trang, their residential area, by Dao Huy Quyen, Son Ngoc Hoang, and Ngo Khi (2005; 2007).

However, issues about the characteristics of various musics and especially that of the Khmer are only partially mentioned, not deeply studied, dissected of each specific value. They are, furthermore, not primary study objects of the above works, with few exceptions (Jähnichen, 2012).

There are, however, a number of research outcomes about the Khmer in Cambodia. These are Chapbinh Pro Chia Prây Khmer of Chap Pinh (1964); Chapin Pithi Apea Pipea Khmer of Chapin Yike, and Bassac theaters by Pich Tum Kravel (1965; 1997); Pich Tum Kravel's Khmer Mask Theater (2000a); Đ'tt'ây, Rô, and Lakhôn Khmer by Pich Tum Kravel (2000b), and the Khmer Orchestra descriptions by Hun Sarin (2004). When Bonh Tum was a UNESCO listed Khmer Intangible Cultural Heritage item, some writings were added of Chhung Phanh Sô Phone (2003). Some observations on Khmer performing arts were simply introducing the origin and history of performing arts. Thensome others were describing subjectively the role and meaning of the pieces used in orchestras called A Răk, Pin peat, Moro, Chhay Dam, Muon Khrum, and Skochhas of the Khmer in Cambodia.

According to Pham Tiet Khanh (2019), studies of Khmer music in Cambodia have increased awareness, providing a multi-faceted view of different genres. However, Khmer music in the South of Vietnam, as well as its specific issues, were not the subject and scope of such kind of research.

The purpose of studying music in general in the current period is to grasp the common and highlight the peculiarities of each local group, and to study the function of cultural phenomena, the interaction, and the regulation among them at the time of research. This helps identify music regions, musical spaces, as well as issues in the theory of cultural diffusion. In the meantime, these principles may have changed along with new insights into the organization of societies and the interactions between cultures.

Studying social functions, as well as the ethics of Khmer music is a very important issue not only to the Vietnamese surrounding. In the music of the Southern Khmer, local music is a cultural activity associated with a specific social environment, carrying certain social functions, and the aesthetic characteristics of specific creative subjects, mainly lyrical features through the local language of the Southern Khmer in that case. Since time immemorial, the purpose of music creation and its function was of significant nature. Long-term changes in society may have found their expressions in the development of the Southern Khmer community of Vietnam.

Regarding musical instruments described: The most common classification system used in Vietnam is the von Hornbostel-Sachs method. This method of classifying musical instruments is based on the use of consistent criteria, which can be applied to the classification of any instrument in any culture. Therefore, it was in earlier years strongly supported by the International Council of Traditional Music (ICTM) and is regularly critically reviewed, renewed, and corrected (Jähnichen, 2019).

In this article, research methods of different research areas were used, among them musicology, folklore, history, general fieldwork, interviewing, collecting, synthesizing, and processing

materials and ascribing them to specific talents. Relevant data had to be compiled to contribute to the clarification of the research issues posed for the characteristics of Khmer folk music in the South of Vietnam.



**FIGURE 1: Khmer Southern Orchestra (photos by courtesy of the Khmer *Ánh Bình Minh* Art Delegation).**

### **TOPICS AND CONTENTS OF THE LYRICS IN SONGS**

Topics and contents of Khmer songs are mostly, expressed in their lyrics. They contain many elements of life such as the love for the homeland, love between men and women, love of the family, and working habits.

#### **Songs Praising the Homeland**

For many centuries, Khmer life has been closely associated with agricultural activities, fields, rivers, and canals. There were such living conditions that have formed unique cultural values, typical for inhabitants of the area. Song lyrics refer to this as the culture of adapting to living conditions, the culture of coping with natural fluctuations, and the culture of the exploitation or the daily use of natural resources. Most song lyrics are to create and express attachment, especially adapted to the natural environment of the river landscapes.

One example is: *I miss the sounds of gibbon howling / On the top of Mount Chi Xô / I remember lamenting / Still on the banyan tree branch / I remember every tick / Moaning on the top of the tower / Preachet Peak.*

#### **Song Lyrics Dedicated to the Love between Men and Women**

This is as everywhere a topic of great interest and holds the largest reserve in the treasure of Khmer songs. A striking example is:

*He sat and waited for me all the time, waiting forever / The coconut ship was tired of falling down / Pouring water on me was very cold / And, the cloud was also gratuitously angry.*

Or:

*His boat swam lightly in the lotus lagoon / Lotus scent spreads sweetly across the sky / Listen to the water rolling along the boat.*

### **Song Lyrics about the Love of the Family**

Some examples should help understand the specific ideas of this group of songs: *Go to sleep, good child! / Tomorrow mom wakes up early to work and to raise children / I love them and I comfort her, I hold her / Let her kids sleep, In the dawn I go to plow.*

Khmer lullabies show in great variety this unique way of expressions (Jähnichen, 1993), for example: *My grandmother's love is so much loving / Darling, please don't cry! Yes, grandma loves me, I'm happy with her*

### **Song Lyrics of Working Habits**

The function of labor is reflected in the Khmer's short songs and are dedicated to some working sequences such as: rice-treating, string-pulling, lotus-picking. Each region has different texts, but the main function is to pound rice in a rhythmic way and with a memorable text coming. In the next text example, there is an experience reported, which says that when pounding rice workers have to keep the rice husks and bran for use, which should not be discarded.

*She is very good at / Grinding rice, pounding rice, ready to be diligent / Listening to the old people's teachings / Take rice husks to make bricks for the yard to build a house.*

Another interesting song called Bompêao (lullaby for a nephew) has the following lyrics:

*My mother works hard in the fields / A lifetime of two hardships / A whole life is muddy and muddy. All day long, hand-and-feet-wet / Sucking rice, rain, thunderstorms.*

## **SIMILARITIES WITH MUSIC FROM OTHER AREAS AND ETHNIC GROUPS ON THE TERRITORY OF VIETNAM**

### **Musical Instruments**

In comparison with music from other areas and ethnic groups on the territory of Vietnam, one finds that Khmer music has some characteristics common to others. This is shown mainly in a number of similar musical instruments of string instruments, wind instruments, idiophones, and membranophones. Besides knowing the Hornbostel-Sachs nomenclature, it is advisable to follow the local classification systems.

#### *Brass string instruments*

Among the instruments used in the Central Highlands, three musical instruments similar to the Khmer string instruments are identified, namely the b'rooc, k'râu and the chink'la. They are identical to the Khmer chhayđiê (khsêđiêu, say đieu), the k'râu of the H're; v'rooctru of the Sedang; the tinhninh of the Bahnar; the goong used among the Rongao, Gie-Trieng and Bahnar, and the goong de of the Giarai, Rongao, and Gie-Trieng.

Similar to the truô sô, the 2-string fiddle of the Khmer, is the cò of the Vietnamese, the còke of the Muong, the Sisolo of the Thai, the door of the Tay, and of course, the erhu of the Han living in South Vietnam.





**FIGURE 2: Khmer people's *Truô sô* (photo by the author).**

The wind instruments resembling those of the Khmer *khôy* are, the *tàlía* of the Co, Sedang, or H're, the *alal* of the Bahnar, the *kađeh* of the Raglai, the *đinh k'lía* of the E-de, the *ống ôi* of the Muong, the *píthiu* of the Thai, the *pi* flute of the H'mong, the *tieu* of the Vietnamese, and the *xiao* of the Han.



**FIGURE 3: Khmer people's *Khôy* (photo by the author).**

Similar to the kongmon of the Khmer people, is the ching goong of the H'rê, the goong of the Sedang, the chenh goong of the Gie-Trieng people, the Chenh of the Bahnar people, and the gongs (muong) of the Vietnamese people.

## **Scales and Modalities That Share Common Features with other Communities in the Region**

In addition to similar musical instruments, the modal scale in the music of the Southern Khmer also shows some common features, mainly with Vietnamese music of that area. According to Lu Nhat Vu, the so-called two-tone, three-tone, four-tone, five-tone and six-tone scales of the Khmer are recorded with hundreds of rhythms containing specific common traits of South Vietnamese music. The scale numberings, however, are not to classify any quality or historical relationship.

I may suggest that scales and modes are the key elements in this music, because listening to them eases the way to recognize and explain differences. But music is more than the way, how scales or modes might be constructed although, in Vietnam, this is a leading issue in theory as well as in music practice, where 'translations' into solfege are often used and become a sign of a self-colonizing approach.

Here some known theories based on the number of pitches used with possible examples (Lu Nhat Vu et al, 1986a; Lu Nhat Vu et al, 1986b):

### **2-tone Scale**

2-tone scales are found in children's songs, with simple, rustic tunes, but very joyful in its construction. These songs are often accompanied by dance movements in a child's play. 2-tone scales can be divided into three categories:

Type 1 is still found in the game song *Lbêngrotpuôn* [Hiding sword] of Kien Giang province, forming a 2-Dur interval (c2 - d2) as the following examples demonstrate:



**FIGURE 4: Excerpt from *Lbêngrotpuôn* [Hiding the sword].<sup>1</sup>**

Type 2 is found in the *Khâmênh khuyal krobây*, [playing in the field], of Hau Giang province, which forms a minor third interval (a1 - c2) shown as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> All transcriptions are extracted by the author.



FIGURE 5: Excerpt of *Khměnh khuyal krobây* [playing in the field].

Type 3 in *Playing outside in the field* collected in Tra Vinh province, there is a major third interval (bes1 - d2):



FIGURE 6: Excerpt of *Playing outside in the field*.

### 3-tone Scale

A 3-tone scale is used in Khmer children’s songs found in the song *Chăc tucđông* (Pour coconut water) and *Chap koonkhleung* (Catch a kite) in the Kien Giang province. The following examples present a series of three fixed tones (fis1 - b1 – cis2):



FIGURE 7: Excerpt of the song titled *Chăcturđông* [Pour coconut water].



FIGURE 8: Excerpt of the song titled *Chap koonkhleung* [Catch a kite].

### 4-tone Scale

The 4-tone scale in the Khmer tunes also has many types. The following belongs to the common types. In the song *Mê Trây* (Guest leaving) collected in Go Quao district, Kien Giang province, the tone order f1 - aes1 - bes1 - c2 was formed.



FIGURE 9: Excerpt of the song titled *Mê Trây* [Guests leaving].

Or the song *Oum tuck* (paddle boats) collected in Loc Ninh district, Binh Phuoc province, has the same scale structure.



FIGURE 10: Excerpt of the song titled *Oum tuck* [Paddlers in boats].

### 5-tone Scale

There are many types of the 5-tone scales in Khmer tunes. The following is one of the typical ones. There are many Khmer songs with the scales corresponding to the *Bac*, *Nam* and *Oan* in

Vietnamese songs. In the song titled *A Le* (Guy hunting) a 5-tone scale is formed, g - a - c1 - d1 - e1, which corresponds to the Bac mood. Also, the *Choôch Chung* (throw a ball), has a similar scale structure.

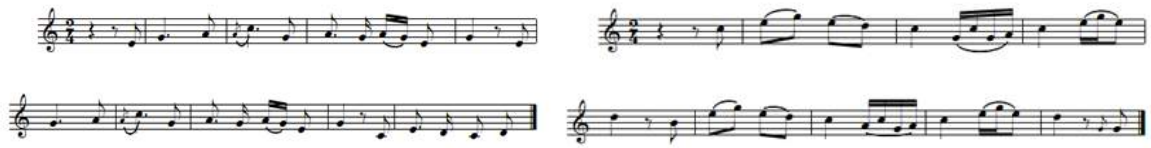


FIGURE 11a and 11b: Excerpt of *A Lê* [Guy hunting]. Excerpt of *Choôch Chung* [throw a ball].

Similar to the Nam mode of Southern Vietnam, is the structure in the song *Oum Tuck Chook* [Rowing]: a1 - c2 - d2 - e2 - g2.



FIGURE 12: Excerpt of the song titled *Oum Tuck Chook* [Rowing].

Or the song *Đomrây Thngôn Phluc* [Big ivory elephant] also has a similar scale structure.



FIGURE 13: *Đomrây Thngôn Phluc* [Big ivory elephant].

The structure of type 3 of the 5-tone scale corresponds to the *Oan* (variation) in Vietnamese songs of the South (*Hò - xư - xang - xê - cồng non*). However, this scale type is less common in Khmer songs. In the song *Xarikeo* (Starling) collected in the My Xuyen district of the Hau Giang province, there is a 5-tone scale: b - d1 - e1 - fis1 - g1.



FIGURE 14: Excerpt of the song *Xarikeo* [Starling].

Also, the song named *Kom Boontôh Boong* [Don't blame me] possesses the same scale structure given as follows:



FIGURE 15: Excerpt of the song *Kom Boontôh Boong* [Don't blame me].

### 6-tone Scale

Among Khmer songs of the southern region, there are three types of 6-tone scale constructions. Among them the songs: *Bompê Kôn 1* [Lullaby 1], *Xrây Rot* [Ms. Rot], *Bompê Kôn 2* [Lullaby 2], *Xôridăng* [Sun], *Cha puuk* [Sparrow], *Chbăpprodau* [Teaching'] may be cited as specific examples. Type 1 in the 6-tone scale is formed by two groups of 3 tones connected by a minor second interval.

The song *Bompê Kôn 1*, collected in the Long Phu district of Hau Giang province, consists of the following scale: c - d - e \_ f - g - a.



FIGURE 16: Excerpt of the song *Bompê Kôn 1* [lullaby 1].

The song *Xrây Rot* (Ms. Rot) reveals a similar scale structure:



FIGURE 17: Excerpt of the song titled *Xrây Rot* [Ms. Rot].

Type 2 in the 6-tone scale is composed of two groups of 3 sounds. It is recommended to consult the *Xôridang* (Sun), which was collected in the Ha Tien of Kien Giang province. It has the same scale structure as well presented in the following example:



FIGURE 18: Excerpt of the song *Xôridang* [Sun].

Type 3 in the 6-tone scale of the Khmer in the South is also composed of two groups of 3 sounds. See the example below:

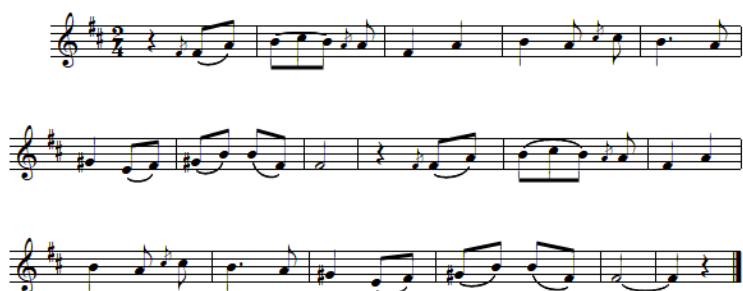


FIGURE 19: Excerpt of the song titled *Chap puuk* [Sparrow].

