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Editors

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Three Categories of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Three Degrees of Importance: The Case of the Sama-Bajau Igal Dance Tradition of Tawi-Tawi Province, Philippines

Matthew C. M. (MCM) Santamaria
Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman
e-mail: mmsantamaria@up.edu.ph

Abstract

In this piece, I assert that several categories may be observed in intangible cultural heritage or property such as dance. Such categories correspond to varying degrees of importance to the community that own such intangible cultural heritage. Cultural workers who wish to sustain intangible cultural heritage must therefore take heed of differences among categories, and devise diverse strategies or approaches that are appropriate for each of them. In order to illustrate the practicality of this approach, three categories of the Sama-Bajau *igal* dance are introduced and described: ritual *igal* found in the various *pag-omboh* (ancestral veneration) ceremonies; secular *igal* found in weddings and other social festivities; and theatrical *igal* found in the repertoires of dance troupes. Examples of *igal* dances belonging to these categories are also described and ranked in terms of importance in the context of social function as well as rarity in performance. The background of practitioners belonging to these categories are also compared in order to gain an understanding of their embeddedness in their respective communities. Based on these categories, performance qualities and embeddedness in communities, a prioritisation scheme for intangible cultural heritage in the *igal* dance is proposed. Based on this prioritisation scheme, a documentary video produced by the National Commission on Culture and the Arts Intangible Cultural Heritage Team is evaluated in terms of comprehensiveness in capturing types of categories, practitioners, and specific dances that belong to the *igal* dance tradition. I, therefore, propose that a comprehensive inventory of what constitutes the *igal* dance tradition(s) must be made before setting out a path towards crafting policies and programs that relate to sustainability. Indeed, the question of what needs to be sustained must first be answered.

Keywords: categories, *igal* dance, intangible cultural heritage, practitioners, Sama-Bajau

Introduction

A chance encounter in YouTube of an uploaded video produced for International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the Auspices of the UNESCO (ICHCAP) has prodded the writing of this piece. ICHCAP is a centre based in South Korea that was to

"…establish and promote intangible cultural heritage together with forty-eight UNESCO MEMBER STATES in the Asia Pacific Region." The documentary video is labelled "Philippines-Igal Dance UNESCO." Its title in the video itself is "*Igal: Traditional Dance of the Sama of Tawi-Tawi*" (hereafter, "*ICH Igal Video*"). The video itself is apparently produced by the "NCCA ICH team" (ICH Links). This means that Philippine government funds were used to create the documentation via the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

As the ICH *Igal* Video rests solidly on the resources and cultural capital of the NCCA as well as the ICHCAP, great expectations are raised concerning the information that it contains as well as the process it followed in documenting *igal*. What categories of *igal* need to be included in a documentary film on the dance tradition? What types of key informants need to be interviewed for such an undertaking? What types of music need to be discussed in relation to the categories of *igal*? I will attempt to provide answers to these questions and to discuss issues that relate to them as I navigate my way through the contents of the *ICH Igal Video.* At the end of this piece, I will introduce an evaluation instrument in the form of a matrix that may help creators of documentary films in interrogating three different categories of *igal*. I believe that these instruments, in modified forms, can be useful in guiding the documentation process in other forms of intangible cultural heritage.

From Great Expectations to Deep Dismay

I am an *igal* enthusiast. Since the summer of 2003, when I encountered the dance tradition in a *lami-lamian* wedding festivity in Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi, I have become a hostage to its irresistible allure as a form of total performance.[1] Thereafter, the southernmost province of the Republic of the Philippines has become my field site in studying the music and dances of the various Sama-Bajau communities.[2] Later on, Semporna in the District of Tawau, Sabah State, Malaysia has also become one of my favourite field sites for research in *igal* dance and *kulintangan titik* music.

I was filled with much excitement when I discovered the uploaded *ICH Igal Video* on YouTube sometime in September 2023. As it was purportedly produced by the "NCCA ICH Team" and linked to the ICHCAP website where many other intangible cultural properties from all over Asia were featured, I had no doubt that the production values of this piece of creative work will not disappoint.

The film opens with the rhythms of *Titik Tabawan*, a fast-paced *kulintangan* ensemble piece for secular dancing. Suddenly, the eyes are assaulted by the image of Bud Bongao, a sacred mountain to the Sama Dilaut. I see local Dance Master, Hadja Sakinur Ain Delasas dancing on a pier and then later on an immobile *lepa* or a Sama Dilaut houseboat. A very good beginning for a documentary film, I thought. It captured the imagination and drew the viewing audience closer to the screen. Curiosity, well at least mine, was immediately generated.

Five minutes through the film, my generally good feeling about this documentation turned into dismay when the unseen narrator declared:

> For diverse reasons and occasions and with many variations, the Sama people of Tawi-Tawi and maritime Southeast Asia perform their traditional dance, the *igal*. It

> is a shared heritage among the Sama and other peoples in the western Mindanao area. It is called *pangalay* in Tausug and *pamansak* in Yakan. All the names simply mean "dance." (ICH *Igal* Video, Philippines Igal Dance, 2020)

This perspective is a hegemonic one, mainly espoused by Ligaya Fernando Amilbangsa in her seminal book, *Pangalay* (1983) and echoed in her entry "Pangalay/Igal/Pamansak" together with Rosalie S. Matilac and Earl Francis C. Pasilan in the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Encyclopedia of Philippine Art (2020). I have long argued against this hegemonic and homogenising perspective along with other scholars of dance (See: Mohd Anis Md Nor, 2017, p. 90; Nepomuceno, 2020, p. 32; and, Hafzan Zannie Hamza, 2013, p. 54, Hafzan Zannie Hamza, 2015, p. 51, Santamaria, 2012a, pp. 117-141, and Santamaria, 2017, pp. 117-141). Why are sets of dances with different movement aesthetics, musical accompaniment, costumes, and properties as well as performance contexts considered one and the same? Why are three different ethno-linguistic groups construed to "share the same tradition"? The different labels that are not used as cognates across these groups indicate difference. Can they not be seen as "related" but "distinct" traditions? I will answer these questions as I discuss the different categories of *igal*. At this juncture, I would like to point out to the holders of this perspective that the practitioners of these three traditions are not one and the same. They sustain and transmit traditions that are not mutually inclusive to all three ethno-linguistic groups.

The Absence of Ritual

About three minutes into the film, I saw the face of Professor Mucha-Shim Lahaman Quiling. She currently serves as Director of the Sama Studies Center of the Mindanao State University Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography (MSU-TCTO). She discusses four categories of the Sama people: the Sama Talun (upland Sama), the Sama Dileya (land Sama), the Sama Bihing (coastal Sama), and the Sama Dilaut (sea-dwelling Sama).[3] She also notes that the Sama call themselves by their island origin such as Sama Simunul or Sama Tabawan. I believe that this brief discussion rightly emphasises the great diversity found among the Sama-Bajau people, who according to A. Kemp Pallesen (1985) may be divided into at least 10 linguistic groupings (pp. 45-48). Surely, this diversity can also be found in their tangible and intangible cultural properties. In my opinion, such diversity in languages and other properties makes the idea of the sameness of the Tausug *pangalay*, the Sama *igal* and the Yakan *pamansak* rather difficult to defend.[4]

The time marker of the film reads 5:06, and the camera pans towards the face of Hadja Sakinur Ain Delasas who explains that *igal* is "not a Muslim dance." This opinion is quite correct as *igal* does not have any ritual function directly associated with Islam. At that point, I thought that at any moment Sakinur would start a description of ritual *igal*. Instead, she mentions the "slight differences" between the Tausug pangalay and the Sama *igal*. She extends this assessment of "slight differences" in the *igal* traditions among the Sama of Tabawan, Sama of Simunul, the Sama of Sapa-Sapa, and the Sama of Sibutu. Again, I must beg to disagree with this assessment by the most esteemed local dance master for I have observed the *igal*

traditions of the Sama Sibutu, Sama Sitangkai, Sama Tabawan, and Sama Simunul, and the differences among them are nowhere near "slight." For instance, I observed in the Tausug *pangalay* a very smooth and slow horizontality in the dance. This accounts for *pangalay*'s very refined demeanour. There is hardly any verticality or quick upward-downward movement done by hopping, jumping or via knee extension. The *pangalay* dancer tends one level as he or she moves forward, backward or to the sides. In contrast, the *igal* dance traditions that I observed show a high degree of verticality. Some other observers describe this as "bouncy," produced by a series of upward-downward movement of the body. Such a movement cannot be seen in the *pangalay*. This verticality characterises *igal* dances. In Tabawan, the verticality is very regular, with the constant rising and falling of the dancer's body following the very loud ostinato produced by instrumentalists beating the rims of two *agung* or large gongs. Since the styles of dancing as well as music-making are quite distinct, I would even dare say that the dances belonging to these different Sama communities must be treated as 'traditions all their own'. In a nutshell, there can be no single overarching Sama *igal* tradition as each island grouping exhibit significant differences in terms of dancing and music-making.[5] The differences are even more pronounced when comparing the Tausug *pangalay* with any of the diverse variants of the Sama *igal*. I will discuss these differences in a later section of this piece.

It appears that the *ICH Igal Video* has missed a great opportunity in its blatant omission of ritual. A discussion of *igal* dance in ritual would have revealed the overlapping spheres of cosmology, performance, and identity. Bruno Bottignolo (1995) notes the distinctiveness of the Sama Dilaut religion from Islam. He calls this religion *Umboh*, thus centering this cosmology on the "the first man, and the great Badjao ancestor" (p. 58). Sama-Bajau rituals are invariably referred to as *pag-umboh*, and are thus dedicated to the *Umboh* (proper name with upper case). and all the other ancestors *umboh* (name with lowercase) that are able to commune with the living and to intercede in order to protect communities from illness, natural disasters, and other calamities. *Igal* dancing is usually featured in major Sama-Bajau rituals. *Igal* in rituals together with sacred music pieces played on the *kulintangan* ensemble induces a conscious trance called *patakahan.* During such trances, ritual specialists or spirit mediums supposedly host the spirits of ancestors or their spirit guides, who then recommend certain actions to correct specific communal errors, heal individuals, or avert disasters or calamities.

I have personally observed three rituals that involve *igal* dancing accompanied by sacred ritual music. Among the rituals of the Sama Dilaut, I have studied the *Pag-Igal Djin* (also known as *Magpa-igal Jin*), a monthly ritual conducted by ritual specialists called *igal djin* (dancing spirit mediums) during the full moon at the *pantan* (open-air platform constructed above the shallows) of the *Kalamat* or *Wali Djin* (head ritual specialist) in the Island of Sitangkai, and the *Pagkanduli* (thanksgiving ritual) held yearly in the Island of Sikulan, which is performed by the same *igal djin* ritual specialists (See: Santamaria, 2017; Hanafi Hussin & MCM Santamaria, 2008a and Hanafi Hussin & MCM Santamaria 2008b). In these two rituals, four *igal* dances named after four musical pieces called *titik* played on the *kulintangan* ensemble are performed following a strict order in appearance. *Igal Limbayan* opens these two rituals. Accompanied by a relatively slow piece called *Titik*

Limbayan, this dance is performed by *igal djin denda* or female spirit mediums. After several starts and stops of *Igal Limbayan,* a non-sacred piece called *Igal Tabawan* is performed by persons who are not *igal djin* mediums. It has been explained to me that this performance allows anyone in attendance to dance the piece, but that such a piece is usually performed by the proxies of *igal djin* mediums who could not attend the ritual. This dance can also be performed by both sexes. The accompanying music piece is called *Titik Tabawan.* It features a decidedly fast tempo with a rising and falling melodic line. After *Igal Tabawan*, a sacred piece called *Igal Djin* is performed by the *igal djin lella* or male spirit mediums. The accompanying music is called *Titik Djin,* which has a relatively fast tempo. The last dance is reserved for the *Kalamat* or *Wali Djin*. It may be danced alone or with an *igal djin lella* protege-in-training to the head ritual specialist.

Although *Mag-Djin,* the Tausug name for this Sama Dilaut ritual, was mentioned in passing, none of the above repertoire of very important *igal* dances and *kulitangan* pieces were captured by the *ICH Igal Video.*

The other Sama-Bajau ritual that I have personally witnessed is the *Pagjamu Bohe' Deya.* This ritual is performed by the *duwata* ritual specialists of the Island of Tabawan. This ritual is offered to the ancestral spirits of the community as well as to the protector spirit of the sacred well found at the centre of the island. It is usually performed once in five-year cycles, at times when the water of the well turns salty or non potable, or when illness or disasters strike the community. In this ritual, only one music piece accompanies all the dances for ordinary men and women as well as the *duwata* ritual specialists. This piece is called *Titik Lenggang*, a fast-paced composition which is strikingly similar to the *Titik Tabawan* of Sitangkai. Dances in the community are named according to the gender of the dancer, that is either *igal denda* (*igal* for women) or *igal lella* (*igal* for men) or according to the property the *pang-igal* (dancer) carries, that is, *igal tumbak* (*igal* with a spear)*, igal kayab* (*igal* with a fan), *igal kalis* (*igal* with a bladed weapon), *igal panyuh*, and so on. Apart from the *Pag-umboh Magpaibahau,* the ritual offering to the new rice which the Sama Tabawan share with the Sama Sitangkai and other communities in Tawi-Tawi Province and the eastern part of Sabah, Malaysia, there are two other rituals in Tabawan which I have yet to witness. One of these is the *Pagjamu Laitan*, the ritual feeding of ancestors done in the shallows of Tabawan Island during low tide.