*Chbăpprođau* (teachings) collected in the Hau Giang province, contains the same scale structure given as follows:



FIGURE 20: Excerpt of the song titled *Chbăpprođau* [Teachings].

In addition to the 2-tone-, 3-tone-, 4-tone-, 5-tone-, and 6-tone scales, there is a combination of scale forms that produce a range of tone colors. Likewise, according to Lu Nhat Vu, this phenomenon is common in South Vietnamese folk songs. This also proves that the



characteristic of the modal scale in Khmer Southern folk music shows some common features with Vietnamese music.



**FIGURE 21:** Artist Kiên Via Sa Na playing *roneat* (photo by courtesy of Khmer *Ánh Bình Minh*, Art Delegation).

## CONCLUSION

Khmer music has the characteristics of music, absorbed the arts of other ethnic groups in the country and Southeast Asia. This is reflected in the material used in musical instruments, similar musical instruments belonging to significant instrument groups played in their areas and the represented tunings of musical instruments.

In addition, music of the Southern Khmer region also has the characteristics of music in the Southeast Asian region, using gongs through assigned persons. Although there are common musical features in the Central Highlands, music of the Southern Khmer region has its idiosyncrasies. Music of the Khmer as well as Khmer people are as talented as many other people in art, which is clearly shown in their musical efforts.

Through the study of scales and musical construction principles found in the music of the Khmer, it becomes visible that the way of thinking about music can be far different from that of other ethnic groups inhabiting the same region. Khmer music shows flexibility, skillfulness and quite strict rules in the way the music is performed, if some kind of music produced in a rather traditional setting is considered.

Consequently, one can see the theme and lyrical content of songs, characteristics as well as the role and dominating ethics of Khmer music for contemporary music within the larger national context of a, lived culture in Vietnam. This contribution is only a very small beginning of an exploration of some functional issues and musical methods of the Khmer living in South Vietnam that should be further studied.

The inheritance and promotion of the typical values of Khmer music into social life is a very practical job, which needs more attention.

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# LEUANGTENG DONG: ANALYSIS OF A HMONG SONG

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## Abstract

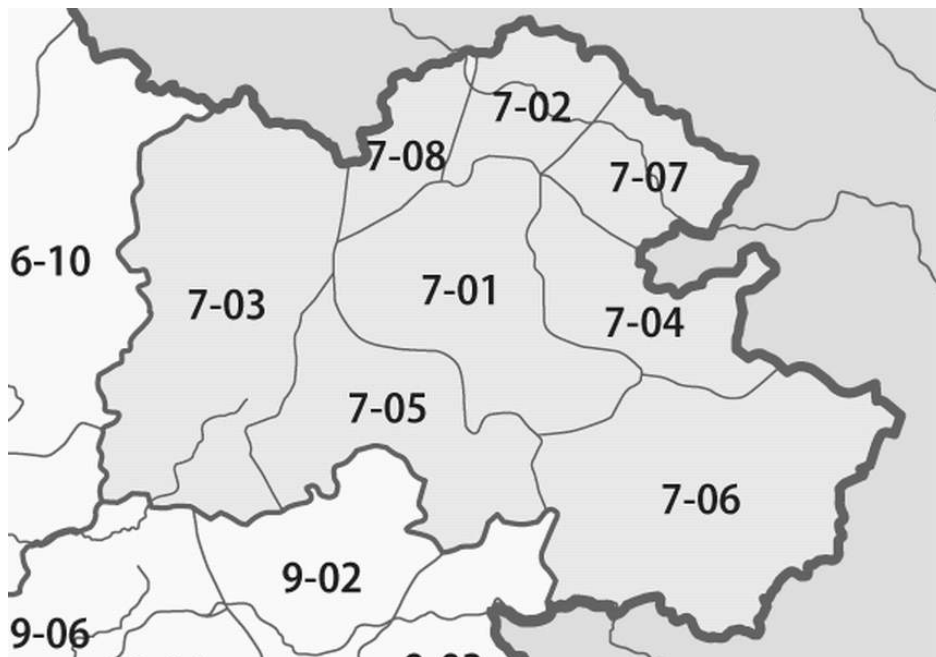
This article is an analysis of ‘Leuangtengdong’, a Hmong song melody which was recorded and transcribed by Jähnichen in 2000, while documenting a collection of Hmong songs in Laos. This new article is an effort to analyze melodic patterns of the song while considering its historical and social contexts through the personal gaze of the author with a specific background in singing and social experience. It is important to mention that the language sung in the song was unknown and that the emphasis of the analysis is on the musical shape. Finally, there is a conclusion regarding this song fitting in Jähnichen’s hypothesis on Hmong song melodies which states that most musical phrases do not repeat; all lines are different in pitch, order and length; pitch order and intervals can indicate a specific type (of song); singers do not know which type they sing, only analysis shows; and analysis cannot prove ethnic groupings. "Very interesting is the general characteristic of generating absolutely individual melodic lines in each example and in all the other recordings there was no one song with a repetition of a single melodic line. Avoiding repetitions is therefore a remarkable sign of Hmong song melodies." (Jähnichen, 2011: 126). The given core hypothesis was the point of departure in this analytical article.

## Keywords

Hmong, Wedding song, Pitches, Intervals, Tonal language

## THE COLLECTING OF THE SONG

In order to analyze this, or any other song, I find a need to understand the context in which the song was or is used and collected, therefore I will briefly introduce the circumstances in which the recording was made.



**FIGURE 1:** Scheme of the province Huaphan in Laos. The village Ban Vanglom where the song was collected in the year 2000 is in the district 7-01 (Scheme open source, modification by the author).

On January 2000, Jähnichen and her colleagues were traveling in Laos to record Hmong songs with the purpose of providing accessibility to these songs and analyze them. On the previous month, December 1999, they had already been to Phonsavanh, Muongkhoun and Nonghet, observing Hmong festivals such as ‘Pig’s and Cow’s Day’ and ‘Buffalo Fights’ as well as recording their songs. By January, they had reached Sam Neua and on January 14, they went to Ban Vanglom, where they observed the New Year’s festivities and recorded several more songs, including the song analyzed in this article. The performer was an approximately 70 years old man and the equipment used in the recording were two microphones Sennheiser MD 425 and a SONY DAT handheld recorder.

## THE SONG'S FUNCTION AND CONTEXT

"Types of song melodies are very important to different Hmong groups living on the Southeast Asian mainland." (Jähnichen, 2011: 85). There are historical, religious and cultural functional contexts in which the songs are performed. Some Hmong songs tell the story of their migration to Southeast Asia, others are sung in everyday life events—such as a mother singing to her child— and finally, songs have important social functions in ceremonies such as the 'Ball-Playing' courtship during the New Year’s festivities. These songs have been orally passed on from generation to generation. The analyzed song is an old wedding song named “Leuangtengdong” which can be translated from the Hmong language as: Leuang (meaning, story, contents), teng (getting married) and dong (eastern, others, loud). Weddings involve the singing of many special songs and are rites of great importance to the Hmong people living in that area. “Certainly, the four major categories of Hmong rituals—New Year and Marriage, Death and Shamanism—account between therefore the greater part of the many customs, or kevcai, which the Hmong have, and are rightly concerned to preserve and transmit" (Tapp, 1989: 89).

## THE HYPOTHESIS ON HMONG SONG MELODIES

After collecting 189 recordings of Hmong musical activities, Jähnichen transcribed and analyzed a selection of 24 songs which led to this hypothesis:

1. Most musical lines are not repeated.
2. All lines are different in pitch order and length.
3. The pitch order and intervals can indicate specific type (of song).
4. The singers do not know which type they sing, only analysis shows.
5. The analysis cannot prove ethnic groupings.

When looking at this melodic construction (FIGURE 1), it was observed that none of the phrases are repeated and the pitch range is under one octave, more exactly a minor 7th—from C3 to B3 (Do to Ti or Si<sup>1</sup>). In a micro analysis of the first four phrases, when comparing the intervals between all of the pitches, I observed that there are only four types of intervals in the song. The predominant intervals are: Perfect 4th, which appeared 24 times, and Major 2nd, 17 times out of a total of 51 intervals in the first 4 phrases as the following table in FIGURE 2 demonstrates.

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<sup>1</sup> This cultural translation helps imagination when being familiar with it. It is not used in any other analytical context given in this article.



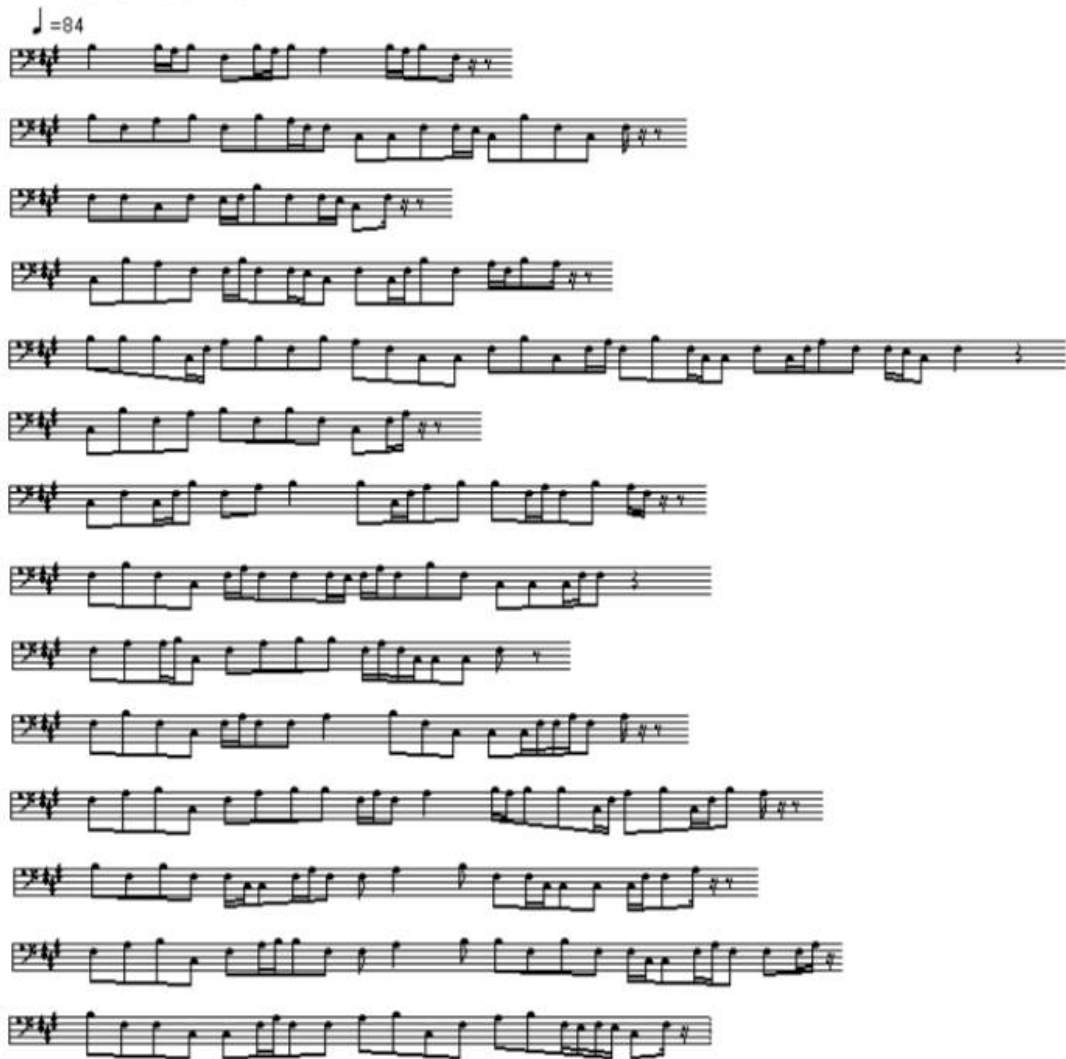


FIGURE 2: Transcription of Leuangtengdong by Gisa Jähnichen, 2000.

Phrase 1	Pitches:	B, A	A, B	B, F#	F#, B	B, A	A, B	B, A	A, B	B, A	A, B	B, F#					
	Intervals:	M2	M2	P4	P4	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	P4					
Phrase 2	Pitches:	B, F#	F#, A	A, B	B, F#	F#, B	B, A	A, F#	F#, C#	C#, F#	F#, E	E, C#	C#, B	B, F#	F#, C#	C#, F#	
	Intervals:	P4	m5	M2	P4	P4	M2	m5	P4	P4	M2	m5	m7	P4	P4	P4	
Phrase 3	Pitches:	F#, C#	C#, F#	F#, E	E, F#	F#, B	B, F#	F#, E	E, C#	C#, F#							
	Intervals:	P4	P4	M2	M2	P4	P4	M2	m5	P4							
Phrase 4	Pitches:	C#, B	B, A	A, F#	F#, B	B, F#	F#, E	E, C#	C#, F#	F#, C#	C#, F#	F#, B	B, F#	F#, A	A, F#	F#, B	B, A
	Intervals:	m7	M2	m5	P4	P4	M2	m5	P4	P4	P4	P4	P4	m5	m5	P4	M2

M2 = Major 2<sup>nd</sup>, m3 = minor 3<sup>rd</sup>, P4 = Perfect 4<sup>th</sup>, m7 = minor 7<sup>th</sup>

FIGURE 3: Table demonstrating the pitches and intervals in order (compiled by the author).

It was also observed that eight out of 14 phrases end in the pitch of F#. Not that the key center is relevant, but the relationship between the tones might be. If this song was to have a center key, as any familiar Western music known does, it would be the key of F# minor and in that case, all of the of pitches in this song are heard as if they belong to an F# minor pentatonic scale. The interval order is seemingly not simply coincidental, something in the history of this music has led to the choice of these intervals.

The minor pentatonic scale, as taught and used in some countries with a focus on formal Western music education, is a five-degree scale derivative from the natural minor scale<sup>2</sup>. The natural minor scale being a seven-tone scale containing the degrees of 1, 2, b3, 4, 5, b6, b7, in comparison with the major scale of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. The minor pentatonic simply leaves out the degrees of 2 and b6, therefore remaining the 1, b3, 4, 5 and b7 (FIGURE 4).

Degree of the scale	1	b3	4	5	b7
Key: F#m	F#	A	B	C#	E

**FIGURE 4: Table demonstrating the degrees of the F#m pentatonic scale as perceived by the author.**

Rhythmically speaking, the patterns reappear many times in the song, but with variations and not always in the same place in a phrase. As demonstrated in the marked tone groups (FIGURE 5):



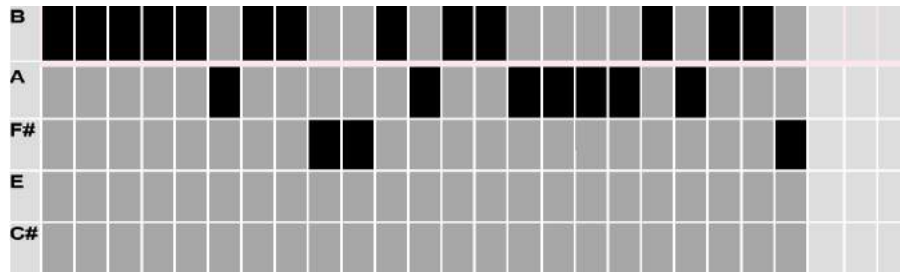
**FIGURE 5: The first four phrases with rhythmic similarities of the analyzed song as transcribed by Jähnichen, 2000.**

The next image series (FIGURE 6) shows that the melody of the phrases form wave-like patterns that are small in range and since the song only utilizes five different pitches and never repeats the same note in different octaves, the same pitches appear repetitively.

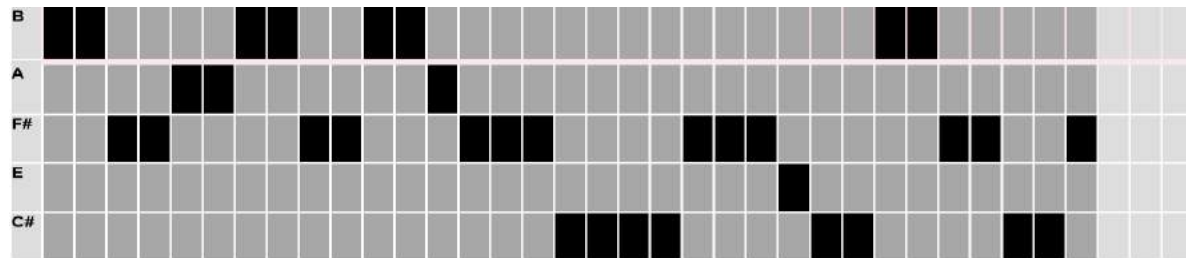
<sup>2</sup> I am aware of the fact, that all scales taught in my previous educational context, are constructed scales, even if they are called 'natural'.



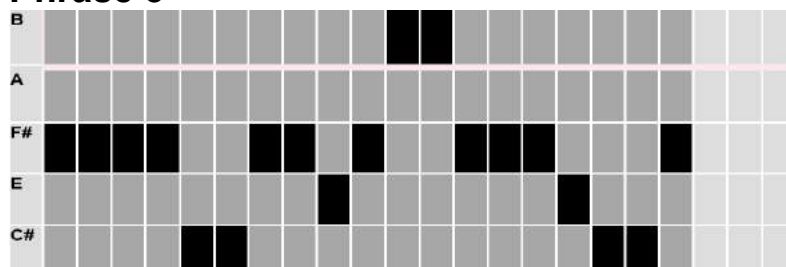
### Phrase 1



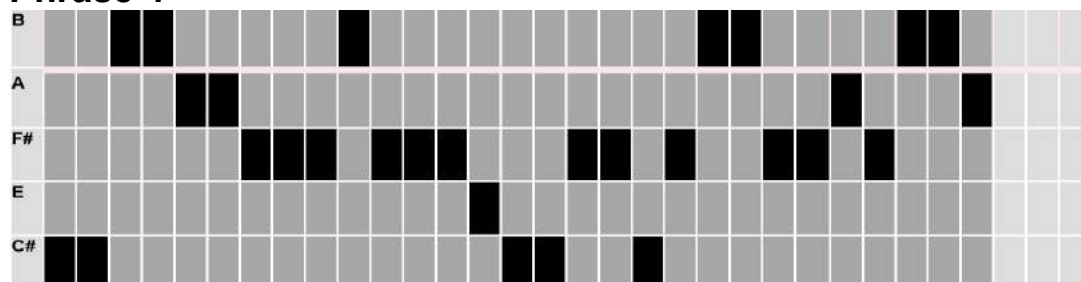
### Phrase 2



### Phrase 3

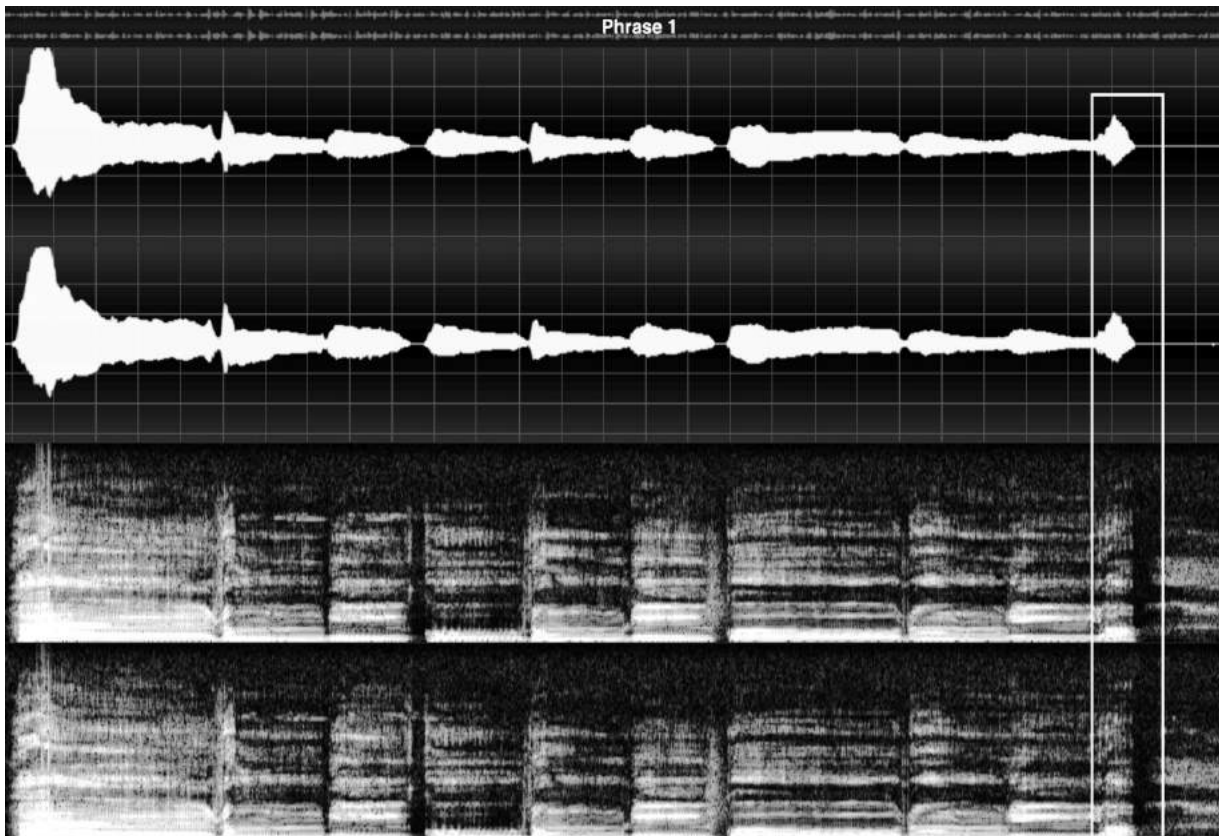


### Phrase 4



**FIGURE 6:** Table of melody, darker cells represent the tones in that pitch level (vertically) and duration (horizontally, 1 cell = the sixteenth part of a bar), light grey cells represent rests (presentation by the author).

Since the Hmong language is a tonal language and the pitch is probably, but not necessarily, correlating with the speech tones, it is fair to deduce that the melody can be related to the tonal structure of the words. When analyzing the spectrogram, I observed a higher intensity on the last tone of every phrase of the song, as can be seen at the end of phrase one (FIGURE 7).



**FIGURE 7: Spectrogram of the first phrase of the song (presentation and visualization by the author).**

This intensity on the last tone, might indicate shortness of breath of the particular performer, however, without another version of the same song or knowing the words, it is difficult to conclude if this rhythmic pattern was influenced by a shortness of breath or if this was done on purpose to emphasize those words.

### LISTENING TO THE SONG THROUGH MY EARS

Listening to this song was a new experience to me, without understanding any of the lyrics and having no previous experience with any music that resembled this. What I heard was a melody that was soothing and perhaps cheerful, and very repetitive in types of intervals. The voice of the performer sounds as the voice of the older man that he was. I'm under the impression that sometimes he rushed through some sentences to catch a breath, but without knowing the words I cannot know that for sure. Sometimes he took his time to remember a next phrase before beginning a new sentence, but that can be irrelevant since these performers are not considered to be professional singers. The constant repetition of intervals and rhythms makes me think that maybe the song describes a sequence of tasks or expectations to be fulfilled by a bride or a groom, or both. However, I reiterate, these are just impressions of ears that do not understand any of the words sung in the song.

### CONCLUSION

Firstly, many of the observations I made through the analysis of this song were also observed in other Hmong wedding songs performed in Thailand, "They possess a range of minor 7, the note group to 5-6 notes, the pentatonic scale (...)" (Boonyanant, 2013: abstract). This could

mean that either these songs have one single origin and were faithfully passed down by previous generations, or that these songs have been more recently modified and uniformed by contemporary forms of communication between different Hmong groups in distant locations.

None of the phrases repeat identically, but they share many similarities in rhythm and pitch. Since their monosyllabic words are inseparable, the difference in the length of musical phrases can be explained by the fact that each text phrase was written according to the meaning of a story and without trying to match a number of syllables on each phrase.

I am convinced that the performers simply repeated songs that have been taught to them by previous generations. I don't suppose they studied the songs they sing in an analytical or written form. Hmong groups in Laos have become refugees, moved from place to place, and lost all their belongings so many times in the previous decades that it would be incredibly difficult for them to have obtained the skill of writing music, not to mention keeping those scores intact. I believe that their methodology of learning songs and keeping them alive for the new generations was in 2000 as it had been for a past that cannot be counted. Nonetheless, they obviously need to practice the songs via repetition so they can learn, perform and teach them.

On the documentary *Disappearing World: The Meo* (Lemoine, 1972: 19:00-19:23) the shaman sings a song very similar in melody and structure to the song 'Leuangtengdong' that is here analysed, showing that some imagined or real shamanic ritual songs and wedding songs may share several characteristics discussed before — non-repetition of phrases, five pitches, small range, and repetitions of same intervals.

It is clear that the non-repetition of phrases is a characteristic of Hmong song melodies. It is difficult for an analysis of songs to "prove" ethnic groups when at any time back in recent or far away history, these songs could have been brought from one group to another and since these groups don't live in complete isolation from the rest of the world there is very big probability that their music has been inspired and or modified by external exchanges and appropriations. This is a fact in the Hmong culture as it is in all cultures, nevertheless there are certain characteristics to a song that can lead to believe that a specific version of a song could come from a specific place, time, and therefore culture. And for this Hmong song, the non-repetition of melodic phrases, the minor 7 range and the use of only five pitches — belonging to the imagined pentatonic scale — are characteristics that can link music to an ethnic group. If that can be taken as a proof is still open and needs further discussion, especially as the definition of what 'ethnic' means beyond the use of a joint language or some ingrained habits connected to working patterns in a specific place. This analysis is, seen from this perspective, not yet satisfying.

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# UNDERSTANDING AN EPIC SONG OF THE HMONG IN LAOS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORAL COMPOSITION

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## Abstract

This article looks at an epic song performed by Hmong in Laos from a perspective of oral composition by analyzing a wedding song *Leuangtengdong*. Through detailed musical and textual transcription, several compositional devices are identified and discussed. My study explores oral composition of the song focusing on its material and structure. I argue that music plays an important role in its oral composition: material-wise, music functions both as formulaic music-text association/unity and by careful music-text interactions; structure-wise, the song is organized in a multi-layered framework realized by the hierarchical music-text formulas, with music-text ‘theme’ in critical structural positions.

## Keywords

Hmong, Epic song, Oral composition, Music, Laos

## INTRODUCTION

Oral-formulaic theory has a major influence on the studies of epics in an oral tradition. The theory was developed primarily by Milman Parry and Albert Lord in mid-twentieth century, identifying the recurrent phrases found in ancient epics as “formulas”, an improvisation and performance device used by epic performers (Lord, 1960). The theory has undergone significant criticism and development ever since, providing a useful account of how literary formulas can be used to quickly assemble an improvised performance in various oral traditions. However, a majority of discussion has centered on the linguistic/literary aspect of oral epic. There is still uncertainty how epic as a sung expression has been orally composed. It is particularly unclear in the case of Hmong epic tradition, either in a global (Hmong) or Chinese (Miao) academic context.<sup>1</sup> This article attempts to expand the scope of oral theory into musical composition in the field of Hmong epic, through an analysis of Lao Hmong epic song *Leuangtengdong*.

The song was recorded by Gisa Jähnichen in her field work in Ban Vanglom, Laos in 2000. In Jähnichen’s research, it was described as an old Hmong wedding song as well as an epic song, which seemingly used a very archaic melody (Jähnichen, 2006: 161-212). Regarding the issue of genre, despite discussions concerning the differentiation of ‘epic and ‘archaic song’ in Chinese Miao scholarship (Hong, 2017: 84-124), there has not been a clear-cut boundary between the two. They both belong to an old oral tradition, narrate stories from the past, and share similar literary and musical styles. In this article I do not make distinction between the two, using “epic” interchangeably with ‘archaic song’.

Another key aspect is the performance context. The song, according to Jähnichen, was performed by an approximately 70-year-old male singer (Jähnichen, 2006: 161-212). Among

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<sup>1</sup> Hmong in Laos are descendants of Hmong immigrants originally from the territory of recent China. Hmong living in China are commonly considered sub-groups of Miao, one of the largest minorities in China. Relationships among different groups are widely studied.

other wedding songs, it is part of the Hmong marriage ritual which could in total last for 3-4 days. From a local perspective of the Hmong, the wedding song performance practice is passed down in their tradition of thousands of years (Thao. 2006: 69). A key role to facilitate the whole process is called *mej koob* (marriage negotiator) (Thao 2006:68-69). When I showed the song to Hmong language and culture expert Zhang Yuan Qi<sup>2</sup>, he immediately recognized it as a wedding song sung by a *mej koob* from the groom's side. *Mej koob* is above all a practical role that facilitates and supports the marriage ritual, a negotiator, rather than a performance specialist that demonstrates singing virtuosity. The performance seems to be extemporized and could be interpreted afresh each time. It is a fluid text also in terms of individual and time, from a living oral tradition.