The other one is the *Pagjamu Entosan,* the ritual feeding of ancestors done in front of the *pandan* leaf press that is owned by the whole community. As these rituals are done in five-year cycles or as needed by the community, quite a huge investment in time, money and effort is needed to sufficiently capture these events. As such, the apparently parachute-type of documentation done by NCCA ICH Team, that is research documentation done in short periods of time in a limited number of visits to the field may be deemed to be insufficient in capturing *igal* dance as embedded in cyclical rituals. There is no mention of the *Pagjamu* rituals of the Island of Tabawan. There is also no mention of the dances found in this particular ritual, as well as the music pieces that figure prominently in this ritual. There is, however, a mention of the ritual of *Magsalba* found in Siasi. Alas, no filming of it or photograph of this ritual is seen in the documentary.

Given the absence of examples of *igal* as embedded in ritual, the *ICH Igal*

Video may be deemed to have 'failed in documenting this most important category of *igal*' as an example of intangible cultural heritage.

Misunderstanding Movement, Music, and Costumes

Shortly after her discourse on "slight differences," Delasas talks about what constitutes *kamanisan igal* or beautiful *igal*. At the time marker of 5:49, she mentions that in *igal* performances, the dancers move "against the music." She adds that "the fastest (sic) is the music, the slower is (sic) the movement." This description is quite disconcerting and quite confusing. First of all, if the tempo of the music is used for the basis of slowing down, then one still moves with the music. It can never be "against it." What happens here is that when the music accelerates in tempo, the dancer decelerates the execution of movement. Instead of finishing a movement motif in four counts, one extends this to eight, sixteen counts or more. The dancer still dances to the music! An opposite relationship can be observed. It is still a relationship that pegs the movement to the music, and never against it. Secondly, this description fits the aesthetics of the Tausug *pangalay* rather than the Sama-Bajau *igal* traditions where a fairly consistent one-to-one correspondence with music and movement can be observed (See: Santamaria, 2017, Santamaria, 2019, Abdul Hamid Chan, Hafzan Zannie Hamza & M.A. Santaella, 2015).

At the around time marker of 6:45, the discussion appears to pick up and start to become very interesting. Delasas starts talking about movement. Rightly so, she says that the traditional *igal* is not choreographed, that the movements are "not repeated" (an observation which is not entirely correct), that they appear to be "random" (well, they indeed appear random to the observer, but are actually quite intentional to the *pangigal* dancer), and that the movements "come out from your heart…from your mind" (entirely, no argument with this poetics as all improvisational forms come from the heart or the mind). She then starts describing movements in the Sinama language "*pasuron jin ni baran nu*" and then "*paluwas nu ya ma tangan nu*" (move your hands inward and then move them outwards). She demonstrates movements called *angolles* or *kelloh* (outward rotation of the palm) and *kollek* (inward rotation of the palm). However, she does not call them by name. I would have expected a local dance master to have compiled, at least from her immediate community the "movement vocabulary" or labels of the specific movement of the *igal* dance tradition. At the marker of 12:23 and onwards, the sideward movement of the feet is shown. Its name, *ingsud-ingsud* (aka *hengsod-hengsod*) which portrays the movement of the sea snail, however, is most unfortunately omitted. Scholars of *igal* have already started to compile local labels for movement units. (See: Santamaria, 2013; Mohd Anis Md Nor, 2021). Most unfortunately this documentary does not even skim the surface of this rich area of inquiry.

At the time marker of 17:23, Delasas correctly explains that "traditionally, a good dancer, the real *igal* dancer will never start the movements for as long as the music is not good to the ears." The documentary film immediately shows *kulintangan* (a.k.a *tagungguan*) ensemble playing. In this case, the ensemble only features a single *agung*, an acceptable minimum to instrumentation accompanying the *igal*. However,

noticeably absent is the extra *ostinato* at the highest pitched gong in the *kulintangan* instrument. This is called the *solembat* or *tungtung,* which may be struck by one or two sticks by the player. Delasas does not mention the *solembat* or *tungtung* which provides an extra layer of rhythmic patterns or "drone" to ensemble playing. She however mentions the *agung* and the desirable instrumentation of three hanging gongs. She likewise does not mention their names which are the *agung* which is a large gong with a wide rim, the *bua* which is a large gong with a narrow rim, and the *pulakan* which is a medium-sized gong with a wide rim. She also gestures with her hands as if playing a *gendang*, which is a double headed drum associated with the Tausug and not the Sama-Bajau whose *kulintangan* esemble instead features a single headed *tambul* drum. This hybridity or confusion is left unexplained in the documentary, despite the availability of the seminal works by Martenot and Maceda (1980) that mapped out the variants of the *kulintangan* ensembles in the Sulu-Sulawesi area. Perhaps, Delasas' mixed Sama and Tausug lineages may account for this confusion or liberal crossings in musical traditions.

Liberal crossings in dance traditions are likewise shown in the costumes worn by the performers filmed in this documentary. At times, the women including Delasas are seen wearing the Tausug *biyatawi* (aka *bitawi*) blouse while the men sport the *baju lapi* (Chinese collared-shirt) featuring an unbuttoned asymmetrical-cut placket, which is likewise associated with the Tausug and not with the Sama-Bajau groups. It is quite unsurprising that a question was posted in the comments section of the YouTube video asking: "Sorry asking why the costume looks like a suluk costume?" The commentator is befuddled by this strange and unexplained mix as this writer. Traditional Sama-Bajau costumes for women consist of either a long-sleeved blouse called *sablay* or a short-sleeved blouse called *sambra,* which is worn with a *tadjung* tubular skirt. Another *tadjung* may be folded over several times and then worn over one shoulder as a decorative piece, which is also called a *sablay.* Sama-Bajau men wear a *badju lapi* shirt sporting a Chinese-style collar with a closed or buttoned placket. For pants, they wear a *sawwal kantiu*. At several instances, Delasas is seen wearing a yellow and green, top, and bottom combination. These colors are associated with the *igal djin denda* or female spirit mediums of Sitangkai (See: Clifford Sather, 1997, pp. 302 and 307). The film is mute about this association and it appears that these colors are randomly linked by the makers of film with any Sama Dilaut *igal* dances, thus showing no distinction between secular and sacred contexts in performance.

Based on what has been presented in the film, I can say that the creators have missed the opportunity to identify specific movements and show how their labels connect to the natural environment of the people. It has not been able to present the diversity of instrumentation and musical pieces across Sama-Bajau communities. It has also failed to discuss how traditional garments or costumes vary across ethno-linguistic communities in the Tawi-Tawi Archipelago.

No *Igal* dancing in *Lami-Lamian* Merry-Making

Another context where *igal* dancing may be observed that ought to have been captured by the ICH *Igal* is the *lami-lamian,* literally a merry-making event held during

weddings and other important festivities. Three types of *igal* recognizable according to musical accompaniment may be observed in *lami-lamian* evenings: (a) *igal* accompanied by a *kulintangan* ensemble; (b) *igal* accompanied by a gabbang (bamboo xylophone) or a vocalist singing to gabbang music, which is called the *pagsangbay* (aka *sangbay or sangbayan*) or *igal* accompanied by a *gabbang* player with or without a vocalist; and (c) *sangbaian pangigalan* or *igal* accompanied by a vocalist singing to music played on an electronic organ or synthesiser.

Secular *igal* performances accompanied by a *kulintangan* (a.k.a *tagungguan*) ensemble have been well documented by Martenot and Maceda (1980) wherein two pieces stand out. The first and most popular dance is *Igal Tabawan,* which is accompanied by a music piece of the same name called *Titik Tabawan*. This is a dance favored by women but otherwise can also be danced by men during *lami-lamian* evenings leading to the *pagsandang* (presentation night of the bride and the groom) held at the evening of Sama-Bajau weddings. The piece is danced to a music of relatively fast pace. Properties such as the *bola'-bola'* wooden or bamboo clappers as well as *sulakengkeng* (aka *salingkuku* or *janggay* in Tausug) may be used by women in this dance. The second dance is called *Igal Tarirai,* which is accompanied by a music piece of the same name called *Titik Tarirai*. The music features syncopation and slight pauses which are interpreted kinetically by the dancer through the exaggerated jerking of the shoulders (*kidjut*), stamping of the feet (*tandak*), an accented raising of a leg (*sintak*), or tip-toeing on two feet (*engke*) (See: Santamaria, 2019). Both dances are highly improvisational and rely on individual dancers to show off their personal styles while sticking to the acceptable kinetic vocabulary of the *igal* dance tradition. I have seen various renditions of these two dances accompanied by the *kulintangan* ensemble in wedding and public events in Sitangkai Island and Tabawan Island, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines and in Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia. Sadly, these two dances have given way to a more contemporary form of *igal* accompanied by vocalists singing to electric organs or synthesizers. The *kulintangan* ensemble has become a rarity in *lami-lamian* merry-making evenings.

The *pagsangbay* originated as a particular style of singing that accompanies the *Dalling-Dalling* dance, a choreographic piece associated with the Tausug *Pangalay* Master Albani that reached its heyday in the 1930s through the immediate postwar period (See: Ricardo Trimillos III, 1972, p.117). The Sama-Bajau adopted this genre using their own language in their original compositions. The *pagsangbay* which is categorised under the *paggabbang* musical tradition is hauntingly captured in H. Arlo Nimmo's (1994) novel titled "*Songs of Salanda*." I have personally seen *igal* accompanied by the *gabbang* as well as by the *pagsangbay* on two occasions in Semporna, Malaysia. The first one was in 2013 during the Regata Lepa Festival performances. In a performance titled "Lolai," three ladies from Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia, presented a group dance, featuring a singer accompanied by a *gabbang* and a *biula*, a native violin. The second one involves several pieces featured in the Kulintangan and Gabbang Competition Festival held on the 19th to 22th June 2022, also in Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia. The event was sponsored by the Southeast Asia Music, Education and Research Exchange (SEAMEX), an organisation based in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. The playing of the *gabbang* for the purpose of accompanying an *igal* dance performance has become very rare.

The *sangbaian pangigalan* is currently the dominant mode of vocal music accompanied by an electronic organ or synthesiser combined with a contemporary form of *igal* dancing called *igal pakiring*. Bernard Ellorin (2011) cites the following conditions in the southern Philippines that led to this shift in instrumentation:

> As a region historically known for its political instability, the Philippine-Sama musical instrument manufacturers, musicians, and singers work abroad. Because musicians are required for celebratory occasions, Sama musicians remaining in the Philippines have found affordable means to supply their community's demands for performances of traditional and contemporary music. Hiring musicians using the [electronic keyboard] is affordable for low-income families because it requires compensation of three performers as opposed to compensating the entire traditional five-musician gong ensemble. [Hence the electronic keyboard has largely replaced music of the traditional *kulintangan* gong chime and the *gabbang* bamboo xylophone.] (p. 74, emphasis mine)

I have attended a *pagsandang* or presentation of the bride and groom to the public in Sitangkai, Tawi-Tawi Province, Philippines in May 2005 and November 2007. On both occasions, I have observed singers standing behind or next to synthesisers or electronic organ keyboards towards the side of the *pagsandang* stage (Santamaria, 2010, p. 170). Their songs describe the dancers, honoured guests and even the event itself. Sometime in October 2012 during a visit to the *kampung ayer* or water village of Bangau-Bangau in Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia, I find myself being pushed on stage dancing to an improvised *sangbaian pangigalan* following the tune of a song titled "*Lolai Loloh*." As my Sinama is very poor, I was unable to interact with the famous singer named Jenes, who according to my hosts described my movements and even introduced my credentials as a scholar "from the Asian Center, University of the Philippines" (See: Santamaria, 2014, pp 1-3). This interaction between the *penyanyi* (singer) and *pangigal* (*igal* dancer) is a core feature of this genre of music and dance. The *igal pakiring* that is usually performed in these kinds of events is rather flirtatious, characterised by side-to-side leaning of the torso (*pakiring-kiring*), swaying of the hips (*kembot-kembot*), and jerking of the shoulders (*kidjut-kidjut*). This genre of *igal* is what I call "social *igal*" (Santamaria, 2012b). Like in any other social dance, dancing between the opposite sexes is often seen but not in the rigid norm as dancing between or among women, or between or among men. Dancing among "*bantut*" or transgender men may also be seen.

It is again most unfortunate that the ICH *Igal* Video is unable to capture the category of social *igal* as well as the context of its performance. The character of *igal* movement vocabulary changes as the instrumentation or accompanying music changes. Featuring his transformative character of *igal* would have underscored the dynamism of the living tradition. Luckily, its absence in the ICH *Igal* Video is made up for by thousands of uploads in YouTube for those who wish to see representations of this genre. Capturing social *igal* in its embedded sites of performance would have illustrated the great diversity of individual styles that exhibit creativity and artistic liberalism while staying within the traditional conventions of *igal* vocabulary and kinaesthetics. The sites of social *igal* are sites of enculturation, where Sama-Bajau

young men and women are exposed to *igal* dancing, and where they learn via personal experimentation and mimesis. The site also permits allowable forms of socialisation between members of opposite two sexes, a place of meeting potential partners in life where limited physical contact actually occurs. One example of permitted socialisation, in this case, allowable physical contact between opposite sexes can be seen in the practice called *panji-panji* or *sabud-sabud,* where admirers may place folded bills in between the fingers of the *pangigal* dancers during performance. Again, the ICH *Igal* Video as a documentary film with an intended global audience has failed to capture this important dimension of the *igal* dance tradition.

Theatrical *Igal*: A Staged and Dis-embedded Context

What was captured by the ICH *Igal* Video? To recapitulate, the ICH Video did not capture *igal* in a ritual context. It also did not capture *igal* in a social context. What it captured is theatrical *igal* in a staged context. "Theatre" comes from the Greek word théatron, which means something that is meant "for viewing." I therefore refer to "theatrical *igal*" as something that is primarily choreographed or arranged for viewing (See: Santamaria, 2012b). Theatrical *igal* has a "performance context" as well as a site. This can be a school performance in a classroom or a basketball court, a commercial performance in a theatre or auditorium, a free public performance in a field, or even performance done through the streets of a certain municipality, such as the choreographed street dance version of *igal* which was captured by the ICH *Igal* Video in Simunul Island.

Apart from the street dance performance context, the ICH *Igal* Video does not capture any organic performance context of theatrical *igal*. Capturing the performance context as well as the organic site of theatrical *igal* is important because aspects of choreography and aesthetics as well as audience-performer dynamics may be seen to change depending on the context. ICH *Igal* Video is only able to capture what it commissioned to be performed in an empty dock or pier, an empty space fronting what appears to be a *masjid*, or an immobile reproduction of a *lepa-lepa* houseboat. None of these show organic spaces of real performances with specific contexts. Instead, they were staged for the production of the ICH *Igal* Video. The scenes are not able to capture reality as it existed. They are instead directed scenes of choreographed dances for film.

I must emphasise at this juncture that theatrical versions and choreographies of *igal* are also important. They affirm the creativity of local artists who continue to work with the genre as they teach in institutions such as the MSU-TCTO. The renowned choreographer and dance artist, Ligaya Fernando Amilbangsa, is known to have started this practice upon establishing the Tambuli Dance Troupe in the said institution. Mahail "Mark" Hajan and Hadja Sakinur Ain Delasas have followed suit by taking over the directorship of the group after Amilbangsa. What is most apparent to me in the video is that fragments of the repertoire of the Tambuli Dance troupe are what appears to have been captured by the ICH Igal Video documentary as produced by the NCCA ICH Team.

The Tambuli Dance Troupe repertoire includes several dances that may be found in the video. *Igal Linggisan* is a mimetic dance featuring the flight of the frigate

bird (*Fregata ariel*). *Igal Tabawan Bola' Bola'* is an *igal* dance featuring bamboo clappers danced to Titik Tabawan.

Igal Kabkab is *igal* danced with a fan. The version with a *kabkab* or fan on the right hand and *sulakengkeng* or ornamental nail extenders on the left hand is a version particularly associated with Delasas. *Mag-ambit* renders in pantomime a traditional fishing technique of the Sama Dilaut. *Igal Tarirai*, wrongly referred to by Delasas as a "courtship dance" also features the use of the bola'-bola' and an abrupt raising of a foot during a brief pause in the music. I have already discussed this theatrical version of Tambuli Dance Troupe as quite different from the practitioners of Sibutu and Sitangkai Island, where the dance supposedly originates (See: Santamaria, 2019). It is most unfortunate that all of the above are not properly identified and labelled in the narration and the subtitles of the documentary film.

Different Categories of *Igal*, Endangerment and Sustainability

In the second section of this work, I have briefly described the great diversity in terms of movement and music found among the different *igal* dance traditions in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi Archipelagoes. I have also emphasised that in terms of music-movement relationship as well as kinaesthetics, a great difference can be observed between the Sama *igal* and the Tausug *pangalay* traditions. In this section, I would like to discuss the diverse characteristics of *igal* as found among the different categories and relate it to the idea of endangerment.

Endangerment directly relates to the idea of the rarity of the performance and the type of performer. Table 1 below shows that ritual *igal* requires it to be performed by ritual specialists or spirit mediums. Since the main audience for such performances are ancestors and other spirits, the ritual *igal* cannot simply be performed by anybody. Otherwise, *busong* or curses in the form of ailment or even death are believed to be incurred. The time of performance must also be determined by ritual specialists who choose from certain auspicious dates of the year, usually occurring during the full moon. Other restrictions such as, among others, some distance from the time of death of a fellow ritual specialist are known to be observed by the *igal djin* of Sitangkai. As such, the performance of the ritual *igal* may be considered to be rather rare and may be given a valuation of "3."

In contrast to ritual *igal*, the performance of social *igal* is fairly regular or frequent. Social *igal* dancing may be observed in wedding celebrations and other festivities. These are normally scheduled during full moons or during the nights leading to the full moon. In such gatherings, there is a very porous line between the performers and the audience. Individuals at one time become performers and at other times become members of the audience. This type of inter-activity may be observed in many social occasions. In this vein, social *igal* is generally fairly regular, and therefore may be given a rarity valuation of "2."

Theatrical *igal* follows no rules in terms of type of performer and auspicious dates. It may be performed by anyone at any time. Even non-members of the community or non-Sama Bajau are welcomed and able to present their individual versions of theatrical *igal*. Whether such performances are deemed to be aesthetically good or not is not my concern in this paper. Rather, I would like to point out that

anyone can study and claim to perform any theatrical *igal* piece without being subjected to religious, cosmological, or social strictures. As such, theatrical *igal* may be deemed to be quite common, and therefore it may be given a rarity valuation of "1."

Table 1

Category of Igal and Rarity of Performance

Category of Igal	**Performer**	**Audience**	**Times (Frequency) of Performance**	**Rarity Valuation**
Ritual *Igal*	Ritual Specialist	Mainly for Ancestors other Spirits	Determined Dates (Infrequent)	Rare to Very Rare (3)
Social *Igal*	Members of the Community	Members of the Community, Interactive Audience	Auspicious Dates, Full Moon (Somewhat Frequent)	Regular, Expected (2)
Theatrical *Igal*	Members and Non-Members of the Community	Non-active, Viewing Audience	Any Time (Very Frequent)	Common (1)

Given varying degrees of rarity, it would be most sensible for producers, writers, and cinematographers of documentary films to exert greater effort in capturing the rarer categories of *igal*. In this case, their primary goal should be to try to capture ritual *igal* during the rare instances when it is performed. Social *igal* should be the next target, and this should be relatively easy to film as social celebrations often happen every month during the full moon. Theatrical *igal* should therefore come after the two other categories. Most unfortunately, the ICH *Igal* Video is only able to capture the theatrical *igal* category. And again, most unfortunately, except for a few clips of street *igal* in Simunul Island, the ICH *Igal* Video also failed to capture a socially embedded context of a local performance. Instead, it appears that the producers directed scenes with *igal* dancing to be captured via filming at their convenience.

Proceeding from a discussion on rarity, I would now like to propose a definition of "endangerment" in the context of performance, specifically dance performance. For this purpose, I would like to adopt the definition "endangerment" from the UNESCO statement on "Language Vitality and Endangerment" (hereinafter, UNESCO Statement) produced by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages (2003). As such, with slight modifications, I define performance endangerment as follows:

> A performance tradition, form, genre, subgenre, or particular piece is *endangered* when it is on a path toward extinction. Without 'adequate documentation,' a performance tradition that is extinct can never be revived.

> A performance tradition, form, genre, subgenre, or particular piece is in danger when its practitioners cease to perform it, perform it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. That is, there are no new practitioners, adults, or children.

Like the writers of the UNESCO Statement, I place great importance on "adequate documentation" as such a process may be used to attempt to revive or to recreate performance traditions that may have gone extinct. I also place great importance on the variable frequency of performances given a certain definite time period such as within a month or within a year as well as on the variable of transmission to the next generation of performers. Given these considerations, I propose to adopt from the said statement a matrix for the assessment of endangerment for performance as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Valuation Matrix for Assessing Performance Endangerment

Degree of Endangerment	**Grade**	**Performer Population**
safe	5	The performance genre, subgenre or particular piece is performed by all ages, from children up.
unsafe	4	The performance genre, subgenre or particular piece is performed by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
definitively endangered	3	The performance genre or subgenre or particular piece is performed mostly by the parental generation and up.
severely endangered	2	The performance genre or subgenre or particular piece is performed mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
critically endangered	1	The performance genre or subgenre or particular piece is performed mostly by very few practitioners, of great-grandparents generation.
extinct	0	There exists no performer.

The usefulness of the valuation devised above can be observed in the specific indicators of endangerment which can either be pegged onto the type of population in terms of the observable range of age of the performers. This may also be modified to

be mainly based on the "frequency of performance" or "rarity of performance" which can likewise be assigned an "adjectival value" or "numerical value."

Further developing the model adopted from the UNESCO Statement, I have devised another matrix as indicated in Table 3 in order to relate categories of *igal* to degrees of endangerment as well as other variables such as audience and significance to the people or owners of the so-called intangible cultural property. Here we will see that ritual *igal* is linked to the cosmology of the people which is undergoing fast change due to conversion to Islam. This category of *igal* is mainly concerned with ancestors or other denizens of the spirit world. This belief often conflicts with Islam, which is gaining converts among many Sama-Bajau communities. *Pag-omboh* rituals are giving way to this process of religious conversion. In fact, some Sama-Bajau believers of Islam consider *pag-omboh* rituals, where *igal* trance dancing and kulintangan music- making figures prominently, to be "un-Islamic." I have already noted the apparently unsustainable replacement rate of *igal djin* spirit mediums in Sintangkai Island who are mostly in their 60s (Santamaria, 2018). As such, ritual *igal* a rating of "2" or "severely endangered" in terms of degree of endangerment.

Social *igal* play an important role in the socialisation functions among members of Sama-Bajau society or communities. As a category, it cannot be immediately rated by itself as a whole. Instead, forms of social *igal* that may be distinguished according to the accompanying music constitute subgenres all their own. As already mentioned earlier, among the subgenres, *igal* accompanied by the *gabbang* or what may be called *pagsangbay-igal* has become very rare. Instrument makers have become fewer through the years. Also, very few members of the older generation of *penitik* or gabbang players have passed on the skill to the next generation, as such this genre of interactive performance among *penitik*, *penyanyi* (singers) and *pangigal* (*igal* dancers) may also be given a rating of "2" or "severely endangered." The other subgenre in this category is social *igal* accompanied by a *kulintangan* ensemble. Although production of instruments has declined in the Sulu and Tawi-Tawi Provinces, the Meranaw of Tugaya, Lanao del Sur as well as the Rungus of Kudat, Sabah, Malaysia still produces gongs for this ensemble. The main threat comes from economic considerations, as already mentioned by Ellorin (2011, p. 74), as well as a change in taste for music accompanying *igal* performances among the members of the younger generation. With these conditions, this subgenre is given an endangerment rating of "3" or "definitively endangered." The subgenre of social *igal* that is nearly hegemonic and most popular with nearly everyone is *igal pakiring* accompanied by the electronic organ or synthesiser. This is given an endangerment rating of "5" or "safe." The last category is theatrical *igal*. This category is sustained mainly through dance troupes many of which are school organisations. Theatrical *igal* is important in its function in creatively and artistic content. It also has a commercial function as found in the numerous productions of CD and DVD recordings of Sama-Bajau artists, many of whom are based in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. This category is generally doing very well in terms of production and consumption, and as such may be given an endangerment valuation of "5" or "safe."

Table 3

Categories of Igal, Degrees of Endangerment and Other Variables

Category	Significance	Audience	Degree of Endangerment	Source of Endangerment
Ritual Igal	Cosmological	Spirit World: *omboh*, *djin* and other spirits	Severely Endangered (2)	Ageing Practitioners Religion Change
Social Igal: ***Pagsangbay / Gabbang***			Severely Endangered (2)	Ageing Practitioners Economic considerations Decline in instrument producers Change in Taste
Social Igal: ***Kulintangan* Ensemble**	Socialisation Function	Performers = Audience	Definitively Endangered (3)	Ageing Practitioners Economic considerations Decline in instrument producers Change in Taste
Social Igal: **Electronic Organ**			Safe (5)	None
Theatrical Igal	Artistic Expression and Market Value as "Content"	Strictly Non-Performing Audience	Safe (5)	None

As implied in the UNESCO Statement, documentation is the very foundation of crafting strategies or policies for sustaining intangible cultural property. As resources are finite, the process of documentation must prioritise what needs to be immediately captured in film and sound recordings. In order to achieve this goal in a rational manner, a system of "valuation" or "evaluation" must be followed based on instruments that allows for comparison and ranking. I believe that the matrix present above is a step towards the development of this kind of protocol that can guide future endeavours and processes of documentation.

Conclusion

Intangible cultural heritage is not a monolithic entity. More often than not, it is made up of categories and subcategories that reflect the complexity of the socio-cultural reality of communities from which such cultural properties emerged. The Sama-Bajau *igal* dance tradition(s), and please note the implication of the pluralization in parentheses, veritably show(s) this complexity. Within *igal* as an overarching tradition and label for a particular dance practice, at least three major categories may be observed. In this piece, I identify the following categories: ritual *igal*, social *igal* and theatrical *igal*. I have shown that each category exhibits variations in terms of rarity of performance and endangerment. Under the category of social *igal*, three sub-categories based on musical accompaniment and performance can be further identified. These are: *igal* accompanied by the *pagsangbay* (vocal music with *gabbang* instrumentation), *igal* accompanied by a *kulintangan* ensemble, and *igal* accompanied by *sangbaian pangigalan* (vocal music with electronic organ or synthesiser). Again, each of these categories exhibit varying degrees of rarity and endangerment.

By understanding the existence of categories within a single tradition or intangible cultural heritage and their corollary degrees of rarity and endangerment, producers of documentary film will be able to decide whether or not to cast the widest net possible, that is, to attempt to capture all types of categories, or to target specific categories that may be deemed to be the rarest or the most endangered. Such a decision cannot be done without proper knowledge of the intangible cultural heritage found in the field. In the case of the *igal* dance tradition as captured in the ICH *Igal* Video, the casting of the net is not at all wide. It is also unable to reach a certain depth in knowledge production. The ICH *Igal* Video is only able to capture the theatrical *igal* category. And again, most unfortunately, except for a few clips of street *igal* in Simunul Island, the ICH *Igal* Video is also unable to capture the socially embedded context of a local theatrical performance likewise. Instead, it appears that the producers directed scenes with *igal* dancing to be captured via filming at their own convenience.