The aim of this article is to understand the oral composition of this epic song through analyzing *Leuangtengdong* performed by Hmong in Laos. The article attempts to show that music plays an important role in its oral composition, both as music-text association and by music-text interactions. The remaining part of the article proceeds as follows: The first section examines the narrative and speech-like quality of the song and investigates the relationship of pitch and tone; the second part identifies music-text-associated "formula phrases" as crucial building material of the song; and the third section is concerned with the song structure in terms of a hierarchy of formulas.

## MUSIC AND TEXT

Preliminary music analysis of the song reveals high monotonicity in its musical language:

- Dynamics: quite stable, slightly louder in the beginning
- Tempo: stable, moderately accelerating over the course
- Rhythm: largely syllabic and isochronic; one syllable mostly corresponding to one rhythm unit, representing 1-2 pitch positions
- Melody: 5 pitch positions across a space of minor 7th, with a major position in the center; melodic intervals including major 2nd, minor 3rd, perfect 4th and minor 7th
- Form: main body framed by a heightened opening and a short closing, divided by performer's breath into lines of irregular lengths
- Singing: monotonous singing technique and style, non-ornamental, solo, unaccompanied aged male voice

Moreover, the ambit, tempo and rhythm are comfortably set to the range of human speech. The music, with weak sense of turning or direction, displays a narrative and speech-like quality. Limited use of musical devices, speech-like quality as well as the ritual functionality imply "language" as a critical dimension for both performing and understanding of the song.

Hmong language is a subbranch of the Western (Chuanqiandian) branch of Miao Languages. It is tonal and mostly monosyllabic, composed of an initial consonant or consonant group, a vowel, and a tone. The language used in the song is believed to be the White Hmong dialect, which has 7 tone levels.

It is necessary to transcribe the song into fixed visual forms for detailed analysis, with the knowledge that the performance is just one realization of many possible ones from a living oral tradition. Recording and transcription are only compromised attempts to represent a reduced life of the tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> Zhang Yuan Qi is a Chinese Hmong language and culture expert based in Wenshan, Yunnan Province. He recognized the song as a wedding tune immediately by its melody.

The literary transcription uses Lao RPA (Romanized Popular Alphabet), under which system each syllable is constructed in 3 parts: vowel, consonant and tone. The task of literary transcription is particularly challenging due to the lack of local Hmong language expertise and the innate difficulty to identify tones from a sung expression. With the assistance of Hmong language expert Ran Hai Bo<sup>3</sup>, a portion of the text is transcribed with tones and greater accuracy. The rest is mainly dictated without tones, marked as “-∅” (mid-level) in the transcription (excluded from tone analysis). Thus, the overall textual transcription should be considered neither a complete nor an accurate one. However, it is reliable in capturing certain sound patterns and structural features of the text.

For effective and wholistic visualization of the song, an adapted form of numbered notation is developed and used (FIGURES 1, 2a and 2b). The notation foregrounds pitch position – the musical element with greatest flexibility in the song. 5 pitch levels are represented by numbers ‘3’ (#C), ‘5’ (E), ‘6’ (#F), ‘1’ (A) and ‘2’ (B) from low to high. The melodic and poetic lines correspond to the performer’s breath and rest.

The correlation between speech tone and melodic pitch immediately surfaces as a key question to understanding of text-music relationship of the song. The left half of below table in FIGURE 1 shows the markers and values of the 7 phonemic tones, and the right half examines the characteristics of corresponding melodic pitches and tone-pitch relationship.

Orthographic tone symbol	Tone value (5-point scale) <sup>4</sup>	Typical representation in song (pitch value in numbered notation)	Tone-pitch relationship
-b	55	High note (1, 2)	Consistent
-∅	33	Mid to high note (6, 1, 2)	Wider range in singing
-s	22	Central note (6)	Consistent
-j	52	Low note (3)	Consistent with tonal ending, lower in singing
-v	24	Mainly 1, 2, occasionally 6, upward movement	Higher in singing, consistent in movement direction
-m	21	Low to mid note, upward movement (3, 5, 6)	Opposite movement direction
-g	42	Central note (6), downward movement	Consistent

**FIGURE 1: Tone-pitch comparison table (compilation by the author).**

The correlational analysis leads to the conclusion that the melodic pitch is highly related to but not simply mirroring speech tone. The tone-pitch relationship varies from ‘opposite movement direction’ (-m) and ‘loosely related’ (-∅) to ‘somewhat consistent’ (-j, -v) and ‘consistent’ (-b, -s, -g).

The findings differ from those of previous research conducted by Amy Catlin in 1997 (Catlin, 1997: 69-81), which could be a result of geographic and temporal differences of source material. Nonetheless, both researches agree that melodic pitch is a different but relevant system to speech tone. Reasons for tone-pitch deviations could be subject of further research.

As can be seen from the table, it is possible to set a single tone to multiple pitch positions. The pitch choice and treatment can be intricate. When (textual) phrases repeat, the melodies usually stay the same. However, if a word repeats itself in a single phrase and is placed close to each other, such as in ‘ABAC’ form, the two ‘A’s can be sung in different pitches, possibly to create

<sup>3</sup> Ran Hai Bo is a Chinese Western Hmong language expert based in Chongqing.

<sup>4</sup> The tone values follow a system developed by Smalley, W. (1976) and Ratliff, M. (1992), also cited in Christina M. Esposito (2012).

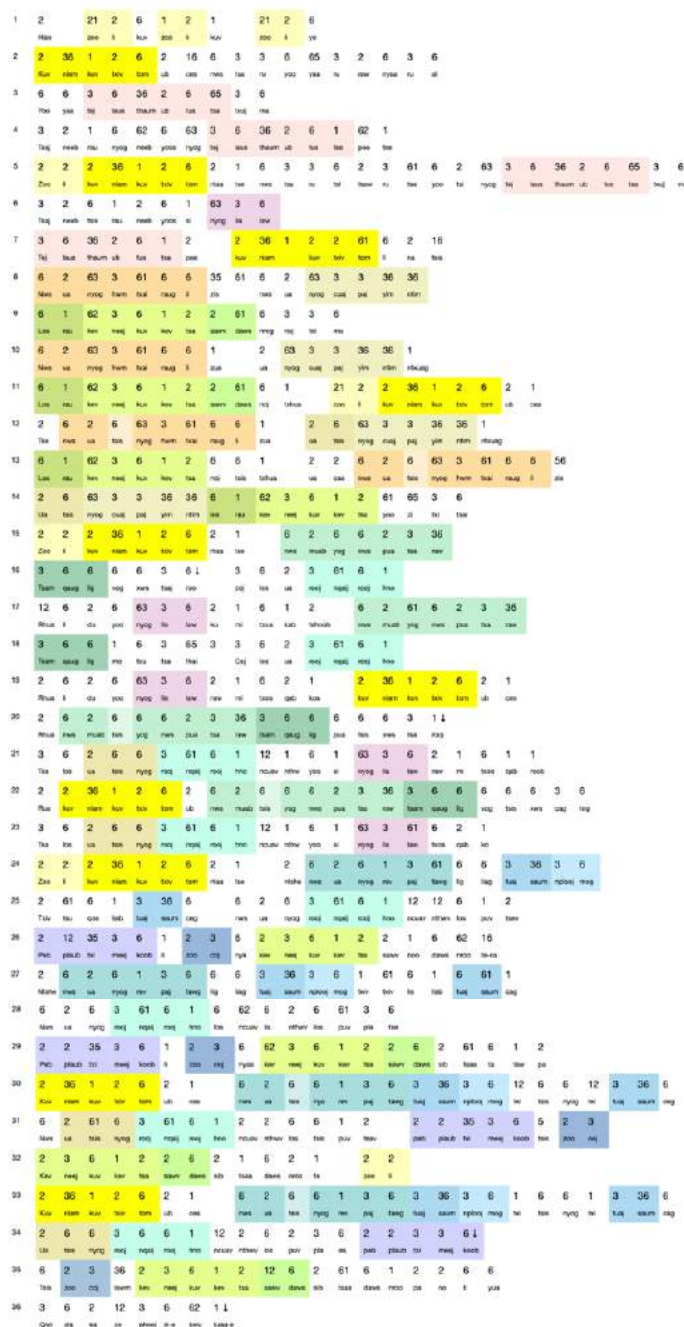


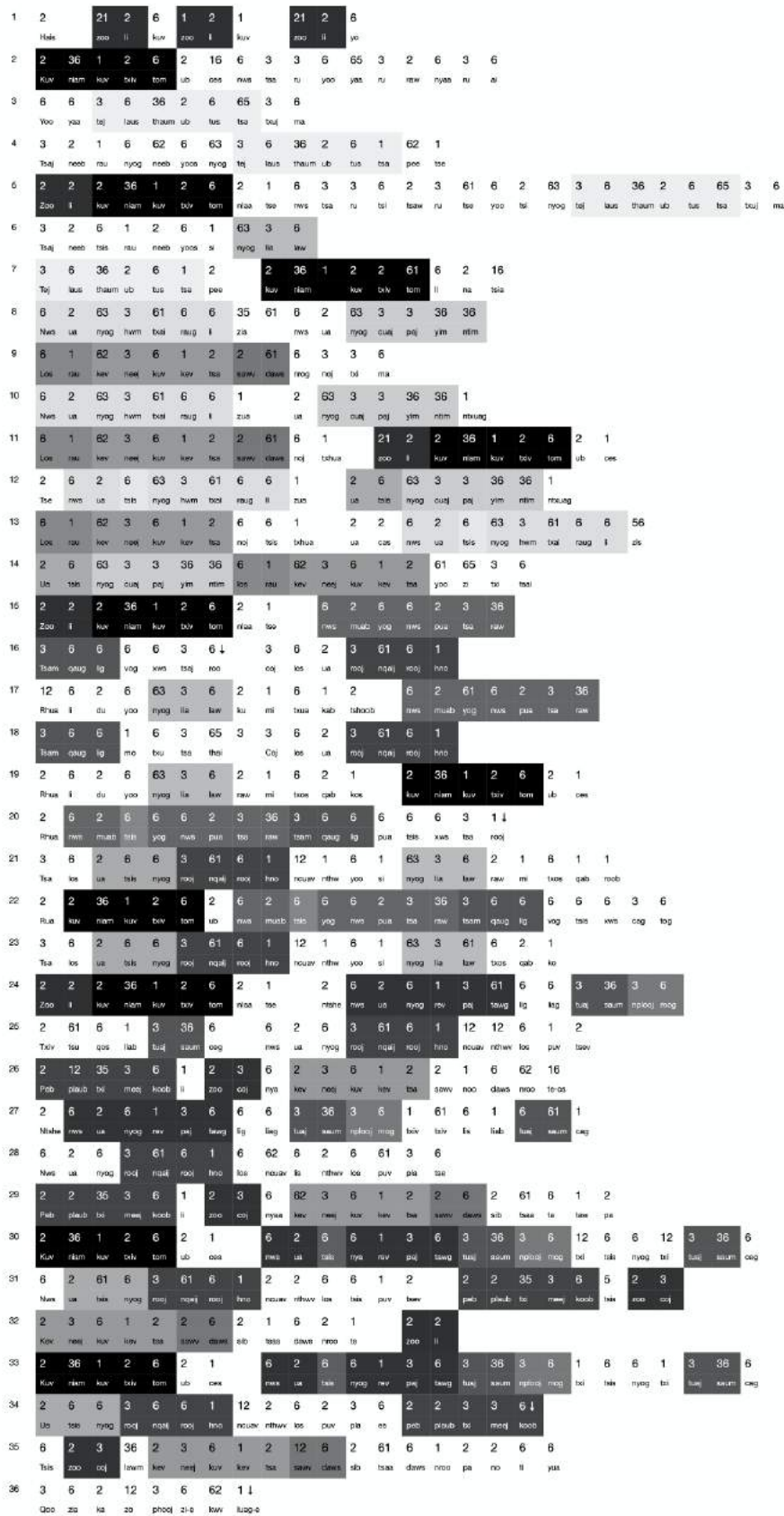
musical contrast. For example, “*kuv niam kuv txiv*” is set to ‘2-36-1-2’ and “*rooj nqaij rooj hno*” is set to ‘3-61-6-1’, respectively.

This analysis provides evidence that pitch treatment in the song is highly relevant to the speech tone of lyrics, while the flexibility in pitch choice allows for performer’s subtle arrangement for musical effect. Music and text are closely connected to form the building material of the song – formulas.

## FORMULAS

Transcription makes repetition patterns visible. As can be seen from the chart (FIGURE 1), repetition of phrases is prevalent, and more interestingly, based on music-text association. Some words are set to same melodies when phrases repeat. Occasionally, where pitch positions may differ, melodic contour stays unchanged. Repetition works in a way that text and music form an associated material unit.





FIGURES 2a and 2b: Transcription chart (2a in colour; 2b in b/w for alternative visibility), music transcription by Zhang Xun, text transcription by Zhang Xun and Ran Hai Bo.

The scale of such identically recurring ‘stock phrases’ ranges from 2 to 24 syllables. I take out 18 ones that appear at least 4 times for further analysis. The 18 phrases are color-coded in the transcription chart.

Phrase marker	Textual content (2-8 syllables)	Number of repetitions	Number of melodic forms <sup>5</sup>
A	zoo li	8	1
B	zoo coj	4	1
C	tuaj saum	8	2
D	nplooj mog	4	1
E	sawv daws	5	1
F	los rau	4	1
G	ua tsis nyog	6 (2 overlapping with “nyog cuaj paj yim ntim”)	1
H	nyog lia law	5	1
I	tsam qaug lig	4	1
J	rooj nqaj rooj hno	8	1
K	kuv niam kuv txiv tom	10	2
L	nyog cuaj paj yim ntim	4	1
M	kev neej kuv kev tsa	8	1
N	peb plaub txi meej koob	4	1
O	tej laus thaum ub tus tsa	4	2
P	nws ua (tsis) nyog rev paj tawg	4	1
Q	nws muab (tsis) yog nws pua tsa raw	4	1
R	nws ua (tsis) nyog hwm txai raug li	4	1

FIGURE 3: Statistics of 18 formula phrases (compiled by the author).