This NCCA ICH Team that produced this video could have avoided this failure by following good research protocols. First, the team should have reviewed the literature on *igal* that has been published both in the Philippines and elsewhere in order to learn more about ritual and performance. As the references of this piece indicate, much has already been published on the *igal* dance tradition in both the

Philippines and Malaysia. Second, it should have gone to different sites where different manifestations of the *igal* dance can be observed. Limiting field work to provincial capitals like that of the Municipality of Bongao and the nearby Municipality of Simunul severely constricts the range of *igal* categories and styles that may be observed. Finally, reliance on a few dance informants (three actual practitioners in the ICH *Igal* Video), also does not paint a full picture of the *igal* dance tradition as an *intangible* cultural heritage. It not only tends to cultivate hegemonic views of experts at the regional centres, but it also renders mute the multiple voices and views on one of the most diverse performance traditions found in maritime Southeast Asia.

Endnotes

[1]Like many other Asian performance forms, *igal* often combines the artistic expressions of poetry, song, musical accompaniment, and aesthetic movement. In its ritual forms, *igal* combines movement with prayers, ancestral admonition, and other utterances that makes for a most rarefied performative expression.

[2]My first foray in the field was made possible through a Faculty Merit Grant from the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC), Ateneo de Manila University. Accompanying me in the field sites of Tawi-Tawi were Dr. Cynthia Neri Zayas, a Maritime Anthropologist based at the Center for International Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman; Dr. Adelina Amparo Umali III, a Performance Studies and Japanese Literature Expert also based at the CIS, UP Dilman; and Ms. Marta Lovina Prieto, an Independent Scholar and Documentation Specialist. In the field, Hadji Yusup Malabong, Hadji Musa Malabong and Hamka Malabong served as our co-researchers. I produced a draft monograph titled "Capturing Pangalay." It served as my terminal report fopr the IPC grant. This fieldwork experience helped me in forming my views on the difference of the Tausug *pangalay* and the Sama-Bajau *igal* dance tradition.

[3]In most of my works, I adopt Pallesen's Sama-Bajau label (originally Sama-Bajaw) to refer to the wide linguistic sub-family of the Sama or Sinama-speakings peoples which include the Christianized Abaknon of Northerwestern Samar and the Yakan people, who have since dropped the "Sama" appellation.

[4]The *pamansak* is also called *pansak*. This label can also be observed among the Sama Siasi and the Sama Bangingi (aka Balanguingui). The Yakan is actually a Sama or Sinama-speaking group based mainly in the Island of Basilan. I believe that the terms *pamansak* and *pansak* are related to the Indonesian labels of pencak (as in the martial arts form of *pencak silat*) and *mancak.* Some sources state that the term may have come from the Sanskrit *panca,* meaning "five" (perhaps, for five basic postures) or the Chinese *pencha* or *pungcha* which means to parry, deflect or to strike.

[5]I have already discussed this very close and inextricable relationship between *igal* dances and their corresponding *kulintangan* music(s) or *titik* accompaniment in a chapter of mine titled "Necessary Reunions" in Mohd Anis Md Nor and Kendra Stepputat (2017).

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Biography

MCM (Matthew Constancio Maglana) Santamaria is a professor of Asian and Philippine Studies at the Asian Center, University of the Philippines Diliman. He received his Doctor of Law in Political Science from the Kyoto University Graduate School of Law in 1999. He is currently the assistant dean for cultural affairs of the Asian Center. He has published many book chapters, articles, and essays on the themes of ethnic conflict, Sama-Bajau ethnography, ritual and performance, and dance studies. He is also a renowned theater choreographer who pursues his advocacy in helping sustain Sama-Bajau traditional music and dance through the Bunga Arts Link (BAL), a performance group that he established in 2004.

Postcolonial Predicaments in Malaysian Theatre: The Work of Ghulam Sarwar Yousof, Krishen Jit, and Faridah Merican

Kathy Foley
University of California Santa Cruz, USA
e-mail: kfoley@ucsc.edu

Abstract

Choices by Anglophone educated artists in developing Malaysian Theatre from the 1970s have defined three major directions that persist in theatre education, writing, and production: (a) a heritage, scholarly, and literary focus exemplified by scholar-writer Ghulam Sawar Yousof working from a University platform; (b) performance as socio-political critique exemplified by director Krishen Jit who began in academia but manifested his political activism in journalism collective creations at Five Arts Centre in Kuala Lumpur and beyond; and (c) urban professional repertory producing as exemplified by Faridah Merican whose economic realism and fund raising as a producer-actress-director at KLPac (Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre) helped develop a repertory model for developing contemporary Malaysian Theatre in Kuala Lumpur and Penang. The current generation of theatre leaders carry forward the hybridity forged by these three ethnic "outsiders"—all Malaysians of South Asian descent. These artists developed the postcolonial model of urban and academic theatres that persist to the present.

Keywords: Faridah Merican, Five Arts Centre, Ghulam Sarwar Yousof, Krishen Jit, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, Malaysian postcolonial theatre

Introduction

The Malaysian transition from a colonial to postcolonial theatre is exemplified by the work of three major figures, all born in 1939 and all Malaysians of Indian descent who came of age in the Anglophone educational system and urban middle class in the 1940s to the1960s, and who helped forge the post-colonial models of theatre practice and its dissemination in higher education from the 1970s to the1990s. Their influence looms large to the present: as scholars, directors, actors, and writers these figures helped mould the Malaysian theatre landscape in both Penang and Kuala Lumpur where much of the theatrical activity is still concentrated and where perhaps ironically Anglophone theatre still persists in part due to their use of this language medium.

Ghulam Sarwar Yousof (1939-2022), Krishen Jit (1939-2005), and Faridah Merican (1939-)[1] have impacted theatre performance in diverse ways. I will use Ghulam Sarwar Yousof as a model of heritage and scholarly research in performing arts in the university sphere. While his first interest was literature, his attention to indigenous traditions tried to mend the fissure of colonial disruption to help

"tradition" extend and reinvent local performance. Krishen Jit, best known as a director, remains an exemplar of a critical postmodern not-for-profit theatre that, while aware of and sometimes dipping into indigenous roots, used drama as a forum for socio-political-intercultural debate. Faridah Merican, producer, actress, and director, sees theatre as a site where artists of all ethnicities, ages, and inclinations can potentially share the stage. While the former two found early homes in the university system, Faridah's sphere, until recently, was in media and advertising with strict attention to the economics and fundraising that are part of the arts in capitalist cultures. This paper will begin with Ghulam Sarwar Yousof's attention to heritage, move to Krishen Jit's theatre of socio-political critique, and end with Faridah Merican's creative space making.

Ghulam Sarwar Yousof: Reinventing Traditions and Heritage Building

Ghulam Sarwar Yousof [hereafter Ghulam] made primary impact on theatre as a scholar and professor teaching at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM, 1970-2002), Akademi Seni Kebangsaan (ASK, National Arts academy), International Islamic University Malaysia (2009-2014), and Universiti Malaya (UM, 2014-2022).[2] As the son of a Penang textile merchant of Punjabi origin, Ghulam took his BA at Universiti Malaya in 1964 where he was involved in the drama society LIDRA. After graduation he planned to do an MA in what was then called "third world" Anglophone literature. But before he began graduate work, he was hired in 1969 to teach part-time at USM while working in his father's business.

Humanities scholarship in post-independence Malaysia was undergoing a postcolonial revisioning. The Eurocentric focus of the British colonial educational system was being questioned as former colonial subjects sought independent identity. Literature, even in the western academy, was being rethought with inclusion of oral traditions and performance studies. Asia's intricate theatres—India, Japan, China, and Indonesia—were now being studied with enthusiasm in the western academy. European modern drama with its textual primacy and realistic acting/staging was being challenged by models of Brecht, Grotowski, and guerrilla theatre. Were such new approaches—performance and cultural studies methods, which rethought storytelling, theatre, and dance—apt for independent Malaysia? Had heritage forms already been quashed, or might they serve as postcolonial models? Ghulam, heretofore educated in an Anglophone environment of literary written texts, was minimally acquainted with theatre *qua* performance. When Vice Chancellor Hamzah Sendut invited Ghulam to found a performing art programme at USM, Ghulam responded, "What the hell is performing arts?" However, as he took his students to Kedah and Perlis to do field work on indigenous theatres, noting ritual openings, trance connections, and mythic narratives, he rethought what theatre meant. (Ghulam Sawar Yousof, personal communication, June 6, 2014).

Ghulam and the department's direction were affected by the political situation. In the Cold War era, the U.S. competed with the U.S.S.R. to win Southeast Asian hearts and minds. The "soft power" of educational funding was being deployed by the U.S. to leverage influence.[3] The Marxist vs. Western democracy/capitalism

rivalry had shifted from East Asian hotspots—China in the 1940s and Korea in the 1950s—to focus on Southeast Asia by the 1960s and 1970s, as the Southeast Asian War expanded. A generation of Americans who served in the Pacific theatre in WWII and the Korean war, had returned to American universities to study on the G. I. Bill. Many focused on the Asia-Pacific cultures they had encountered while in the military and then taught at the tertiary level. By the 1960s these newly minted professors were establishing programmes that expanded literature and arts studies beyond the western canon. Emerging programmes in ethnomusicology, dance ethnology, and Asian theatre were established in American universities where area studies funding grants from the U. S. government was available, including the University of Hawai'i and the University of Michigan. Scholarships were readily granted for supporting promising students and academics from Southeast Asia, the American Congress hoped such students might rise to leadership positions and influence "third world" nations to favour western democracy and capitalist enterprise.

Influential figures for USM included Robert Van Neil (1922-2012) of Dutch descent, who had served in the Philippines in WWII and then studied in Indonesia (see Van Neil, 2012), and James R. Brandon (1927-2015), who served in Japan during the Korean War and then served as a cultural officer at the US embassy in Jakarta before conducting research on Japanese and Southeast Asian theatre (see Jortner & Foley, 2011). Each would become important for Ghulam. In 1967 Van Neil, by then a Southeast Asian history professor at the University of Hawaii, had applied to the U.S. Commission on International and Cultural Affairs for funding, submitting a "Proposal for Training Indonesian Historians" (Van Neil, 2012). Indonesia was still in the chaos of the Sukarno-Suharto transition that resulted in the mass killings of perhaps half a million so-called "communists." Yet, Van Neil's idea of implementing a humanities curriculum that included art, drama, and journalism interested government offices in Washington that were dealing with Southeast Asia. The model was likewise welcomed by Malaysian academic leaders at the newly founded USM (1969), since it offered a postcolonial approach which highlighted local culture and creativity, promising a break with the British system and its subaltern thinking.

From 1971 to 1973 Van Neil served as the Foundation Dean of the Humanities School at USM. Ghulam moved into a full-time position with Van Neil's support and was tasked with developing the first formal performing arts program in Malaysian higher education, though, of course, drama had long been an important extra-curricular activity of students at University of Malaya (see discussion of Krishen Jit's work at UM below). Ghulam, as he developed the program, invited practitioners of traditional puppetry (*wayang siam*'s Dalang Hamzah Awang), dance drama (*mak yong*'s star Seri Panggung Khatijah Awang). He would also hire figures from the popular urban improvised theatre (*bangsawan*'s Mak Mina Yem and Pak Ilias), as well as modern icons such as Krishen Jit to advise and teach in a course of study, which mixed courses in indigenous genres with contemporary western experimentation and developing Malaysian modern scripted drama. James Brandon, then head of the Asian Theatre PhD programme at University of Hawaii was the theatre consultant on Van Neil's USM project: Brandon soon would be Ghulam's PhD advisor. Brandon's student Roger Long, who was still finishing his dissertation on *wayang kulit jawa* for the University of Hawaii, came to teach at USM in 1972

(see Foley 2011). Belgian director Tone Brulin shared European avant garde ideas. The period was marked by a strong flow of arts practitioner-educators between USM and Hawai'i.[4]

Students, it was envisioned, would be prepared to make their own combinations of old and new, rural and urban, to develop new arts which could exemplify the emerging nation. This mixture of indigenous and experimental performance courses would, with time, be exported to other Malaysian tertiary education institutions as graduates of the USM programme (for example, Hatta Azad Khan, Zainal Abdul Latiff, Marion D'Cruz, Rosmina Tahir, etc.) took up faculty positions across the nation. Thus, the American model, prompted by the Cold War use of education in influencing potential allies, helped to advance postcolonial performance education.

A second context for the programme at USM was the National Cultural Policy which dictated focus on Malay culture as central to Malaysian identity. Following the May 13, 1969, riots that pitted Malay Malaysians against Malaysians of Chinese descent, *bumiputra*/indigenous Malays called for economic advancement and affirmative action for Malay Malaysians who, although they were the majority, were economically behind compared to the urban Chinese and Indian Malaysians, many of whose families had immigrated during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. By 1971 social policies were implemented to ensure Malay culture would be the base of national identity. Though the Chinese and Indian Malaysians, as well as mixed race individuals, might have lived multiple generations in the country, these groups were seen as subsidiary.

Thus, in planning for developments in the new programme, Ghulam was responding both as a national citizen and a private individual to both Cold War and national political dynamics that created both opportunities and limitations. Though arguably the "heritage" of arts of ethnically mixed in Penang could have included Chinese *xiqu* (opera) and Fujian hand or iron-rod puppetry and Indian dance forms like the twentieth century revisions of courtesan dance including *bharata Natyam*, *odissi*, and *kathak*), it was primarily Malay forms that were installed as studio classes.[5] In the early 1970s this Malay focus was indeed embraced with enthusiasm by Ghulam along with most Malaysians, regardless of their ethnicity. Place-based arts and nationalist feeling coincided. However, inequities would become clearer with time and even the lack of deep support of the heritage Malay disciplines by some in the government would become apparent. The Islamic revival, which arguably began with the 1979 Iranian revolution, would make the arts a target as Sunni followers increasingly questioned elements like cross-gender representations, women on stage, rituals, and the mythos of traditional stories.

For the programme to advance at USM it required Ghulam to retrain himself. In the colonial era, English was the language of education and government, and immigrant groups from China and India did not need to merge to a full degree linguistically with the Malay majority. But now Malay language and cultural forms were "core." The 1971 National Cultural Policy affirmed non-Malay elements should only be included as they fit with a Malay Islamic centre.[6] Thus, the USM arts programme, led by a Malaysian of Indian heritage would prioritise Malay forms, since government funding often was predicated on the degree of "Malay"-ness.

Reprogramming was a challenge to someone like Ghulam, who came of age when English was the medium of education, bureaucracy, and cross ethnic communication. Ghulam, regarding his lifelong preference for English, wrote in a blog post as late as Sept. 1, 2016:

> I cannot think as effectively in any other language. It is natural for me to use English for the purpose of creative writing . . . My view is that the writer should choose the language he can handle best and all writing by Malaysian writers is Malaysian. (Ghulam, 2016)

But not everyone agreed. Malay poetry, novels, dramas were more likely to garner support and in the 1970s, Ghulam, as all professors, was required to sit for tests in Malay. The medium of instruction shifted from English, to English-Malay bilingualism, and finally Malay for instruction.

Ghulam only encountered *mak yong*, the genre that would become his life-long research specialty, in 1969 at a theatre conference at the University of Malaya.[7] At the same event he met ethnomusicologist William Malm of the University of Michigan who had, in 1968, researched the music of this Kelantanese dance drama. Ghulam, in my interview with him in 2014, noted "Mak Yong did something to me... I felt good vibrations about it" (Ghulam Sawar, personal communication, June 6, 2014). He chose art as his dissertation topic when he entered the PhD programme in Hawaii with funding from the East West Center, an institution established by the U. S. Congress in 1960 to strengthen relations between peoples of Asia, the Pacific, and the United States through scholarships and academic exchange.

Malm had recorded in 1968 ninety hours of *mak yong* performance, and Ghulam would meet him again in Hawaii, where Malm was, in 1973, temporarily a Senior Fellow visiting the East West Center's Cultural Learning Institute. Malm's presence and research materials became the basis of Ghulam's production (1973), a *mak yong* version of *Raja Tangkai Hati*, using the University of Hawai'i (UH) theatre and music students to present this Kelantanese art, with choreography reconstructed from Malm's tapes by UH dance ethnologist Judy van Zile.[8] This was probably the first attempt by a Western cast to do a traditional *mak yong* performance. Later Ghulam would watch all Malm's Kelantan footage in Michigan where Malm had returned; perhaps ironically these American experiences were his first in-depth exposures to the form. Then in 1975-1976 in Kelantan, Ghulam worked with Seri Temenggong Group whose star was Khatijah Awang. Her son served as Ghulam's field assistant, helping him even as he was still learning the Malay language, especially Kelantanese dialect. Thus, Ghulam became an anthropologist of the arts, working to understand Kelantanese rural culture, which differed radically from his multicultural urban Penang. With Ghulam's return to USM in 1976, he would bring Khatijah and Dalang Hamzah to teach *mak yong* and *wayang*, respectively. The department developed training for both students and community members. In 1978 Ghulam helped to organise a Festival of Penang, expanding to include *bangsawan* performance workshops; yet, for Ghulam, this popular improvised theatre lacked the ritual, healing, and mythological connections that made Kelantan's traditional arts so appealing.

In time, Ghulam was doing fieldwork throughout Southeast Asia and guest teaching at the University of the Philippines in Quezon. Over the years his Malay/Thai research covered *wayang gedek, wayang siam, nora chatri* as he wrote on the traditional arts of all areas in the Southeast Asian region (see Ghulam 1994). Additionally, over his career he authored a number of plays (*Suvarna-Padma, The Golden Lotus*, written in 1972, published in 2015; *Halfway Road*, 1982; *The Trial of Hang Tuah the Great*, written in 1983-84, published 2014; *Small Business Loan*, 2001). Yet these are all modern scripted dramas in which language predominates in narratives focused on contemporary political issues of the nation. They do not tap the traditional theatre he focused on as a scholar. Ghulam Sawar noted, "My plays, I think, are quite significant in what they say. And because of what they say they are also considered 'sensitive' in Malaysia" (Ghulam Sawar, personal communication, June 6, 2014). *Halfway Road* could not get police permission to play in Penang—police found a Malay girl as a barmaid disturbing, and that the public felt the title maligned the site (Halfway Road, now Jl. A.S, Mansoor) (Yau & Raheem, 2018, 170). The nuance of a country halfway toward freedom went over the head of the censor. *Trial of Hang Tuah the Great* was suspect in that it accused the ultimate hero of the Malay race for failing the nation. Hang Tuah is charged

> with causing the May 13 riots in Kuala Lumpur in the year 1969; with the subversion of the New Economic Policy . . . being involved in bribery, corruption, and other allied crimes against the country, the Malay race, and their religion. (Ghulam 2014a, p. 95)

The audience is left to decide his guilt/innocence.

In *Suvarna-Padma, The Golden Lotus* (2015) a poet faces a censorious society where creativity is crippled. Literary awards depend on kowtowing to the government officers who want intellectuals to support the "party" and ignore the corruption. These are plays about the cultural politics of contemporary Malaysia. The hero commits suicide rather than play along with the system. He is called Vacha ("speaking clearly" in Sanskrit) and deplores the state of society.

> Vacha: The error they have committed recently. . . From the simplest measures to promote local industries to the largest projects . . . built with European assistance. The exploitation of religion and corruption is so rampant—it's sickening. It's oozing out of the skin of every government official from the highest to the lowest. . . How can I write what the state expects me to? (Ghulam, 2015, pp. 17-18)

For imaginative responses to traditional theatre, one must go to Ghulam's short stories and poetry. Two stories, "Tok Dalang*,"* which presents a puppet master going into trance mid performance, and "Mak Yong Dancer," share fictive versions of experiences Ghulam likely encountered in field research (2014, pp. 156-182, pp. 44-59). For example, the latter story has the narrator, a journalist visiting a somewhat faded *mak yong seri panggung* (probably modelled on Khatijah Awang), hoping to

pry out the secret knowledge that Malay traditional forms claim to hold. The journalist knows the challenge:

> The intense beauty of mak yong, manifested particularly in its dance and music, was unquestionable. Its spiritual side had been hinted to me many times . . .. But no one was prepared to go beyond the basics. Was it at all possible that, at last, through Mak Su I would reach deeper into the soul of mak yong? (Yousof, 2014b, p. 49)

Though he has written on many genres of Southeast Asian theatre, *mak yong* in the style of Khatijah Awang has predominated in curricula he mounted and researched. While he has discussed the links to *main peteri* often, he delves only lightly into the psycho-social outcomes and healing methodologies of the form. Perhaps he encountered more the *lahir* (case) explanations in his fieldwork and not always the *batin* (spirit), as inner knowledge in traditional Southeast Asian genres is usually held only for children of the artist's families and Ghulam, while supportive, was a Malaysian-Indian outsider. Ghulam's writing is strong in describing rituals (in some cases trying to revive faltering practices like the *sembah guru* [respecting the teacher] initiation of a dancer). His photo and video resources are rich, but Ghulam never really trained as a practitioner, and perhaps this limited his perspective. Perhaps a performance ethnologist must enter the form to fully understand the questions that he/she needs to ask. Training allows fundamental analysis of movement, improvisation technique, music, mantra, and full socio-mythic meanings. That he began research as the Islamic revival was threatening the form as "un-Islamic" was a problem. By the 1990s fundamentalism led to the banning of traditional arts in their home area, Kelantan. This situation of threat that the Kelantanese arts have experienced has certainly caused traditionally trained practitioners to self-censor, altering answers where anything might be seen as un-Islamic (*shirk)*. Arts which are already designed to be secret are even harder to research in times when they are perceived as against received religion.

Ghulam's greatest contribution to Malay theatre is his development of a curriculum requiring performing arts students to study heritage dance, drama, and puppetry forms. This model at USM was later exported in part to ASK/ASWARA in Kuala Lumpur, where Ghulam helped form the theatre program in the 1990s, taking with him Dalang Hamzah and Khatijah Awang. UM and other institutions would include heritage classes, too. Ghulam's efforts would result in the two major artists he championed being recognised as National Artists (Seniman Negara)—Hamzah in 1993 (see Ghulam, 1997) and Khatijah in 1999. The 2006 designation of *mak yong* as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO (2006) was due, in Ghulam's estimation, to his work. When culture department officials had failed to write a convincing proposal on first efforts, "They came to ask for help. They hadn't done it properly . . . [I told them] 'Let me do it alone'" (Ghulam Sawar, personal communication, June 6, 2014).[9]

He created the file, chose the performers to present to adjudicators, developed the script, and met with the UNESCO officers. His detailed proposal had a six-year plan for training a new generation and was accepted. It called for the creation of a permanent training centre in Kuala Lumpur, regular conferences, international

touring, etc. Though the designation was achieved, his plan was never implemented. Instead, he noted, the minister gave the funding to ASWARA (where *mak yong* continues to be taught, but sometimes in an adaptation of Disney's *Cinderella*, rather than a traditional *mak yong* narrative). In Ghulam's perspective the government preservation was a failure: "Nothing has happened till now . . . Nothing will happen," he stated (Ghulam Sawar, personal communication, June 6, 2014).

His writing struck a similar note:

> It is likely that existing Malay performing arts will not survive for long. Indeed, it appears as if their fate has already been sealed. They are doomed . . .The problems are the result of the prevailing attitudes, values systems, and the pressures of modernization. . . [T]he future of the traditional Malay performing arts as well as the artists involved in them is at best bleak. (Ghulam, 1992, p. 220)

Ghulam's work ensures that consciousness and focus toward the past is a part of Malaysian theatre training. He also created a valuable archive, where if and when a full revival is sought, rich resources are ready to tap. The short university courses, meeting once a week for some months, cannot create a *dalang* or *seri panggung*. Skill in movement, music, improvisation, and repertoire are too complex to "fit" the adumbrated modern educational format, not to mention the more metaphysical skills of controlling trance, mastering mantra, and detailing ritual offerings. Ghulam's students like Anne James and Marion D'Cruz, both dancer-actors who have helped develop Five Arts Centre and participated in other theatre/dance groups, have only been given a taste—yet they have worked to impart the vision of the significance of traditional arts to their students. Perhaps someone will, using Ghulam's archives, later carry his research to conclusion.

Ghulam was the scholar-chronicler of the theatre of the Malay past. He was an "outsider" who valued and promoted Malay traditional arts and followed where the scholarship led, acknowledging the Javanese and Thai influences rather than stopping at national borders. He protected and preserved local religious insight regarding teacher-student relations and animistic and trance potentials of traditional arts as forms were attacked by religious fundamentalists. He showed the path of championing study of the Malay theatrical past as a conduit to the theatre of a Malaysian future.

Krishen Jit: Exploring Postcolonial Directions

Krishen Jit (1939-2005), trained as a historian, is best remembered as a director and theatre critic whose work navigated postcolonial history's wavering winds.[10] He was born in Kuala Lumpur to a Punjabi family and his first role at eight years was Rama in a 1947 production at Gombak Lane Hindu Temple. He attended The Victoria Institution, a leading secondary school in Kuala Lumpur, where in colonial-era education, drama was part of the programme—since this was then the norm in elite British public schools. As he took up a major in history at the University of Malaya (UM) in 1959, he was doing stage work in the important amateur theatre, Malaysian

Arts Theatre Group (MATG) in Kuala Lumpur. MATG's European members at the time would play the leads, while the Malaysian locals did technical work or carried spears. It was a revolution in casting when Jit played Julius Caesar in 1959, the first Malaysian to play a lead role. Jit, with Tan Jin Khor, founded the University of Malaya Literary and Drama Association (LIDRA) in 1960. Finishing his undergraduate degree, he accepted a 1962 Fulbright Scholarship to do a history MA at University of California Berkeley, entering the campus as the Berkeley Free Speech movement, civil rights, and Vietnam war agitation activism mounted. Brechtian productions, guerilla theatre, and theatre for social change were endemic to American campus life in the 1960s. Jit returned to UM in 1967 to teach history and used his tools of political-cultural analysis in both his acting and directing for MATG and UM's Cultural Centre.

In the wake of the May 13, 1969, incident, Jit joined with other like-minded cultural leaders to demand that drama help redress social and economic inequity in Malaysia's young democracy. At the 1971 National Cultural Congress, he joined with important writers, directors, and actors Syed Alwi, Rahim Razali, and Usman Awang on a statement/paper, "Our Theatre . . . Where Are Your Roots," which

> advocated a theatre practice that thematically drew from local history and culture. It also suggested that theatre practitioners employ traditional theatre to enrich practice, citing Syed Alwi's use of *Wayang Kulit* in the flashback scene of *All the Perfumes* [1968] as an example. The paper criticised the dependency on Western theatre and noted that theatre practice was only accessible to a small English-educated elite. (K. Rowland, as quoted by Luminosita, 2005)

Though himself primarily Anglophone, Jit in this period embraced Malay language and culture. He switched from English to Malay language drama, helping found a bilingual publication (*Seni dan Teater* [Art and Theatre]) for MATG and instituting MATG's multi-lingual performance festival Genta Rasa in Kuala Lumpur in l971. He worked for over a decade in Malay language theatre; Audre Londre's maxim— "the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house . . . they will never enable us to bring about genuine change"—seemed to exemplify his rejection of English as a medium for Malaysian performance in that period. The focus on Malay characters/stories may have hastened his withdrawal from acting—his accent when speaking Malay was pronounced.