These recurring stock materials are called ‘formulas’ in oral composition theory. The analyzed 18 formula phrases (FIGURE 3) take up over 60% of the whole song in syllable count, strongly placing the performance in an oral tradition. A majority of the phrases are also formulaic in melodies, indicating the characteristic music-text association of formulas in the song. However, 3 of them are set to multiple melodic forms.

Text	Melody 1	Times	Context (numbered pitch level)	Melody 2	Times	Context (numbered pitch level)
tuaj saum	3-36	7	various	6-61	1	recurring sound pattern
tej laus thaum ub tu tsa	3-6-36-2-6-65	2	before “txu (3)”	3-6-36-2-6-1	2	before “pee (2/62)”
kuv niam kuv txiv tom	2-36-1-2-6	9	before “ub” (2) or “nlaa” (2)	2-36-1-2-2-61	1	before “li” (6)

FIGURE 4: Statistics of 3 formula phrases with multiple melodic forms (compiled by the author).

FIGURE 4 presents the summary statistics for the melodic variations of 3 mentioned phrases. For the first case, ‘*tuaj saum*’ has a dominant melody of ‘3-36’, with one exception of ‘6-61’ in line 27 (FIGURE 5).

2	6	2	6	1	3	6	6	6	3	36	3	6	1	61	6	1	6	61	1
Ntsh e	nw s	u a	nyo g	re v	pa j	taw g	li g	lia g	tua j	sau m	nplooj	mo g	txi v	txi v	li s	lia b	tua j	sau m	ca g

FIGURE 5: Transcription of line 27 (by the author).

<sup>5</sup> In this study, two-note syllables that share one same note are considered to have a same form.

Within the line, a repeating sound can be recognized:

... *lig liag tuaj saum ... lis liab tuaj saum ...*

Translation: ... afraid it will bloom on the tree... bear fruit on the root...

Ambit flows upward in the second appearance of ‘*li lia tua sau*’ (tone markers removed as heard in sung expression) while the melodic contour stays. The purpose is perhaps to create contrast between two phrases considering their similar phonation. In doing so, music provides a melodic context for the audience to distinguish the two sounds as distinct phrases with their separate meanings. Moreover, a parallel (and reverse) structure is recognized between the semantic and melodic movement of two phrases, creating interesting rhetorical effects.

In the case of ‘*tej laus thaum ub tu tsa*’, two melodic forms vary only in the last syllable – ‘65’ vs ‘1’. This can be explained in terms of the intervallic relationship with the following pitch. ‘1’ and a subsequent ‘3’ create a major 6th that does not make valid melodic interval in the song’s musical language, while major 3rd and major 2nd can be well expected.

‘*Kuv niam kuv txiv tom*’s melodic variation concerns rhythm rather than pitch level. The musical difference is likely related to the linguistic context.

Music can also take a dominating role. It is shown in several cases that melody could function as placeholder to allow for different text setting. In the case of previously mentioned ‘*kuv niam kuv txiv tom*’, the phrase is most often followed by ‘*ub ces*’ or ‘*nlaa tse*’ that are both set to a same melody ‘2-1’. In a second case, line 30 and 33 are almost identical, with their only difference in the final syllable, where ‘*ceg*’ and ‘*cag*’ are set to a same note, respectively. Another case can be found in the first 7 syllables/notes of Line 25 and final 7 syllables/notes of Line 30. Above three cases demonstrate how melody is used as placeholder for various metrical devices of vowel, consonant or tone.

Another identified formulaic form, less visible but as effective, is ‘loosely arranged recurring expression’. A case study on the four segments between ‘*rooj nqaij rooj hno*’ and ‘*peb plaub txhu meej koob*’ helps provide an understanding. As shown in FIGURE 6, words are inserted freely into core material ‘*ncuav nthwv los puv*’, with all expressions rhyming on ‘*e*’ in the end. This indicates the performer’s skill of reusing material beyond simple repetition, meanwhile following a metric scheme to create poetic as well as musical beauty and consistency.

<b>ncuav nthwv los puv tse</b> <u>v</u>	Line 25
los <b>ncuav</b> lis <b>nthwv los puv</b> pla tse	Line 28
<b>ncuav nthwv los tsis puv tse</b> <u>v</u>	Line 31
<b>ncuav nthwv los puv</b> pla <u>es</u>	Line 34

FIGURE 6: Four segments between ‘*rooj nqaij rooj hno*’ and ‘*peb plaub txhu meej koob*’ (compiled by the author).

In summary, ‘formula phrases’ are the key material in oral composition of Hmong epic song. To a large extent, the formula is a recurring unity of music and text. When necessary, music stands out for various purposes including better delivery of textual meanings, rhetorical effects, and consistency in musical language.

## STRUCTURE

This section examines the relationship between formula phrases and investigates the song structure, in an attempt to answer the question how the song is built up from formula phrases.

Section	Paragraph	Sentence	Phrase	Material arrangement	Line	
	Opening		A		1	
1	1.1	A	K	"K"	2	
		B	"tse nws tsa ru"		2	
			O		3	
		B	"tsaj neeb... neeb yoos"		4	
			O			
	1.2	A	A	A	"AK"	5
				K		
B		"tse nws tsa ru"			5	
			O			
B		"tsaj neeb... neeb yoos"			6	
		H	added			
		O		7		
2	2.1	A	K	"K"	7	
			R		8	
			L			
			F		9	
			M			
			E			
		C	R		10	
		L				
		F		11		
		M				
		E				
	2.2	A	A	A	"AK"	11
				K		
		C	R			12
		G		added		
		L				
		F			13	
		M		"E" removed		
C	R			13		
	G			14		
		L				
		F				
		M				
3	3.1	A	A	"AK"	15	
			K			
		D	P		15	
			I		16	
			"coj los ua"			
			J			
			"rhua li du yoo"		17	
		H				
		D	P		17	
		I		18		
		"coj los ua"				
		J				
		"rhua li du yoo"		19		
		H				
3.2	A	K		"K"	19	
	D	P			20	
		I				
		G		added	21	
		J				
	"ncuav nthw yoo si"					
	H					
3.3	A	K		"K"	22	
	D	P			22	
		I				
		G			23	
		J				
	"ncuav nthw yoo si"					
		H				

Section	Paragraph	Sentence	Phrase	Material arrangement	Line	
4	4.1	A	A	"AK"	24	
			K			
		E	Q			24
			C			
			D			
			C			25
			J			
			"ncuav nthwv"			
			N			26
			B			
	4.2	A	M			
			Q		27	
		E	C			
			D			
			C			
			J		28	
			"ncuav nthwv"			
			N		29	
			B			
			M			
4.3	A	E	added			
		K	"K"	30		
	E	Q		30		
		C				
		D				
		C				
		G	added	31		
		J				
		"ncuav nthwv"				
		N				
4.3	A	B				
		M		32		
	E	E				
		"sib tsaaw daws nroo"	added			
		A	"A"-break-"K"	32		
		K		33		
		E	Q		33	
			C			
			D			
			C			
G			34			
J						
"ncuav nthwv"						
N						
B		35				
M						
E						
"sib tsaaw daws nroo"						
Closing					36	

FIGURE 7: Structure chart of the evolved song (compilation by the author).

'Phrase group' is a combination of multiple phrases, fixed or not. For example, 'zoo li' almost always comes before 'kuv niam kuv txiv', while 'rooj nqaij rooj hno' can be paired with 'coj los ua' (twice), 'nws ua nyog' (three times) or 'ua tsis nyog' (four times). 'Phrase group' is not a definitive structural unit but it helps to understand 'formula' as a layered concept. A 'sentence' is formed by phrases, groups and possible adjuncts following a specific sequence. 'Sentences' are also formulaic that they themselves become a material unit to assemble into a larger

structure – ‘paragraph’. Likewise, formulaic ‘paragraphs’ comprise a ‘section’ of the main body of composition, and ‘sections’ further constitute the main body according to similar structural forms. The hierarchy of formulas is clearly outlined in the structure chart (FIGURE 7). The chart shows some of the main characteristics of the composition.

### ***Structural tightness***

The main body is comprised of four parts with their respective internal structures of ABB-ABB, ACC-ACC, ADD-AD-AD and AEE-AE-AE. The patterns show certain continuity and yet are developing in scale and complexity over the course. The same development is observed in the internal structures from B to E.

The observation suggests a structural mindset in composition. The performer, at the same time the composer, makes use of formulaic stock material of different levels and build into a well-structured framework.

### ***Use of ‘theme’***

The term ‘theme’ here refers to musical and literary material of at least phrase-length that can be found throughout the composition, with or without variation. A melodic ‘theme’ of ‘2-36-1-2-6-2-x’ over the text of ‘*kuv niam kuv txiv tom ub ces / nlaa tse*’ is identified, in which ‘x’ usually takes the pitch ‘1’, sometimes going down to ‘16’ or ‘6’.

Sometimes partnered with ‘*zoo li*’, this is the only ‘theme’ heard in each section and each paragraph. In fact, taking the form of either ‘*zoo li kuv niam kuv txiv tom*’ (referred to as ‘AK’ in chart) or ‘*kuv niam kuv txiv tom*’ (referred to as ‘K’ in chart), this phrase (group) initiates every sentence of the main body.

Appearances of the ‘theme’ follow a designed order (FIGURE 8) that reminds of the sectional internal structural pattern.

<b>Section of main body</b>	<b>Forms of ‘theme’</b>	<b>Sectional internal structure</b>
1	K-AK	ABB-ABB
2	K-AK, same as section 1	ABB-ABB, same as section 1
3	AK-K-K	ABB-AB-AB
4	AK-K-(A)K, similar to section 3	ABB-AB-AB, same as section 3

**FIGURE 8: Structural comparison between ‘theme’s and sections (compiled by the author).**

Starting from a well-designed framework and applying a ‘theme’ as paragraph starter, the system serves as an effective device for performer’s extemporization.

### ***Cumulative material development***

Inside an ‘ABB-ABB’ or ‘ABB-AB-AB’ structure, the ‘B’s are not necessarily identical. Constituent phrases can be removed or added, and the new combination will be reserved into the next appearances, thus forming a cumulative process of composition. For example, in the structure ‘AEE-AE-AE’ of section 4, phrase ‘E’ is added to sentence ‘E’ on the sentence’s first repeat. Phrase ‘E’ remains a constituent of sentence ‘E’ in all of its following appearances.

This cumulative and linear approach of development frees the performer from the burden of memorizing excessive materials and provides a comfortable composition speed.



### *Disagreement between performative phrasing and formulaic structuring*

The performative phrasing is marked by the performer's breath and short rest, represented in transcription in the form of 'lines'. 'Line' however is an ambiguous structure in the system of hierarchical formulas which is defined on a material basis. The difficulty reflects a lasting debate on approach of line division in transcription, where Dennis Tedlock took the performative side (Tedlock, 1972) and Dell Hymes cared more about patterned forms of words (Hymes, 1981).

As can be seen from the transcription, performer's breath and rest (transcribed as line break) do not interrupt the flow of textual meaning.<sup>6</sup> Certain phrase groups exist in both forms of one line and run-on line. How do we understand the line breaks and enjambments then?

The case study on line 33 supports an explanation in terms of metrics and practicality of composition. Line 33 is started with 'kuv niam kuv txiv' that follows 'zoo li' from line 32. The 'zoo li' at the end of line 32 could be confusing at first. However, from a perspective of the paragraph structure, line 33 is almost a duplicate of line 30. By placing 'zoo li' in the previous line, the performer can conveniently construct line 33 by reusing almost a whole big part of line 30. In this case, enjambment assists to create metrical symmetry and also works as a convenient compositional device.

One might suspect if the physicality of performers would also be a factor causing unequal line lengths.<sup>7</sup> However, even for a less trained singer, one's breathing capability is relatively stable. While the performer is able to deliver 27 syllables in one breath (line 5), it is less convincing that fewer syllables would be a challenging task.

Moreover, line break can be musically understood with regard to the melodic feature. In initial musical analysis I had the impression that the song lacks sense of gravity or direction of movement. To an extent, it seems that a line could almost comfortably end in any position. However, pitch analysis tells a different story. As FIGURE 9 shows, melody is organized primarily on a tetrachord of '3-6-1-2', with occasional bridging of '5'. The overall pitch heavily centers on '6', the central note of the ambit, while '1' is a least frequently used pitch level in the tetrachord.

Pitch	3	5	6	1	2
Overall times	149	11	<b>294</b>	129	166
Times at ending	1	-	<b>19</b>	13	3
Times at caesura	1	-	2	<b>12</b>	4

FIGURE 9: Pitch statistics (compiled by the author).

Investigating into the ending note of each line, '6' remains a major pitch, while '1' grows in importance. Further examination of the caesuras reveals that '1' even becomes a major pitch level. This shows that besides the key note '6', '1' also provides certain sense of completion and stability into the melodic flow.

This analysis reflects the performer's melodically purposeful choice of place to stop, or in another way, material to end a performative phrase / poetic line.

<sup>6</sup> Chao Ge Jin talks about the dilemma in transcription between word-based and performance-based line division in *Oral Poetics: Formulaic Diction of Arimpil's Janger Singing* (2000). He believes that the problem is yet to be solved, and the issue is particularly challenging for verses with less strict metrical and syntactical scheme.

<sup>7</sup> Pu Heng Qiang suggests that "performer's physical limits" could be a reason for the "free" rhythm pattern of Miao folk songs, in *Studies on Miao Folk Songs* (1988).

## CONCLUSION

This essay has identified and discussed several oral compositional devices that deal with material and structure through an analysis of the Hmong epic song *Leuangtengdong*. Melodic pitch in the song is highly relevant to but not a simple mirroring of the speech tone in the text. Recurring music-text associations/unities, called ‘formulas’, are used prevalently as stock material to build the song. Formulas range from phrases and phrase groups to sentences, paragraphs, and even sections. The composition is structured by different levels of formulas, into a well-designed multi-layered framework. A ‘theme’ is used throughout the song, initiating each paragraph. Variations of formulaic paragraphs are developed in a cumulative style. Enjambment, when necessary, can be applied for metrical or musical reasons.

Besides being part of the formulaic music-text association, this research has provided a deeper insight into the important and unique role music plays in oral composition. In tone-pitch mapping, flexibility in pitch choice allows for performer’s subtle melodic arrangement for certain musical effect. Within a formula, same text could be set to different melodies for rhetorical, narrative or musical reasons. It is also possible to set different texts to a same melody, whereas melody functions as metrical placeholder, enlarging the formulaic scope. With regard to the enjambment question, pitch affects where and how to end a line.

The major limitation of this study is lack of local Hmong language expertise and small sample size. Further research should be undertaken to examine the linguistics and investigate the literary poetics of the song in detail, including the textual meanings, grammar, syntax and metrics. To develop a full picture, additional studies will be needed to involve a wider range of performance practices from different performers, ethnic groups / performance traditions, and sub-genres of Hmong epic songs performed in Laos. Based on linguistic affinity and historical connection, transnational studies across Laos, Vietnam and China on the current topic are recommended.

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#### Recording:

“*Leuangtengdong*.” duration of 5’13’’962’’, live performance of an old Hmong wedding/epic song sung by one approximately 70-year-old male singer, recorded by Gisa Jähnichen, WAV file, created 14 Jan. 2000, in Ban Vanglom, district Sam Neua, Laos. This audio file is publicly accessible at the National Library of Laos in Vientiane and at the Berlin Phonogram Archive under the code number ATML00234.

# HOME-COMING: THE REPATRIATION OF HISTORICAL RECORDINGS

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## Abstract

This article deals with the provocative questions of repatriating recordings stored in large and small archival institutions, mainly audio or video recordings, to source communities.

While this topic is often, disputed within the framework of sound and audio-visual archivists, it is rather rarely, investigated with academic vigor based personal experience in the field of music research. This paper attempts to start closing the knowledge gap and exchange ideas between those with practical experience and those with musicological background but not necessarily intense experiences.

The article provides an in-depth understanding of the term 'home-coming' and how this term relates to future activities and directions to be considered by museums and archival institutions. These insights might be of great benefit in sustaining and developing today's archival institutions in Asia and Europe.

## Keywords

Repatriation, Archives, Historical audio recordings, Community connections, Global musicology

## THE REPATRIATION OF THE 'SECOND MUSEUM AGE'

Unprecedented private and public collecting activities have been an important part of museum construction in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This process even 'empties' many important items of local communities, including living items, handicrafts, musical instruments, recordings, photos, human remains, which are just the key to the continuation of their ancestral traditions and local historical memory.

By putting forward the 'First Museum Age' in 1969, Sturtevant pointed out that public museums were emerging in Europe, North America, and in colonies from 1840 to 1920, and they were the landmark buildings and institutions of western modernization. If the traditional museum is a symbol of power and prestige rooted in the Western knowledge tradition, then from the beginning of the 21st century, the museum has gradually entered the 'Second Museum Age' (Phillips, 2005). At the end of the 20th century, with the reflection and evaluation of post-colonialism and post-structuralism in academia, material and visual culture began to be re-theorized by anthropologists, historians, and cultural researchers, the image and practice of museums are changing as well.

Michael Rowlands interprets the 'Second Museum Age' as: In this era, ethnographic museums would change to concerns for cultural restitution, source community origins of collections, as well as cultural diversity.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, museums and archives around the world are trying to establish cooperation and partnership with the source communities. One of the most important assignments is to return the cultural property and assist the construction of local archives or museums in the source community.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Rowlands, Reconsidering Heritage, Memory and Postcolonial Museum, online lecture, sponsored by Quanzhou Institute of Cultural Heritage, 10 October, 2020.

The development of technology, especially digital technology, has changed the methods and approaches to preservation, control, application, and consumption of audio-visual archives. It is enlivened in a wider context and space, and plays an important role in different communities. The repatriation of historical archives is a heated topic in the field of audio-visual archives and Ethnomusicology in recent years. People begin to find that the audio-visual heritage has such a wide range of application space, life value, and attraction through different ways and methods of repatriation practices. However, the task of repatriation is far more complicated than simply returning the collection to the community. Whether it is for conducting of researches or re-researches based on the collection, promoting new dialogues around archives, or trying to retrieve or construct cultural memory through old recordings, it requires the actors to carry out this work discreetly.

In this article, I attempt to discuss the issues related to historical recordings and their repatriation, as well as the contemporary value of it, by sharing two cases that I have come across.

### **THE INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY OF AFRICAN MUSIC AND THE REVITALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC**

Founded in 1954 by Hugh Tracey, The International Library of African Music (ILAM) is one of the world's greatest repositories of African music, today located in Grahamstown, East Cape Province, South Africa. It preserves a large number of books, musical and technical instruments, and historical recordings of African music. The main audio-visual collection is Hugh Tracy's counting more than 25 000 recordings from 19 field-recording tours between 1929 and 1977. It also includes his record series 'Sound of Africa' and 'Music of Africa', which is globally well known among all researchers and students in the field of ethnomusicology, and musical anthropology.

I was able to visit ILAM for a two-month internship and fieldwork at the beginning of 2019 and I am very impressed by the efforts of generations of archivists in preservation and especially repatriation in ILAM. From the time of Hugh Tracey to Andrew Tracy, Diane Thram, Lee Watkins, Elijah Madiba, and others, all colleagues constantly tried to repatriate through various ways and means. Although their choices are different, the core is to let the source communities, musicians, and their descendants benefit from ILAM's audio-visual heritage.

Since the mid-20th century, Hugh Tracey implemented some practices aiming at 'repatriation' but not in a typical sense, which he consciously returned to the communities he visited and whose music he recorded. He then records the scene of 'reunion' and the changes of local music culture.

During his 40 days Nyasaland recording trip in 1958, Tracy intentionally passed by two districts of Southern Rhodesia he visited in 1931, Chibi and Gutu, when he first started recording. He met two singers, who performed for him back then. Consequently, he found out that not only their singing was not as good as before but the overall music quality of both regions could not be compared with that recorded in the 1930s. (Hugh Tracey, 1958).

We can see that Tracey, on the one hand, developed the academic concept of 're-research'. Archives can be 'sustainably growing'. On the other hand, although he did not give back the recordings to the local people during this revisit, from the emotional and cultural memory perspective, Tracey maintained the relationship or say 're-connection' with the source community through his revisits. In my opinion, his action, to a certain degree, entails the meaning and value of repatriation.

Inherited from Hugh Tracey, many ILAM archivists are making continuous efforts in this direction through cooperation with other archives, projects, teachers, students, and scholars. They already launched diverse repatriation projects sending back recordings to Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa. These actions suggest this gesture toward

decolonization of ILAM serves as a model for the decolonization of ethnomusicology at large. (Thram, 2018). Meanwhile, they also encountered many problems. For example, when the archivists occasionally return to the source community to which they sent back the historical recordings, meaning repatriated, they realize that the local people neither have the required equipment nor enough technical knowledge to play back the recordings.

One of my supervisors at ILAM, Elijah Madiba, emphasized that when doing repatriation, active people must be able to improvise, it is not as simple as sending an object back to someone's home and putting it on their desk and shelf. Local people cannot play back the recordings they receive and so if you do not address that issue then repatriation becomes useless.

Therefore, Elijah decided not just to 'send back' the recording like before, but also to directly deliver it to musicians. Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, the nearby King William's Town and their ports create opportunities for Kossa musicians, poets, and artists in areas such as Elizabeth, to connect with the music in Tracy's archives.



**FIGURE 1: Elijah Madiba encouraging young musicians through his work with historical recordings. (Photo by courtesy of Elijah Madiba).**

Therefore, Elijah selected 16 Xhosa music albums from the Sound of Africa series, a total of 201 recording tracks, brought and played these recordings to the hip-hop musicians from King William's Town, Peddie, Grahamstown, and Port Elizabeth which are in proximity to the ILAM, it stimulated their creative use of the historical recordings. He recorded the whole process of the repatriation project in detail and further analyzed whether it is possible and if so, how traditional music can be revitalized through the creation of new music styles based on audio-visual archives? (Madiba, 2017).

From Elijah's repatriation project, it becomes visible that he attempts to link the repatriation practice with the revival of traditional music culture. He does not just send the historical recordings back to the 'locker' of culture bearers, but truly stimulates the younger people's interest in the musical heritage of their ancestors. While repatriating the audio-visual archives in his practice, also enables the old recordings to be activated and recirculated in a new narrative and performance. Therefore, I think, his efforts are valid and it may achieve a state of the real 'living archives'.

### **HOME-COMING OF THE LAUFER COLLECTION**

Under the promotion of anthropologist, Franz Boas (1858-1942), German American anthropologist and historical geographer, Bertold Laufer (1874-1934), once considered to be the most outstanding Sinologist of his time, presided over the 'Jacob Schiff China expedition' (1901-1904) and more than 7500 items he thought could represent and symbolize Chinese culture were sent back to the United States. It included a quite many clothing, paintings, musical



instruments, shadow puppets, drama puppets, and other items. In addition, he recorded representative sound of China in 502 wax tubes, of which 399 are currently, collected by the Archives of Traditional Music (in the following ATM) at the Indiana University and becoming the Laufer Collection, generally considered as the earliest musical field sound recordings that heard in China at present times.

Since the spring of 2019, the Asia Europe Music Research Center (in the following AEMRC) of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music formally collaborates with the ATM regarding the project of ‘First Recordings’ from China: The 1901-1902 cylinders of Berthold Laufer’, which initiated the home coming journey of the Laufer Collection. I am also involved as a project assistant in this undertaking.

In this project, AEMRC has a very special role, which is not only the receiver of these precious early recordings but also undertakes the task of making the recordings heard and recognized by the knowledgeable people as a ‘transfer station’. We have gathered many experts and scholars from different disciplines and brought folk scholars and folk record collectors into the team. On the one hand, we have explored the significant value of the Laufer Collection for the research of traditional Chinese music and Chinese music history from different perspectives. On the other hand, we are trying to achieve the real ‘Home-coming’ of the special collection.

From the perspective of research, through the identification and analysis of the collection in the past two years, we found out that the recordings not only contain many lost plays, such as the *jingju* (京剧)<sup>2</sup> ‘*Da xiang shan*’ (大香山), but also involved varieties of Chinese music genres. This includes *tanhuang* (滩簧), *qinqiang* (秦腔), *guci* (鼓词), *chuida* (吹打), and nationwide folk songs that were popular in Shanghai and Beijing. Meanwhile, we took a closer look at some early forms and historical development of some genres from the recordings. For example, we discovered that the performing forms of *Jingju* (京剧) were not completely fixed back then. Many prominent performers would combine some local folk tunes within a *Jingju* (京剧) (张玄, 2021). In other words, the Laufer recordings present a glimpse of ‘pre-history’ of many contemporary *xiqu* (戏曲) and *quyi* (曲艺) genres in Shanghai.



**FIGURE 2: Photography from the Laufer Collection adding up to the material of the audio recordings at hand (open source).**

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<sup>2</sup> jingju = opera

Based on years of *erhu* (二胡), playing experience and the academic background of musicological studies, team member Jinqiao realized that a *huqin* musician (胡琴) recording (ATM recording No. scy2931) in this collection, shows exquisite and mature composition and performance skills. He combined a notation-analysis with his practice of restoring the musical instrument performance (can be called HIP practice). It deepened mainly the academic understanding of the development of instrumental music at that time. (Jinqiao [金桥], 2020).

Regarding the dissemination of recordings, in addition to selected recordings and related academic research publications planned by the ‘First Recordings from China’ project, we also released some recordings to the general public through social media, which caused some heated discussions on the title, genre, lyrics and musical instruments of each recording very soon. For example, the *huqin* (胡琴) recording analyzed by Jinqiao has aroused a series of debates, is it *erhu* 二胡 or *banhu* 板胡? Is it an instrumental solo piece or developed from a *xiqu* (戏曲) accompaniment? One expert proposed it came out of the *jingju* (京剧) of the opera *Shiyuzhuo* (拾玉镯) and provided detailed information about the tunes.

Just as some of Hugh Tracey's old recordings did not specify all performers, there is almost no information about the performers in the Laufer Collection, so we can't find the specific owners of the recordings. What we can do is to return this important heritage of Chinese traditional music culture to the public and back to its ‘home’, instead of allowing the repatriation task to take place by any Chinese academia.

### WHERE IS THE HOME? HOW TO GET HOME?

At the SEM conference of 2020, Xiao Mei and I introduced the Laufer repatriation project. After listening to the presentation, Anthony Seager came up with a series of questions: Where is the home of the Laufer Collection? Is Shanghai Conservatory of Music its home? Is academia its home? Whether it is valid to repatriate just digital files instead of physical items?

This also reminds me of the problems encountered in ILAM's repatriation works and inspires me to think further: how can repatriation be valid? It is not a one-way hand over but a practice process of joint efforts of people, institutions, and communities. In this process, everyone involved is socially active and a practicing subject capable of injecting a new life and narrative into historical archives.

In my opinion, the above two cases are typical for the work of the ‘Second Museum Age’. Scholars, archivists, and curators should recognize and understand that the real significance of archived items is not achieved by trying to fix the constant position of an object in the continuous change of time and space, but by recognizing that collections can produce and stimulate more practical significance through their own characteristics and interaction with different subjects. Museums and archival institutions have gradually transformed from the role of a ‘storehouse’ to a subject and place of cultural practice, becoming an open platform or a cultural space for knowledge reproduction and multiple interactions. Archived items are, therefore, ‘sites’ where people connect with each other, with different times and spaces. It will generate new meanings and establish new relationships in diverse contexts. The life of archived items is constantly written and updated during the interaction among archivists, archival institutions, entire societies, and the source community. At the crossroads of history and present times, archived items are constantly interpreted and its new life shoots are growing.

Repatriation of historical recordings has become an important issue of great concern as involved in our discipline, especially in the field of ethnomusicology, library science, and folklore. As Xiao Mei emphasized in the International Workshop on Repatriation: History and Significance of Early Sound Recordings in 2017, it is an emotional feedback from the scholars to the cultural bearers when talking about bringing historical recordings home. The word ‘repatriation’ itself

relates to the overtones of colonialism or post-colonialism. Hence, due to these thoughts, we prefer to use the term ‘home-coming’.

In other words, the concept of home-coming emphasizes the emotional meaning aroused by the old recordings, and equally importantly, the reverse nourishment of scholars to local communities. It also prepares to consider the similarities and differences between the repatriation of audible recordings and other antiques. Why should we bring the old recordings home? What should we do with them? Where is their so-called ‘real home’? How to go beyond repatriation of physical items, and truly achieve emotional, spiritual and cultural feedbacks? How to make the archives truly ‘living’ possessing their own vitality, and then make it grow in the ontological sense in its interaction with people (whether it is research or consumption), is the problem that every archivist should think about.

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## BOOK REVIEW OF

# KIRSTEN SEIDLITZ. 2020. MUSIK & POLITISCHER KONFLIKT AUS DER TÜRKEI – KURDISCHE, ALEVITISCHE UND LINKE MUSIK IN DEUTSCHLAND [MUSIC AND POLITICAL CONFLICT FROM TURKEY – KURDISH, ALEVI, AND LEFTIST MUSIC IN GERMANY]. BIELEFELD: TRANSCRIPT.