The who's who of intellectual Malay playwrights found in Jit a director who brought their scripts to life. He directed major Malay language productions of Usman Awang, Dinsman, and Syed Alwi. Jit was central to the success of Noordin Hassan's plays and wrote about Noordin in international publications, including the works *It Is Not Tall Grass Blown by the Wind* (1970) and *Don't Kill the Butterflies* (1983). In an earlier essay, I argued that Jit's work can be classed as a "people's theatre" of the late twentieth century—socially engaged theatre aimed at empowering audiences to better the world (Foley, 2022). Rather than seeking Aristotelian catharsis, Brechtian theatre wants the viewer to do something and so eschews realism as a mode in hopes that audiences will get to work mending the world. Theatre was for Jit a site of socio-political dissection to get audiences to do something. While Jit sometimes used

elements borrowed from traditional performance, as in Syed Alwi's *Tok Perak* which features a *bomoh* (shaman) type character, the focus in Jit's productions was to construct a dramatic action (often text/plot centric) to make socio-political points about contemporary Malaysian society.

From 1972 to 1994 Jit was Malaysia's foremost theatre critic via the weekly column "Talking Drama with Utih" for *The New Straits Times* (see Rajendran, 2007). The name Utih was borrowed from a character in the play *Uda dan Dara* by Usman Awang. Utih is a wise but quizzical village elder. As an example of Jit's critical style, take a 1986 column where he challenged the arts community:

> I have but one wish this year, and one resolve. I would like to see a play that is engaged with the deep social and political questions of our day… Few theatre people have thought of doing theatre that will cause the audience to sit and stare at themselves. We are living in a decade of entertaining theatre, expensive theatre, professional theatre. All is promise, little has been particularly successful. (Jit, January 19, 1986, as quoted in Rajendran, 2007)

By the 1980s Jit had returned to Anglophone theatre: English, belonging to no specific ethnic group was now for him neutral ground, where all Malaysians could meet without the cultural baggage that the NEP/NEC had wrought. Rising Islamic fundamentalism with heightened censorship of the arts by the 1980s was adding to the obvious inequities of the NEP economic policy of "Malays-first" in academia, government jobs, and, sometimes, corruption. Jit espoused theatre as an open, multilingual, multi-art space where the rising tide of censorship on political, social, and sexual issues should not prevail. Grants to do additional research study interacting with Richard Schechner's Performance Studies programme at New York University made Jit want to keep in contact with developing transnational intercultural work. He networked with modern drama groups throughout Southeast Asia, resulting in his contributions to scholarship on Asian Theatre (see Jit,1993). English helped bridge gaps. With Chin San Sooi, K. S. Maniam, Redza Piyadasa, and Marion D'Cruz, he founded Five Arts Centre in Kuala Lumpur to provide a free space for discussion of the Malaysian postcolonial predicament. Multiculturalism, he felt, was already a natural part of the Malaysian psyche:

> I actually believe that in the case of plural societies such as Malaysian and Singapore, and even certain parts of India, multiculturalism is in one body. We tend to think of it as a negotiation between one body and another, but I actually think it is in one body and in many ways, I have been trying to excavate that in one way or another. (Rajendran, 2012, p. 11)

His Anglophone *1984 Here and Now* presented in 1985 was a particularly hard-hitting statement. This was an adaptation of Orwell's novel by Chinese Malaysian Kee Thuan Chye (1954-), a graduate of USM's performing arts programme who earned his living as a journalist for the *New Straits Times*. Kee had hoped to do graduate work in theatre as USM, but due to the pro-Malay affirmative action policy, the scholarship went to a Malay, who Kee felt was less qualified (T. C. Kee, personal communication, 2013). Ethnicity in this play created the hierarchy.

"The Party" was Malays supporting "Big Brother" (who was meant to represent then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad). "Proles" were the Sino- and Indian-Malaysians.

Kee's play opened with Party members denouncing rock music and dancing as "obscene" and "against our religion" (referring to the censorious environment in the Islamic revival). "Big Brother" states,

> Our war is a war of peace. . .you must put your faith in the party. You must put your faith in God, observe the principles of our religion. You must uphold our culture. Do not let it be shaken by foreign influences. … Party members must unite, one and all with no exceptions. As for the Proles who have made their homes in this nation. . . they must understand that above all else the party members must be kept happy. Party members must not feel threatened or deprived in this land that is rightfully theirs. (as quoted in Rowland, 2015, pp. 38-39)

The performance climaxed as the journalist hero (a stand in for author Kee himself) asked the audience:

> Are you all going to sit here and do nothing? The hope of the nation lies with you! Are you going to sit here and let it go to the dogs? Stand up! . . . Stand up for your freedom, for racial equality and integration, for humanity and justice, for truth, for a nation capable of greatness! . . . You have the power to bring about changes. . . Yes! Yes! Yes! (Kee 1987, p. 70)

In his later career, Jit increasingly directed in Singapore, collaborating with Substation, Wild Rice, and other important groups. Singapore, seeking to promote itself as a global city, was easing up on censorship and sought to establish itself as a cosmopolitan centre through sponsorship of the arts with growing intellectual freedom and English as an international language. This was at a period when Malaysian censors were clamping down, and Jit had retired from UM. One of Jit's mentees Mark Teh credits Jit with:

> making some very clear and self-conscious moves…casting actors against their given ethnic and gender identities, using multilinguality in performances, experimenting with devised and visual performance…

> I always felt that Krishen was running a marathon—you could get the shape of his directorial career by looking across different performances from different periods, and make the links where he changed directions, what persisted in the works, and how it frictioned with what was going on in Malaysia and the region. This can be attributed to his training as a historian and a parallel career as a cultural critic for the NST *[New Straits Times*] for 22 years—he was an intellectual. While he loved the theatre, his curiosity for theory, popular culture, and what could constitute performance was inspiring. (Teh, quoted in Devan, 2018)

Rajendran, Takiguchi, and Nge (2018) reflect on how Krishen was perceived by his peers. He was seen as a mentor guiding them toward a more perfect society. If Ghulam's work signalled toward the Malay past, Jit and his intellectual progeny, most of whom taught arts in tertiary institutions, gathered evidence from the present to

move Malaysian society toward a more multicultural democratic future. Jit's was thinking persons' theatre, music and dance might enter, but political messaging and cultural analysis were core. His work argued that real independence would only come when all Malaysians were treated equally.

Faridah Merican: Making Space for the Creative Spirit

In contrast to the two professor-researcher-practitioners discussed above with past or future foci, the producer-actress-director Faridah Merican has been concerned with the now.[11] She has worked at creating spaces where developing urban artists of all ethnicities can share in open dialogue. The productions can be new or based on tradition; they may be co-productions with international theatres (from Singapore or beyond) or funding groups (for example the Japan Foundation); they may be western classics, West End wonders or Malay musicals, large or intimate, but always they must be driven by the intellectual enthusiasms of emerging directors, choreographers, and performers.

Faridah was raised in Penang's (then Georgetown) multi-ethnic environment as a descendant of the important Indian-Muslim trader, Kapitan Keling, Cauder Mydin Merican (1794-1834). Penang, with its high density of Chinese immigrants, exposed her to Hokkien and Cantonese, as well as Malay and English. Her father, Basa Merican, taught English Literature at Penang Free School. She attended St. George's Girls School where she began acting in plays. Later, while studying at Kota Baru Teacher's Training College she played Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*. She worked as a primary school teacher, but the low salary led her to shift to first, radio (news broadcasting and talk shows), and then, by 1963, television—media which broadcast in English in the late colonial period. At RTM (Radio Televisyen Malaysia) she worked with Leslie Dawson (her first husband), Syed Alwi, Krishen Jit, and Rahim Razali among others and became deeply engaged in local theatre. She worked for advertising firms (S.H. Benson and Ogilvy and Mather), gaining understanding of producing, casting, and budgeting. Faridah's participation in both media and stage work made her pragmatic as to what can play and how to pay. Theatre in urban Malaysia of the 1960s had seen the fading of *bangsawan,* which was commercially viable prior to the war, but had, post WWII, lost audiences to new media. No urban artists in the 1960s earned full livelihood as actors, directors, or writers for the stage. Theatre spaces rented by the amateur groups for short production runs were located in government buildings or educational institutions like UM. No stages were owned by the theatre company.

In 1989 Faridah married her second husband, the Australian actor of Lebanese descent Joseph Hasham (1948-), who, after his graduation in 1968 from NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art) in Sydney, had a successful career in television acting in Australia through the 1970s. He had in 1984 established with others a commercial media production company in Malaysia, which by 1987, was doing all its production work in Kuala Lumpur as GHA Images (later as APV [Asia-Pacific Videolab]). The couple, in 1989, established the Actor's Studio to train performers in Stanislavski and other techniques (voice, movement, improvisation)

with coursework inspired by Hasham's training at NIDA. Many who would become luminaries of contemporary theatre were among the early cohort, including Mark Beau de Silva (currently a resident director at KLPac), Tiara Jacquelina (founder of Enfiniti Academy of Musical Theatre and Performing Arts and noted stage and film actress), Patrick Teoh (radio and television broadcaster and stage and film actor), and others.

The couple's efforts to create an actor training programme and grow it into a commercial theatre was modelled in part on the successful Studio Theatre of Joy Zinoman (1943-). Zinoman, an American actress-director, spent time in Malaysia as a diplomat's wife, teaching at UM and participating in local productions with Faridah. Zinoman, on returning to the U. S., had established a company, first as an actor training programme, and then as a full functioning theatre in Washington D. C. in 1978. Visiting Zinoman in the U. S. gave Faridah and Joe the vision of what could happen: a place where classics, new work, and collaborations with other companies could thrive within a space owned by the troupe.

While Zinoman was talented at fundraising, she was also pragmatic regarding the need for financial independence. In an interview Zinoman notes: "I am not interested in artists who will not be responsible for what they're doing and the money they're spending and what the toll is in human and financial terms. I think this [financial pragmatism] helps you gain freedom, not lose it" (Trippet, 1996). Joe Hasham noted:

> We visited Joy. . . in Washington. We were so inspired by her theatre that we thought, "This is the kind of thing we want!" . . .
>
> This vision of a theatre run by artists for artists became the model for the Actors Studio. The first space we found was underneath the Dataran Merdeka (Independent Square) at the city centre of Kuala Lumpur. We opened a 153-seat theatre there in 1995. We then added a 90-seat blackbox and our Academy facility with 4 studios. (Japan Foundation, Performing Arts Network Japan, 2015)

They soon forged links to other groups: My Dance Alliance (Mohammed Anis Nor, Joseph Gonzalez, and others have been presidents), Hands Percussion group (led by Bernard Goh and Eric Ch'ng), Nyoba Kan Buto dance company (Lee Swee Keong, director and playwright), Huzir Sulaiman's Straits Theatre Company, and comedian Harith Iskandar's Happy Hours comedy series. Faridah noted: "It was a time when Malaysian theatre started to bloom. I think the existence of that venue facilitated it and enabled theatre to really grow" (Japan Foundation, Performing Arts Network Japan, 2015).

When a flood destroyed the company's space, the current location of Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Company (KLPac) in Sentul, which had been owned by Malaysian Railways but being developed by the YTL corporation, became available. Support of the Datin Seri Endon (wife of Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who was then Prime Minister) was instrumental. Using the idea that the arts could be an enhancement and good business for the development of the area, KLPac opened in 2005.

Both the training given in the studios with classes for children to seniors and the theatre spaces where orchestras, theatre, and dance abound, allowed for developing professional training and a corresponding platform for performance (with rentals to outside groups helping to subsidise the group). Faridah noted: "We just wanted to give them [Actors Studio students] the possibility of learning some of the skills of drama, dance, and music. We realised that our education and schooling system in Malaysia did not cater for the performing arts . . . But, when we started The Actors Studio, there was nothing. Nothing to help the students to develop their creative skills" (Japan Foundation, Performing Arts Network Japan, 2015).

Faridah is routinely hailed as the first lady of Malaysian Theatre. KLPac and Actors Studio and the many allied groups work to create space for Malaysian voices: musicals, dramas, orchestral events, short play festivals. Productions in Chinese and Malay as well as English grace the KLPac stages. In 2019 the group launched a degree-bearing professional theatre programme through Taylor's University with Faridah and Hasham in the lead. Though their Penang stage failed in the pandemic period, KLPac, despite closure for 377 days, has shown resilience. The company leverages government and corporate subsidies with box office revenues, grants from international foundations (for example Japan Foundation), rentals, and co-productions with other companies in Malaysia, Singapore, and beyond. There is a will and so they find a way. Their current group of resident directors/conductors/choreographers includes Mark Beau de Silva, Zhafir Muzani, Lee Kok Leong, Cheryl Mah, Andrea Sim, and Keith Toh along with many others in stage management, design, and other areas.

Mark Beau de Silva in a 2014 interview notes that the group does what it can to avoid the kind of restrictions that may cause the government-supported groups to self-censor. While the group may have run-ins now and then in mounting a show, often in that case they may not charge tickets (as happened with, for example, the *Vagina Monologues* in 2002). The theatre has also staged works on gay themes. It upended expectations about Malay classics. For example, Faridah directed a 2015 version of Usman Awang's *Uda dan Dara* (Uda and Dara) which explores class exploitation in Malay society—a poor young man falls in love with a rich elite-class girl. Faridah made the male lover Chinese, disrupting ethnic expectations, and using this device to probe the pro-Malay affirmative action policy. Under Faridah and Joe Hasham's direction, KLPac directors will do "whatever we can get away with" as they seek creative expression and freedom of speech (M. B. de Silva, personal communication, June 5, 2014)

The programming is diverse and primarily judged on the basis of creative merit and support of the artists who lead the projects. This may include semi-heritage works as with Zamzuriah Zahari's *Jalan Primadona* (2015) monodrama which is based on Zamzuriah's own experience as a *mak yong* artist challenged by the religious fundamentalists. *Jalan Primadona* was a mixture of modern acting and the complex dance of mak *yong* as Zamzuriah played eight characters. She noted:

> "Sixty percent of what you will see on stage is based on my own experiences as an artiste," says Zamzuriah, who is a full-time lecturer in ASWARA. She explains that her journey as an artist has never been a smooth one, and she has gone through many

> conflicts. "It is not easy to be a female artist because people are always judging you," explains Zamzuriah. (*A Thespian's Journey*, 2015)

Zamzuriah teaches *mak yong* at ASWARA and seeks to make it a basis of contemporary creative work. Her *Titis Sakti* (Powerful Drops), produced by KLPac, was a *mak yong* adaptation *of A Midsummer's Night Dream* for Shakespeare's 400th birthday.

A May 2023 production for KLPac's thirtieth anniversary is an example of the group's cross-group, multicultural, and Southeast Asian focus that featured Faridah as an actress. This was *Mama Looking for Her Cat* by Singapore writer Kuo Pao Kun (1939-2002), directed by Singaporean Benjamin Ho. This was a co-production with Ho's Paper Monkey Theatre. Ho was a mentee of Kuo and has done previous productions/adaptations of this play which combines Malay, Tamil, English, Mandarin, and Chinese dialects (Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese), all without subtitles. It deals with issues of miscommunication and the possibilities of real understanding across generations and ethnicities. An old Hokkien speaking woman seeks her lost cat as her Anglophone-/Mandarin-speaking offspring realise how little they know about their mother in seeking to find her. She has better rapport with an old Tamil-speaking man than her own children.

The 1988 ensemble piece was developed by Kuo as a showcase for students in his Practice Performing Arts School, who he trained to meld modern performance with Asian roots. The script was meant to test the budding actors' skill of expression that could go beyond language. It was Singapore's first multilingual, multiracial play and, in many ways, remains a quintessential work about the Malay-Singapore reality of a busy younger generation ill-equipped to speak to or understand the elders of many different roots who have birthed their society.

> Ah Tao. . . Mama loses her cat and when her children refuse to help, she looks for the prized feline herself. What is a simple enough search on the surface delves into deeper issues such as loneliness, displacement, and the loss of connection to one's roots. Mama's journey becomes a metaphor for the larger societal changes… with the cat symbolising a gradually eroding sense of home and belonging. . . As the police interrogate her children about their missing mother, . . . they realise that not only do they not know their mother very well anymore, but also that she seems to love her cat more than she does them. (Gopinath, 2023)

This inclusive script demands that actors communicate across generations and languages. As Faridah played the role of the missing mother, she was sharing the stage with the multiethnic and multigenerational cast that is a microcosm of the shared Singapore-Malaysian reality. For Faridah and KLPac, diversity is a strength, and crossing borders is what the stage does best, and this can model the society.

> ASEAN as a region is very rich and has much to offer. We should open up our borders more freely so there is a smooth flow of good leaders and intellectuals that will benefit our population. We've waited too long for this freedom of movement to happen. (Sagoo, 2020)

KLPac is about promoting the movement of artists, ideas, languages, and genres, and training the creative society she (Faridah) wants to be in. In the microcosm of KLPac, where joy in the arts prevails, the perfect society, where dialogue is possible and collaboration is the norm, is already present.

Conclusion

Ghulam Sawar Yousof, Krishen Jit, and Faridah Merican have been important for the development of postcolonial Malay Theatre and have created varying models of how to do it, reinforcing heritage, emphasising political efficacy, and making space for creative exploration. Their students have risen to leading roles in Malaysian arts of the 21st century and are likely to persevere in the models they have forged. I have argued that Ghulam emphasised knowing the past to create the future, Krishen concerned himself with affecting the society that would become, and Faridah pays attention to making space for the creative in the here-now of Malaysian society. Their work has affected performance and arts education in Malaysia in important ways and is likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Notes

[1] For the purposes of this paper, I will use the first names of the figures discussed as this is how they are best known in Malaysia and follows the practice of the Indonesian and Malay world, especially for luminaries.

[2] Biographical information is based on a personal interview. See also Ghulam (2016), Yau and Rajeem (2018), and Alvi and Vengandasamy (2022). For his comments on field work experiences researching individual Malaysian traditional theatre (including *mak yong*, *wayang gedek*, *wayang siam*, *nora chatri*, and *bangsawan*) see also Ghulam (1976, 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1997, 2004, 2011, 2019).

[3] The USSR was of course then engaged in its own educational outreach endeavors.

[4] See *The Leader* (2008), the USM alumni magazine, for various articles and images of early USM performing arts history as remembered by founding faculty and students. https://usmalumni.usm.my/images/09_The_Leader_vol3_no3_Sep2008_1.pdf.

[5] Though conversant in Indian traditions in theory and practice from study at the University of Hawai'i and an assistant director for Shanta Gandhi on a version of *Vision of Vasuvadatta*, Ghulam did not emphasise research in Indian drama specifically, though he did a translation of one Sanskrit play (*Shakuntala).*

[6] The 1971 National Culture Policy posits: 1) "National Culture must be based on the indigenous culture of this region" 2) "Suitable elements from other cultures may be accepted"; and 3) "Islam is an important component in the formulation of national culture" (see Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, n. d. https://www.pmo.gov.my/2019/07/national-culture-policy/).

[7] For a sense of this very important conference see the resulting publication edited by Mohd. Taib Osman (1974).

[8] For details on the production, titled *The Spell of the Giantess*, see East-West Center (1973). https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/5453989d-1583-4e5e-a924-70fc47d7d85d/content).

[9] While Ghulam Sawar certainly led the work, efforts and research of others, including Patricia Hardwick on *mak yong* (see Hardwick, 2009 and 2020) and Patricia Matusky (1994) on

Kelantanese music, were of assistance.

[10] See his curriculum vitae at Five Arts Centre website (Jit, n.d.). https://www.fiveartscentre.org/u/doc/Krishen%20Jit%20timeline_26042023.pdf. For various discussions his work, see Diamond (2002), Lo (2004), Nanney (2009, 2012), Nur Nina Zuhra (1991, 1992), Luminosita (2005), Nge (n.d.), Rajendran (1994, 2004, 2007, 2012, 2013), Rajendran & Wee (2007), Rajendran, Takiguchi, & Nge, eds. (2018), Rowland (n. d., 2003, 2015), Rowland et al. (2020), Soleh Ishak (1986) and Devan (2018). Jit's own writing on Southeast Asian topics includes Jit (1984, 1989a, 1989b, l993a, 1993b, 2002).

[11] For information on Merican and KLPac see Diamond 2002, Japan Foundation, Performing Arts Network Japan 2015, Lo (2004), Sagoo (2020), Jacobs (2023), and Gopinath (2023).

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Biography

Kathy Foley (https://orcid.org/ 0000-0002-3036-8493) is a Research Professor and Distinguished Professor Emerita of Performance, Play and Design at UCSC, an Adjunct at UPSI (2023), and past President of UNIMA-USA. She is past editor of *Asian Theatre Journal* (2005-2018) and guest editor of UNIMA-USA's *Puppetry Research International* (2023). She is one of the first non-Indonesian *dalang*s to perform in the Indonesia National Wayang Festival. Her exhibits have been shown at the National Geographic Gallery (Washington, DC), East-West Center Gallery (Honolulu) and other venues. Her research and performance have been supported by Fulbright, Asian Cultural Council, Institute of Sacred Music/Yale, East-West Center and University of California (Arts Research Institute, Committee on Research, Porter College, Dickson Fellowship) and other grants.

Nigeria to the World and Back: A Cosmolocal Study of Nasarawa State Dance Performances at International Festivals

'Tosin Kooshima Tume
Arts of Africa and the Global South Research Programme, Department of Fine Art,
Rhodes University, Makhanda (Grahamstown), South Africa
e-mail: o.tume@ru.ca.za, kooshima.tume@fuoye.edu.ng

Abstract

As stipulated in the 1988 Nigerian Cultural Policy, the mandate of the National Council for Art and Culture (NCAC) is to promote, preserve, and disseminate the diversity of cultural expressions of the country. This mandate also drives the activities of the various State Councils of Art and Culture/government-owned performing troupes in Nigeria. One of the main activities of the troupes is dance performances, especially at festivals. These dance performances are viable cultural products which also function as cultural diplomacy mechanisms for Nigeria. This paper therefore offers an empirical account of two dance performances of the Nasarawa State Performing Troupe (NSPT) of Nigeria as they navigate diverse spaces. The dances—*Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*—are examined through the lens of Simbao's (2018) cosmolocal orientation concept to consider their evolution as performed at local, national, and international festivals. Interrogating the processes involved in the (re)creation of these dance products for consumption at the various festivals, we further explore the implications of this cycle of choreographic experiments. The data for this study was collated through participant observation and interview research methods, as well as analysis of recorded performance videos.

Keywords: cosmolocalism, dance theatre, festivals, Nasarawa state performing troupe, Nigeria

Introduction

> "Dance in Nigeria today functions in the worlds which may be clearly differentiated for study purposes but do in fact merge in the traditional world, the neo-traditional world and the contemporary world." (Harper, 1969, p. 1)

Nigeria is a plural state that is reputedly populated with over two hundred million people of over three hundred ethnic groups, speaking about six hundred languages and dialects (Osuntokun, 2011; Tume, 2021). In alignment with the intention of the founding fathers of Nigeria to "weld together the disparate ethnic groups that constitute the federation," the tangible and intangible arts produced by the multiple cultures within the country play significant roles in its national development (Ojo,

2021, p. 1). The diverse arts also serve as cultural products which express and propagate the Nigerian cultures to the world. Dance is a popular cultural product among Nigerians, and a vital aspect of theatre practice in Nigeria. For this reason, it forms the core activity of most performing troupes in the country.

In Nigeria, theatre practice can be loosely classified into two: the public and private practice. The public refers to the theatre practice solely funded by the government while the private has to do with the private performing troupes which are self-funded or depend on the patronage and philanthropy of individuals and corporate organisations. The public theatre practice is directly funded by the government through the State Art Councils. This includes the Abuja Cultural Troupe in the Federal Capital Territory, and the National Troupe of Nigeria (NTN) in Lagos. Nigeria has thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Hence, there are thirty-eight government-owned performing troupes in Nigeria.

All the government-owned performing troupes function under the National Council for Art and Culture (NCAC) mandate as outlined in the 1988 Nigerian Cultural Policy. The specific duties of the NCAC are to:

i. Promote and foster the appreciation, revival, and development of Nigerian arts and culture
ii. Plan and coordinate cultural activities in Nigeria and foster the development of literary, visual, and the performing arts in Nigeria;
iii. Render assistance to the States in the field of Arts and Culture; and
iv. Promote the development of music, traditional dancing, drama, indigenous games, opera, cinema, films, photography, folklore, oral tradition, literature and poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture and general arts, woodwork, embroidery, woodwork, and other crafts (laws.lawnigeria.com).

The Nasarawa State Performing Troupe (NSPT) has been variously adjudged as one of the most vibrant and multi-talented performing troupes in Nigeria. The fame of the troupe extends beyond the shores of Nigeria, as they have won the most coveted awards in Nigeria, and also represented the country at key international festivals and carnivals in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Of the 36 states in Nigeria, Nasarawa is one of the most culturally diverse. The state has 31 distinct ethnic groups, and the troupe is particularly known for producing dance performances that reflect a fusion of cultural materials of the diverse ethnic groups within the state.

Festivals are an avenue to celebrate communality and also exhibit cultural heritage such as dances. Nigeria, being a multi-ethnic state is replete with cultural festivals that promote the performing arts, and dance in particular. Every year, NSPT harvests raw materials of dance from the various cultural festivals within the state. The dances which are originally performed by the "local" people, who are considered to be the authentic producers and custodians of the diverse cultures, are then harnessed with other cultural materials for performances at state functions. The same dances are subsequently refined for performances at the national stage and are later exported to the international stage where they represent Nigeria. After coming into contact with other cultures on the international stage, the dances are brought back to the original

"local" owners in a new and vibrant form. By virtue of their dynamic exposure and modifications, these dances qualify as cosmolocal products. The focus of this paper is on two dance theatre pieces produced by NSPT: *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*. The paper examines the reflection of the cosmolocalism concept in the two Nasarawa state dance entries under study, as performed in Nigeria and at international festivals.

Of Dance and Cosmolocal Orientations

Dance is a "major art" that has always been an "integral" and important component of Nigerian society and diverse cultures (Harper, 1969, p. 1). It is a cultural product which has the power to shape and define identities, and also frame the civilization of the people who own it (Sharer, 2023). It has also been acknowledged for its potential to be an effective medium for intercultural communication as well as a tool for the mobilisation of cultural diplomacy (Henry, 2000; Warburton, 2017; Odunze, 2020). Apart from the fact that it codifies and communicates the norms of a people, dance also dons multiple identities such as art, movement, music, language, ritual, festival, masquerade, costume, performance, music, drama, and theatre, within the Nigerian worldview (Abbe, 2014; Tume, 2023). The resourceful nature of dance therefore makes it a prominent feature in the activities of government-owned performing troupes in Nigeria.