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### Abstract

This short review essay refers to the book of Kirsten Seidlitz ‘Musik & Politischer Konflikt aus der Türkei – Kurdische, alevitische und linke Musik in Deutschland [Music and Political Conflict from Turkey – Kurdish, Alevi, and Leftist Music in Germany], which was published in 2020 by the German Transcript Verlag in Bielefeld. It is written in German and addresses many important questions regarding political conflicts and their impact on music among various different Turkish people living in Germany. Migration and political participation are heatedly debated in recent times and also a part of cultural exchange.

### Keywords

Book review, Migration, Musicians, Political conflicts



This book “Music and Political Conflict from Turkey”, written by a young German scholar working in Berlin, is written in German language. This is the mother tongue of at least 100 Million people in the world and the second language of many people living and/or studying in Germany. Being proud of the possibility to review an article in my own mother tongue in this journal, I want to emphasize that I try to be as critical as necessary since the entire problem is dedicated to a burning issue, not only in the context of Berlin or Germany.

The author focuses on live concerts and political expressions within this frame work that is measured by its transparency in terms of a musical conflict determination among Kurdish people, Alevi, and leftists in Germany.

This is seemingly very ambitious and difficult as the author has to agree to many limitations in access to territorial practice. The chosen personal examples are, therefore, rather the few that were available or supporting the claims of the author. Insofar, the point of departure is pretty narrow compared to the promises made in the introduction. The book is in itself quite obviously a development from an academic thesis that tried to focus on specific issues rather than serving the claim of comprehensiveness. Even the subtitle of the book “Kurdish, Alevi, and Leftist Music in Germany” seems too big for being discussed within a single writing. Nevertheless, the author tries to put many basic steps into perspective right from the beginning in the introduction, not without some contradictions.

The author names three research questions, yet does not differentiate much between them as they are all dedicated to political engagement and musical realization brought up through events in Turkey, in Germany, or as projected future impact on musical protest in Turkey.

The book is structured into four inner chapters after this and concludes with a wide-ranging bibliography that is worth the reading. The inner chapters are dedicated to the protest through music, the Kurdish, and the Alevi, which are then in a fourth step all together discussed in the last inner chapter under the title “Fazit” [Result].

The Fazit-chapter is then constructed in a way that it goes back to the initially mentioned research questions such as “Music as a political comment”, Recognition of musical diversity among musicians from Turkey within the German environment”, and also the “Hopes for music in a transnational context”. The author bases his statements on ten interviews made under different circumstances, yet following a strict scheme of generating statements. One very important criterium for interviews was the strict loyalty to self-indicated identities. It was not the author’s idea to create a system of ethnic or religious or political boxes. The interviewees themselves did name their own self-observation. This is one of the many practical solutions to the dilemma of diversity definitions in an evolving cross-regional context with cross-social boundary constructions. In contrast to this, the author defines answers rather based on language use or at least, puts language use in one row with musical elements or symbolic actions. The political aspect of commenting is seemingly reduced to the primary content of song texts, which is less supportive in terms of musical independency in creative expressions. Regarding musical creativity, the use of terminology is rather reduced to known common schemes. To give an example, she writes “Zwar verwenden sie viel traditionelles bzw. von traditionellen Kompositionsschemata inspiriertes Repertoire, doch arrangieren sie dieses häufig mit einem westlichen Touch. Sakîna bspw. tritt in zwei ihrer drei Musikkollektive mit klassisch-westlichen Instrumenten auf: Sowohl das Trio Mara als auch das Anadolu Quartet beinhalten keine spezifisch kurdischen Instrumente.” (on page 177) [Although they use a lot of traditional repertoire or repertoire inspired by traditional composition schemes, they often arrange this with a Western touch. Sakîna, for example, appears in two of her three music collectives with classical western instruments: neither the Trio Mara nor the Anadolu Quartet contain any specifically Kurdish instruments.] The author may have no space nor any intention to describe what traditional repertoire means in this context, what a so-called “Western touch” may imply, or what specifically Kurdish might be in any musical instrument. This is a hurting shortcoming which can only be compensated through further detailed studies.

In this core chapter, the author also follows a very disciplined approach in finding clear statements made in the earlier described interviews. One important moment is the expressed hope in most of the interviewees, that their musical engagement has an impact on the creative

community in Turkey and that living abroad may extend one's view on political issues. The author is fluent in naming some well-known musicians and influential organisers of musical events, so that can be concluded that this book has been thought to be mainly relevant to musicians from Turkey living in Germany. In order to dive deeper into the given facts and generated statements, one has to be familiar with the cultural environment of the interviewees and the life among their primary communities abroad. Looking at it from this perspective opens another view on the felt urge to permanently justify exile and the relationship between the social circumstances in the culture of departure and destination. This is, as I can see, a very important point of departure in studying diaspora and their work beyond the musical appearance.

This seems also be the reason why this book is a necessary addition to literature about music and political conflict.

# REVIEW ESSAY: WHY WAS THIS COLLOQUIUM ON DRUMS AND DRUM ENSEMBLES ALONG THE SILK ROAD IMPORTANT IN THESE TIMES?

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## Abstract

This short review essay aims at answering the question ‘Why was this Colloquium on Drums and Drum Ensembles along the Silk Road Important in these Times?’ It was the very first gathering on this topic I experienced. I could meet experts as an amateur since I only recently dealt seriously with music. I wanted to share my ideas and I could learn a lot, too. However, I think that this mutual learning is the most important. The colloquium was to a great part to increase interest in many details about which we do not know yet.

## Keywords

International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), Colloquia, Mutual learning, Knowledge exchange

At the outset, I would like to make sure that scholars, who might probably expect a detailed review, won’t misunderstand this short essay. I am not a musicologist nor an ethnomusicologist and my interest in music is rather less professional. There was a very fine review of the event ‘27 Colloquium of the International Council for Traditional Music: Drums and Drum ensembles along the Silk Road’ by a Chinese scholar. His name is Guang Bingyang (关冰阳). His review will be published in the widespread Chinese journal, People’s Music.<sup>1</sup>

To understand my interest in music, especially in drum playing, particularly playing the *derebuqa* of Egypt in the context of living in Alexandria, I would like to briefly, explain some personal background.

The very first time I dealt with a *derebuqa* was when I was almost 6 years old. It was during my aunt’s bachelor party. I watched my mother taking down a *derebuqa* from the top of the wardrobe in my grandfather’s house. Animal skin was used to cover the opening of this clay drum. This *derebuqa* type is nowadays rare in normal households. Rather, the contemporary type has a metal resonator with the opening covered with a plastic ‘skin’. I had the opportunity to watch one of my aunties playing an Upper Egyptian rhythm on the *derebuqa* at the bachelor party. These special and unique sounds reminded me of what I heard far away in Aswan, in my father’s hometown, and of singing those old and completely exotic songs to people in the big city of Alexandria. Then, I started to knock on this *derebuqa* randomly. I could not hold it because it was quite big and heavy for a 6 years old child with a tiny body. Yet, feeling its sound is warms my heart, which was probably the moment I fell in love with the *derebuqa* at first sight.

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<sup>1</sup> The publication will have the following title: “丝绸之路上的鼓与鼓乐”: 第 27 届国际传统音乐学会 (ICTM) 专题研讨会述评. There was a pre-print shared on WeChat.



During my early life, I remember to have listened to music every day, maybe even all day long. During the mornings, my mother used to listen to the daily broadcasting program while ironing my school shirt and preparing breakfast. I remember most of the songs, whereas some musical pieces were introductions to concerts. I was then singing and banging on the desks in the school with my classmates during the breaks, between classes, going back home in the afternoon and watching a daily old movie with dozens of Egyptian-styled songs accompanied by a specific fashionable belly dance that required specific rhythmic accentuation. Later at night, before going to bed, my siblings and I used to gather in my mother's bedroom and listen to some other broadcasted songs and audio novels. That is why I still memorize quite many songs. Additionally, this might be a reason why I express them in a specific manner, namely by drumming the rhythmic structure rather than singing them. I used to make a number of mistakes with many words of the lyrics, the reason why all family members made fun of me and my musical ambitions. Nonetheless, never gave up.

During my high school year, I used to study 8 to 10 hours a day, and after a little while I found out that when I think about something deeply, for example a math question, I cannot get an answer unless I drum while thinking, and it works effectively every time. Since then, drumming became a way to focus on any type of work or study. I needed to drum, and I did not know yet, that drumming also needs people like me.

In Egypt, even though the *derebuqa* belongs to the most iconic and respected musical instruments, it is a bit hard for people from the middle class of society to become a drummer. The majority, the middle class in big cities such as Alexandria, to which my family belongs, does not accept fully that doing music or beware drumming is a real profession. Working as a 'drummer' for a living is somewhat shameful and brings a bad reputation. This is the reason why my parents did not pay attention to such a skill and did not want me to become a professional *derebuqa* player. Subsequently, I never intended to do it for a living. But, after the "Arab spring 2011" and the many transformations that happened to all sections and subsections within the society, young people started to consider the *derebuqa* as an inspiring instrument, and they find it very cool to learn it and improve their skills.

Finally, yet importantly, the *derebuqa* has never been a curriculum to me, it is something that I feel in my soul, I never owned a *derebuqa*, yet it is the specific rhythmic association and the beats, which are a part of my everyday life. I am stating this to ensure everyone that I love doing music and feel responsible for the future of this musical instrument. In times of conflicts, social hardship, or health issues, playing any musical instrument is very rewarding, particularly if this musical instrument has a history that gives one confidence and trust. That might be the main reason, why dealing with it is so important, exactly now.

I think that the colloquium about drums and drum ensembles along the Silk Road includes the North African region. In this conjunction, specifically Egypt is a major spot of the traditional Silk Road, where a lot of trade and contact took place in the past and at present. Egypt is a place where in the past, social circumstances paved a way to the development of many musical instruments, not only because of long periods of stability but also due to the manifold contacts to others. Interestingly, diversity contributed its part to this stability. Hence, in this regard, the *derebuqa* should be taken as one example. So far, I could not find any drum that has the same sound like this one. I believe that the *derebuqa* sound fits my personality without a doubt. It produces the loudest drumming sound I am aware of since my youth. This loud sound can express a lot of enthusiasm. The Silk Road still exists in a modern way. Nowadays, it symbolizes the cultural connections between the worlds. Many skills cultivated along this trade route may have been lost for ages. The whole world of knowledge about those skills was hidden in war times and cruel competitions. However, the re-emergence of the Silk Road offers a chance to re-connect. Especially the exchange of intellectuality and of cultural differences. I

believe that people can only know themselves if they are able to know others through anything that connects them such as sound and sound production.

I am studying in Shanghai, at the other end of the Silk Road, so to say. My interest in drumming connects me with many friends and people from all over the world. Now, I play *taiko* in an ensemble of drum instruments iconic for modern Japan. The instruments play the main role in my life. I can express my best while playing in the *taiko* ensemble. It involves my physical body and my mood. It made me think of the main duties of my life. It also helps me to make decisions. I learn to communicate with people in a much better way. Most people I know get very excited about musical instruments, their specific voices. They change their behaviors; they want to do things enthusiastically and in their own way. Instruments can play generally an important role in peoples' life. Nevertheless, many do not realize it and need support. Therefore, this colloquium is important. Musical instruments are irreplaceable. They will never be away from humans' lives or merge in pure electronic devices. Now, that is my experience, middle class people become more nostalgic. They want to keep old things to prove their roots, their connections to earlier times, for example in China, the dedication to *guqin* or *pipa*. They learn it not anymore due to the wish of becoming musicians, they need it for their entire education and also want to achieve distinction in a new popular way.

The colloquium, to which I humbly contributed, was the very first gathering I experienced. I could meet experts as an amateur since I only recently dealt seriously with music. I wanted to share my ideas and I could learn a lot, too. However, I think that this mutual learning is the most important. The colloquium was to a great part to increase interest in many details about which we do not know yet that they become important very soon.

## REVIEW OF

# ZIYING YOU. 2020. FOLK LITERATI, CONTESTED TRADITION, AND HERITAGE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA: INCENSE IS KEPT BURNING. BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA: INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS

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### **Abstract**

This is a short review of the publication by Ziyong You on ‘Folk Literati, Contested Tradition, and Heritage in Contemporary China: Incense is Kept Burning’, which was released by Indiana University Press in Bloomington in the year 2020. The topic is highly sensitive to current efforts in reworking writings on historical developments in China. This review is important due to the fact that it allows many people to access details of the topic and to start a future discourse about some of the arising questions on heritage and historical values as well as about grassroots intellectuals and existing power structures.

### **Keywords**

China, Folk, Literati, Tradition, Heritage

In her detailed study, Ziyong You explores the relationship between discourse, practice, and power in the process of reconstructing, deconstructing, and preserving cultural heritage in contemporary China. Focusing on rural Chinese intellectuals, she explores how local communities engage with efforts to preserve and transmit local cultural practices and traditions. You’s approach to these intellectuals, which she terms ‘folk literati’, is enriched by an analysis of and commentary on their wider contexts, exploring how local communities are marginalized through power structures that emerge as a result of these processes. In addition to the biographical accounts of the folk literati, You’s discussion of their place in local society, motivations, contributions, and how their legacies are perceived by others explores how the ‘folk literati’ have shaped the local politics and reinforced their personal sense of space.

You’s introduction draws together academic sources from both inside and outside of China to highlight problems faced by academics working on folklore studies. The author discusses her understandings of terms such as ‘tradition,’ ‘heritage,’ and ‘literati,’ and presents reasons for utilizing them in this volume. Her discussion extends to Chinese terms and classificatory frameworks, namely the replacement of *minjian* (民间), meaning ‘folk’, with *chuantong* (传统), meaning ‘tradition’, to refer to music, dance, and fine art. Although this substitution serves to incorporate artistic elements favoured by the ruling classes in ancient China (p. 32), it may not account for the views of the author’s research subjects, for whom such a system may appear

arbitrary or irrelevant to their living practices. This raises questions concerning the appropriateness of the term ‘folk’ in the title of this book. The term carries assumptions which the author does not clearly unpack. If ‘folk’ can be replaced with ‘tradition’ in Chinese, why use ‘folk’ at all? I return to these issues in the latter half of this review article.

You’s research centres on three locations near Hongtong County in Shanxi, China – Yangxie, Lishan, and Wan’an. In the first chapter, You explains the historical and social context of these research sites and summarizes the local practices related to Nüying and Ehuang, providing an overview of the connections between local practitioners, those responsible for the restoration and upkeep of the temples, and individuals engaged in the transmission and preservation of local traditions. Yangxie, Lishan, and Wan’an share a belief system centred on Nüying and Ehuang, but disputes over the details of this ‘sacred’ bond more frequently provoke tensions than inspire cooperation. The interconnectedness of Yangxie, Lishan, and Wan’an, coupled with their delicate social and political dynamics—which individuals can significantly impact—make them an ideal site for You’s study. The second chapter explores the role of the folk literati in the transmission and reproduction of local traditions, focusing on the life and work of the late Qiao Guoliang. Interviews with family and friends provide details of Qiao Guoliang’s life, but through an analysis of his poetry, You suggests that Qiao Guoliang identifies himself as a member of the literati. You provides the original Chinese for Qiao Guoliang’s poems, which some readers may find useful, but not for other examples of his writings.

The author opens the third chapter by describing recent recognition in folklore studies of the importance of ethnographic research for situating traditional mythical stories within contemporary Chinese contexts. You explores the history of the story of Yao and Shun, explaining how modern archaeology has contributed to the contested presentation of these figures. Li Xuezhi, the first member of the folk literati interviewed in this book, provided You with a manuscript detailing his involvement in the reconstruction of the temple of Shun as well as the revival of other traditions. The manuscript focuses on the 1990s onward: a period often perceived by researchers as less dynamic. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the dominant narratives that compete with Li Xuezhi’s account, exposing tensions underpinned by the various proponents’ sense of space and politics.

Using several accounts, Chapter Four constructs a more detailed picture of the interactions between individuals, legends, beliefs, practices, history, and place. The author discusses how the folk literati are perceived by one another and by their communities. Chapter Five builds on this and explores how the folk literati interact with the community more widely and discusses their interactions with other social actors such as ritual specialists and temple reconstruction associations.

In Chapter Six, the author exposes the imbalances of the power relationships between actors involved in cultural heritage preservation projects. By outlining the infrastructure behind China’s intangible cultural heritage projects, the author suggests that while initiatives such as the *Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* can encourage people to engage with cultural heritage projects, they often arouse conflicts about ownership in local communities. In her comments on the imbalanced relationship between temple reconstruction associations and local state leaders, You notes that the folk literati are rarely selected as ‘representative transmitters’. Her critique of the heritage-making process, which has distorted power relations and alienated those most engaged with the traditions, opens discussion onto wider impacts of the existing systems surrounding cultural heritage preservation, highlighting areas in need of further development.

You’s analysis of her fieldwork data reveals a detailed understanding of the lives and work of grassroots intellectuals, but her use of the term ‘folk literati’ merits further discussion.

Throughout the volume, You admits that the ‘folk literati’ are a group of dynamic individuals who are difficult to classify as a unified group. She often justifies her use of the term by an individual’s self-representation in their work, or by recognition of their literary abilities by members of their local community. Many of You’s research subjects reject the term ‘literati’, suggesting that it is appropriate for neither themselves nor their fellow intellectuals. You’s use of ‘folk literati’ emerges from a perceived distinction between her main research subjects and other members of their communities. While it is arguable that this distinction clarifies the structure of the book, use of ‘folk literati’ is perhaps more problematic than You suggests.

You deals with the historical conceptions of the literati in the introduction of the book, and suggests that her understanding of ‘literati’ is similar to Yang Kuisong’s ‘scholar’ (书生) concept, referring to ‘those who read books and pursue spiritual goals’, but who also have personal weaknesses and problems (p. 37). If, as You suggests, Yang’s definition could be applied to her research subjects, then is it necessary to coin a new term? Throughout the book, You cites other similar designations such as Merrill Kaplan’s ‘amateur scholars’ (p. 262). The problematic use of ‘folk’ might have been avoided by building on concepts such as ‘amateur scholar’, or using *shusheng* (书生) in romanization. Although the author takes time to explain the use of ‘literati’, the concept of ‘folk’ as used in this book requires further explanation. Jähnichen problematizes the use of ‘folk’ in Chinese contexts, suggesting that it is often invoked to inspire ‘primary interest’ in a subject (Jähnichen, 2020). You’s research is interesting enough on its own and I do not believe the use of the term here is motivated by inspiring ‘primary interest’, but the term ‘folk’ is perhaps too vague. You deploys this term to highlight the efforts of grassroots intellectuals, but instead of helping the reader understand the research subject more deeply, its categorical distinctions may have implications for the way readers perceive the legitimacy and value of the work of such individuals. While the author does not intend to make value judgements on the work of her subjects, more nuanced consideration of terminology would more clearly set out her position in relation to conceptual frameworks in the field.

The author’s cultivation of a personal connection with her research subjects has resulted in an engaging account of her fieldwork, which is enriched by clear and vibrant illustrations in a high-quality publication. You’s detailed analysis provides valuable insight into the lives of often-overlooked grassroots intellectuals, and gives a voice to those disenfranchised by national and international power structures.

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# REVIEW: BRITISH FORUM FOR ETHNOMUSICOLOGY (BFE) ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 8-11 APRIL 2021

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## Abstract

This is a review of an event. The event was the ‘British Forum for Ethnomusicology (BFE) Annual Conference, 8-11 April 2021’, which was held online due to actual circumstances of limited mobility. Both writers attended and shaped this review through their personal thoughts based on accessible information.

## Keywords

Review, Event analysis, British Forum for Ethnomusicology, Online discussions

Amid a global pandemic and heightened urgency to mitigate the effects of climate crises, the theme of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology (BFE) Annual Conference, “Music, Culture, and Nature,” was very fitting. Hosted by the School of Music and Performing Arts at Bath Spa University, the conference was held from 8 to 11 April 2021. This was a conference long in the making, as the preparation had started in 2019 and the conference was planned to be held in 2020, until the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Great appreciation must be given to the organizing committee, as the conference, despite being held completely virtually, was highly engaging and easy to navigate.

At the Welcome Session, Amanda Bayley contended that music plays a pivotal role in helping us think about nature and cultural heritage. Indeed, this is a point that was clearly demonstrated by the presenters. Amongst the papers in the first day, Jun Feng showed how the vanishing practice of the paiziluo shawm and percussion bands highlights the problems of the rural-urban integration policy in Hubei province, China, which has pushed migration to the cities and urbanised the rural landscape. As a result, the original environment for the folk rituals in which the bands play a significant part is lost. Similarly, Salvador Hernandez argued that “the natural environment is an active force that can affect the sustainability of musical traditions.” This is shown clearly in the case of Durango, Mexico, where the practice of the *xuravét* circle dance and music (as a part of the agricultural ritual *El Costumbre*) has been declining due to the degrading condition of the natural environment of San Pedro Xicoras. The condition is not only causing diminishing agricultural harvest, but has also pushed migration to the cities, which means now there are only two or three people left in the village who are authorised to execute the ritual.

On the second half of the first day, the panel of the Society for Ethnomusicology provided some possible answers to a question we must all ask ourselves: “how do ethnomusicologists respond to climate crises?” Drawing from their works in Mongolia, Brazil, Haiti, and the United States,

the panellists (Jennifer Post, Michael Silvers, Rebecca Dirksen, Jeff Todd Titon) shared their experience as ethnomusicologists in assisting communities to sustain their cultural, including musical, traditions. From the discussion, it is clear that transmission of local ecological knowledge is key to creating a sustainable natural environment and the musical cultures that are deeply embedded in it, and ethnomusicologists certainly can play a part in assisting the communities in doing so.

This point on the importance of local ecological knowledge was echoed on the second day of the conference by, among others, Sebastian Hachmeyer, who discussed the sustainability of musical bamboos and flute making in the Bolivian Andes. The shifting of role from flute makers to middlemen to harvest musical bamboos has led to overexploitation of the bamboos, because the middlemen, unlike the flute makers, are not equipped with the ecological knowledge to harvest bamboos with minimal disruption to the ecosystem.

Keynote speaker Angela Impey re-stressed the point through her sharing of the ethno-ornithology project, the aim of which is to garner and amplify valuable insights from environmental listening, especially of the sounds of birds which reflect ecological changes, events, and complexities. A trans-disciplinary project in collaboration with climate scientists, engineers, soundscape ecologists, ornithologists and local ‘citizen scientists’, songs, language and ritual actions of indigenous community used as insights would complement scientific data on and contribute to the mitigation actions for climate crises.

The second day of the conference was then closed by a beautiful concert to honour the memories of mbira master Chartwell Dutiro (1957-2019).

Day 3 started with a host of fascinating panels and papers that continued to deliberate, in different ways, on the conference theme of ‘Music, Culture, and Nature’. In the first panel, *Music and industrial/environmental heritage*, Felicity Greenland discussed the old Japanese folk song *mi yoen*, one among the 200 such songs, associated with Japanese whaling of the pre-modern period. It is interesting to note that these folk songs – which Greenland divided into celebration or the ceremonial songs, work songs, and others – also indicated the belief systems, attitudes, and practices associated with whales and whaling practice among the Japanese whaling community, which in turn contributed to a sense of community among them. This also indicates that in such traditional societies, human survival needs were closely linked to nature and its sustainability. Some songs, Greenland notes, reflected the belief that ‘only if the Right whales bear young will the right whales be always in the sea.’ Whales were viewed as gifts from gods to the community, and at times even god themselves. Hence, a close connection between nature, culture, and importance to sustenance was closely established.

On the other hand, global warming and climate change has become a significant concern today, putting forward the need to engage with environment and its sustainability. Klisala Harrison, in the same panel, explored the manner in which Greenlandic music is intertwined with the politics of extractivism and climate change at the time of arctic ice-melt resulting from climate change. Music has become a crucial tool for locals against extractivism and this is reflected in the lyrics of varied Greenlandic popular music forms of the recent past. In this manner, we can say that music provides voice of protest to the concerned and marginalised citizens through which they can raise important environmental (and political) concerns.

The relationship between sound, living beings, and the environment was also actively explored on the final day of the conference, particularly in the panel on Sound ecologies. Alex South, for instance, presented on the idea of zoomusicology. Taking from the scholarly work of Emily Doolittle and Bruno Gingras, South defines zoomusicology as the area that studies “the music-like sound communication among non-human animals” (2015: R819). In this presentation, South further explored the complexities reflected in the sounds and rhythm of humpback



whales. Therefore, not only human music-making, but non-human music and songs also extensively inform the music and nature ecology. The final presentation of this panel by Mukasa Wafula pointed towards the impact of climate change and socio-economic changes like urbanisation, education, religion, and new farming methods on the traditional Chiswa or termite harvesting among the Bukusu people in Kenya. This in turn influenced the music that accompanies this process. Such changes, Wafula notes, has led to a decline in social institutions among the Bakusu people and the songs of termite harvesting, which has consequently impacted the sound ecology in general. Such music was traditionally used to either ‘motivate, attract, or confuse’ the termites to leave their dugouts in order to catch them, particularly at the time of no rain. The playing of instruments in this process, Wafula noted, also attracted birds who could also eat the termite for their survival. Therefore, termite harvesting can be viewed as not only bringing together the community for their quest for survival, but it also presents the idea of sustainability and that different species, particularly humans and animals, are inter-dependent. This interconnectedness is extremely relevant in the present context.

This conference included panels and roundtables beyond the theme of the conference, which contributed to its dynamism. In a panel on ‘City sounds and spaces’ on Day 3, for instance, Snezhina Gulubova explored the changing nature of the Cuban music scene and its most prominent musical contexts, the streets of Havana, amidst the introduction of internet access, private property and increased travel to and from the Cuban island. Streets that were the home of Cuban music, of everyday music making where the economically-weaker afro-cuban children could learn music, has now become a more regulated music space and a space of ‘five-star hotels, exclusive shopping malls and Chanel’s seasonal catwalks.’

The third day also included Equality, Diversity and Inclusion workshop that touched upon the collaboration of BFE with the EDIMS (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Music Studies). Shzr Ee Tan mentions in her video in the conference’s Whova App, “EDIMS is a cross organisational network which aims to promote, support and share the practice in relation to equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in music higher education in the UK.” (EDIMS, 2021). Chairs Matthew Machin-Autenrieth and Alexander Cannon, further discuss a number of EDI initiatives that the BFE has undertaken in the past year. Some of them include internal and external conversations with EDIMS colleagues on how to combat racism in the discipline of ethnomusicology as well as building this discipline as diverse and inclusive. This detailed discussion was followed by the testimonials of academics and students in the field of Ethnomusicology who shared their personal experiences as a BIPOC. Min Y. Ong, Hadi Bastani, Dunya Habash, Cassandra Balbar, Laudan Nooshin, and Simran Singh raised some important questions concerning the idea of inclusion and equality in this workshop.

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# AEMR

*Asian-European Music Research Journal* is a double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal that publishes scholarship on traditional and popular musics and field work research, and on recent issues and debates in Asian and European communities. The journal places a specific emphasis on interconnectivity in time and space between Asian and European cultures, as well as within Asia and Europe.

The *Asia-Europe Music Research Center at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (AEMRC)*, which is the physical *site of the journal*, is a new academic platform established by the conservatory on the basis of synergetic cooperation between academic institutes at home and internationally. The platform focuses on the study of musical cultures in the geographical arenas connecting Asia with Europe, specifically looking at the flows of musical ecologies and civilizations. It examines and compares the histories and current developments of multicultural practices between Asia and Europe, and explores the reinterpretation of traditional music resources in applied and sustainable contexts. The Centre seeks to promote in-depth academic exchange at home and abroad, with emphasis on interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaborations, including the promotion of cultural diversity in the digital humanities and musical knowledge building. It aims at providing a supportive research and teaching environment with a commitment to the larger interests of equality, tolerance, capacity building and the stimulation of artistic creativity, and the exploration of innovative approaches towards redefining fields of cultural study. The journal is also associated with longstanding 'key tertiary research bases' focusing on humanities and the social sciences in Shanghai, including the Chinese Ritual Music Research Center and the Oriental Musical Instruments Museum, both at Shanghai Conservatory, as well as with the work of other departments at the Conservatory. The Center also cooperates with various Chinese and international universities and research institutions.

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Please, send your full submissions (non-formatted with all your figures and items placed within the text of a word-document and a cover sheet with your personal data) to this email address. The editors will then get in touch with you on an individual basis.

## ABSTRACTING AND INDEXING

Asian-European Music Research Journal is indexed by RILM, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and ERIH PLUS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scopus.

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*Two issues per volume year, June (summer) and December (winter) commencing 2018.*

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