As propounded by Wolfgang Sachs, cosmolocalism (also known as cosmopolitan localism) is a social theory that transfigures the relationship between locality and universality, respecting and promoting local communities across a global network of equal co-existence (Sachs, 1992; Schismenos, 2019). A portmanteau of the words *cosmos* and *local*, cosmolocal not only suggests the movement of a product from locality to universality, it also refers to the dynamic potentials involved in the procedure of linking the local and global communities through production and consumption (Manzini, 2015; Ramos, 2017; Schismenos et al., 2020). Cosmolocalism has also been described as a new form of social coexistence produced through egalitarian and transnational collaborative networks while exploring the interconnectedness of the urban and the rural (Schismenos et al., 2020; Kostakis et al., 2023). Basically, cosmolocalism observes the connection that evolves in the process of growing a product from the local and distributing it to the global.

Though its origins can be traced to the fields of "environment, development, and globalisation," the tentacles of the cosmolocal concept have spread to "digital communication networks," "design and peer production," as well as "traditional ceremonies" like festivals (Sachs, 2015; Schismenos et al., 2020; Simbao, 2018). In her article titled *Trickster Spatialization and the Politics of Cultural Bargaining in Zambia*, Simbao (2018, p. 256) views cosmolocalism as "embodied orientation, attitude and interrelatedness." She reiterates that cosmolocal orientations are situationally cosmopolitan and should not be assumed to be experienced or performed only in fast, large, wealthy, or privileged places (Simbao, 2016; 2018). She further argues that embracing cosmolocalism enables the local to escape the limitations of parochialism (Simbao, 2018).

Contrary to the colonial stereotypical framings of the 19th century which

viewed African villages and their products as "static," "closed," "backward, primitive, and uncivilised," evidence has shown that dance as an African cultural product is "outward engaging," allows for "ongoing process-based acts of spatial bargaining" and "has the potential to exist anywhere" (Warf, 2009, p. 75; Massey, 2015, p. 140; Simbao, 2018, p. 256). Several government-owned and private troupes in Nigeria have had the opportunity to travel abroad to perform at festivals, carnivals, and other events. On these performance trips, the troupes represent Nigeria as a whole. Their performances, which are mostly in the form of dance, explore the coloration of varied ethnic identities to project a positive cultural image for Nigeria. Against this background, we conceptualise cosmolocal dance products as dances that are created locally but distributed globally. Taking a cue from this foregrounding stance, this paper situates the analysis of the two NSPT dances under study within the framework of cosmolocalism. It interrogates the local production and global distribution of Nasarawa dance products and the resultant dynamics.

Analysis of *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*

Su Dir in performance

Treating the focal themes of love and inter-ethnic marriage, *Su Dir* tells the story of two lovebirds, Ojah and Dari, as true love helps them overcome their adversary. The dance theatre starts with Ojah and Dari playing by a farm path. Both Ojah and Dari wear the navy-blue Ashli-awhim looms of the traditional Eggon costumes, while the latter adorns the Mighili accessories of white cowries on her neck and wrists. Dari is busy breaking palm kernels on the traditional Mada Ndallah grinding stone with the Glah little axe, while Ojah does his best to lovingly distract her. Soon, Dari abandons her task and succumbs to Ojah's whims. Employing natural and expressive movements, the lovebirds revel in each other's company and reassurance of their love.

Dari's friends, who wear casual contemporary Ankara attires, dance onto stage observing the lovers with amusement and good-natured jealousy. With the feet stomping Kabulu movements of the Gbagyi people, Dari's friends urge her to leave with them. She declines and stays with her lover, Ojah. After her friends' exit, Dari drapes her scarf round her lover's neck to pledge her undying love to him. This action is typical of the peak of courtship in the Eggon culture.

In a moment of distraction while admiring Dari's scarf, Ojah takes his eyes off his heartthrob. Within a twinkling of an eye, confusion sets in as another suitor, Toumoh, a young man from the Mada ethnic group, shows up with his friends to abduct Dari. This is a perfect execution of the *NarMbe* marriage by abduction style of the Mada people. In traditional societies of the Mada, Gbagyi, Eggon, Rindre and Alago people, "capture marriage" is traditionally one of the numerous legitimate methods of wedlock. Toumoh and his friends, who are costumed in the wine-coloured casual work attires of the Mada people and accessorised with Owa leg rattles, easily outnumber Ojah. Ojah is helpless and heartbroken. Executing the marching Kabulu movements of the Gbagyi people, Ojah quickly enlists the help of his friends, who are also wearing the navy-blue Ashli-awhim Eggon shorts. They organise a search party to locate Dari. Their efforts are in vain. Clutching his heart in anguish, Ojah

breaks into a sorrowful song:

Gwandara song:

Dari we, Dari wee yee
Yani Dari nke ayi aure adari bo
Ya sa maza kuka yee
Eeee eee ooh

English Transliteration:

Oh Dari, Dari my heartthrob
Our love is under attack
My heart aches and my manly tears flow
Eeee eee ooh

When it becomes obvious that the search is a fruitless one, Ojah and his friends exit using the swirling Ompokwu movement of the Gwandara people, while suspending their arms across their chests alternately.

Following the successful abduction of Dari, Toumoh's family, led by his father, goes to Dari's people to officially indicate their son's interest in marrying Dari. Toumoh's parents wear the traditional white and black Angyer costume of the Tiv people, while the father also carries the animal skin Kpar bag which symbolises royalty in Tiv culture. Toumoh's kinsmen wear the traditional wine coloured Mada costumes, sporting the Eggon waist adornment, Eggon Eshri-aku hunter head gear made from baboon's skins, and Owa leg rattles of the Gwandara people as accessories. Dari's father on the other hand, wears the multi-coloured traditional Okpa Khose attire of the Alago people, while her other kinsmen adorn the Nasarawa colours in traditional looms. Toumoh's kinsmen perform the Rindre arm akimbo and feet-shuffling movement and the Eggon feet-stomping movements, while Dari's people execute the side to side ninety degrees hand-swaying movement of the Afo people.

After the formal announcement of Toumoh's intention to marry Dari, preparations for the wedding ceremony begin without delay. The wedding ceremony proper between Toumoh and Dari is kick-started with a song:

Gwandara song:

Amarya da ango ku yi tafiya ze ze
Kar da wuta ya zo a kiya ku boo

English Transliteration:

Bride and groom, do tread carefully
So that your fingers do not get burnt

Maidens from Dari's family dance in with the marching Odu movements of the Alago movement and the side-to-side arm swinging Alago movements, to the Owa music of the Gwandara people. Borrowing from the typical Gbagyi marriage tradition of Kayan Mata, the maidens display the elaborate and flamboyant bridal luggage, which consists of beauty products, kitchen utensils, and general household items. Dari's parents wear the multi-coloured traditional Okpa Khose and Ottena costumes, while the maidens are costumed in the Nasarawa colours in traditional looms. Dari herself adorns the midnight blue Gbagyijeh traditional attire of the Gbagyi people, designed in the Mighili two-piece style with cowries and white buttons and Hausa Jigida waist beads for accessories. Her body is also touched up with the honey and benny-seed make up typical of Mada brides. Toumoh's family members also dance in with the feet stomping Eggon movements. Toumoh wears the full animal skin traditional ceremonial regalia of the Mada people, while his parents wear the same costumes they wore during the bridal negotiation. Ojah also sneaks in with his friends and family looking totally forlorn. In spite of their downcast demeanour, Ojah and his entourage sport the multi-coloured ceremonial Okpa Khose attires of the Alago people, while the two elders in the entourage adorn the traditional Eggon costumes of dried raffia round their waists and heads.

In excitement, Toumoh executes the side-to-side alternate bouncing Owa movements of the Gwandara people, while Dari dolefully performs the feet tapping Mighili dance movements, while holding the edges of her wrapper. During the wedding ceremony proper, Toumoh is subjected to the mandatory traditional Kembeh ritual of the Mada culture. In Mada tradition, the Kembeh ritual is performed to determine whether a marriage will succeed or not. For a marriage to succeed, the Kembeh calabash must sit gracefully on the bride's head without shaking. However, during this particular wedding ceremony, the Kembeh calabash falls down twice when placed on Dari's head. This signifies impending doom for the marriage, at which point the elders have no other choice than to allow the bride to present the Kembeh calabash to the suitor of her choice. Feeling vindicated, Dari executes the Rindre dance movements, as she sings soulfully:

Rindre song:

Do si kpi eh, do si kpi mboro
Ana we brela, do si kpi mboro
Oh do si kpi eh, do si kpi mboro

English Transliteration:

My heartthrob, where are you?
I need you now, my love! Where are you?
My heartthrob, where are you?

After a brief but dramatic search, Dari locates Ojah, and joyfully hands over the Kembeh calabash to him. On collecting the Kembeh calabash from Dari, Ojah's friends rejoice with him, clapping and singing thus:

Alago song:

Ariye na riye eee, ariye na ri yaa
Oyi komu ikete na ri ye
Eno, o beshi ya gboza na riya

English Transliteration:

You are the chosen one, all hail the chosen one
Son of Ikete, the unlikely contender has won the day
You have indeed made your mother proud

This bit is reminiscent of the celebration in the Igyonya segment of the Oyarore festival. Igyonya is the celebration that occurs during the Oyarore festival, when the young man who emerges as the lucky winner of a spear-throwing contest is presented with a virgin bride.

In apprehension of the outcome of the pending Kembeh ritual, Ojah solicits communal support with a song:

Alago song:

Obakonumele, oji ya koyu depe me lee
Oyun tepe yepe fafa
Ogyime e pe wa putu
Oyun ta pepe gbulagada
Enowa leyi ja ja ja
Oyumogu moh amanda, amanda kyogu iyi felele
Ogyeme eba lonyee, go le ga zaa oputu kya wowawaa

English Transliteration:

My brothers, do not desert me this day
Do not fetch me a mat because you think I have won
Lest you come back to find me lying on the bare floor
I need your protection from this hot sun
I once heard your hearkened to your distress call
Now I am exposed, please return the favour
Support me, please, do not let me be ashamed

Ojah's friends form a circle around him chorusing the song and clapping vigorously in accompaniment. As the process of the Kembeh ritual is repeated with Ojah, his friends rally round to support him. Being a Mada traditional ritual, Mada spiritual elders also surround the couple to signify their support with stomping Vringbe movements. The Kembeh ritual ends successfully, and the performance closes with a celebration dance by the maidens and young men. They perform the

Mbaya waist twisting movement of the Ninzom ethnic group. They sing:

Mada song:

Oh ya, oh yaya iya kawo ya ya
Kpuku yenre e ya gya ka gyunma
Di ba nka re ya ya

English Transliteration:

It is done, it is finally done
We have gotten our hearts' desire
Love wins in the end

Njieh Kreh **in Performance**

Njieh Kreh extols the viability of the dance profession, and addresses the multiple themes of talent for survival, creativity, entrepreneurship, partnership, job creation and economic empowerment. It narrates the story of two choreographers, Samu (male) and Likimi (female), as they outgrow rivalry to collaborate. leading to professional success and community development. The dance theatre piece opens with Likimi, who comes on stage with the sharp vibrating Mighili dance steps. Samu also comes on stage and challenges Likimi with the swift jerking Mbaya movements. Likimi wears a black camisole on Mighili traditional white wrapper accessorised with cowries and black buttons, while colourful Hausa Jigida beads sit gracefully on her waist. Samu adorns a mixture of the contemporary Mighili yellow shorts, spruced with the traditional Mighili beads, Hausa patari animal skin waist adornment, and Mada head gear for accessories. Likimi observes Samu's dance movements, then she copies and performs Samu's Mbaya dance to perfection.

Still in the spirit of competition, Samu and Likimi experiment with sustained gliding turns of the Afo movements, and the Rindre angular leg and arm movements of the Wamba people one after the other. In the end, they both come to an agreement to form an alliance, and they perform the vibrating Mighili movements in unison. As Samu and Likimi exhibit their dexterity with the various traditional dances, they discover that they complement each other. After competing with dances and coming to the realisation that they are both highly talented, Samu and Likimi decide to form a formidable alliance. They agree to go into a partnership and create a world-class dance troupe. Calling for an audition, they sing:

Mighili song:

Aye nasibe e, zayara sisi be
Na sibe o aye!

English Transliteration:

Come and join me in the dance of productivity
Do join me, please!

Mada song:

Dere ya yi dere
Bako, nima wurin da za ka kwana
Dere ya yi dere
Njieh, nima wurin da za ka kwana

English Transliteration:

It is nighttime
Visitor, go search for a resting place
It is nighttime
Poverty, go search for a resting place

Ninzom Song:

Ba ruwan nge ni njieh
Ba rawan nge njieh nge wei ker

English Transliteration:

We have no business with poverty
Poverty, you are on your own

Samu and Likimi conduct an audition, after which they take their dancers through rigorous training and exercises, using natural and pure movements. Soon, their "Jenkro Dance Academy" officially takes off with talented dancers. They sing a rousing song:

Eggon song:

Aye… aye!
Dagyi shgrarara dagyi shgra mo
Aye Laila Dagyi shgra kpa'mgba

English Transliteration:

Oh, my kinsmen
Come let us dance to chase poverty away
Let us dance, dance brings wealth

The Jenkro Dance Academy dance artistes go through vigorous rehearsals which culminate into a masterpiece of an eclectic mix of Vringbe, Likya, Mbaya, and Mighili movements of the Mada, Eggon, Ninzom, and Koro people respectively. Eventually, the Jenkro Dance Academy puts up a show for a paying audience. They also experiment with a unique blend of traditional and modern costumes and accessories. The male dancers wear the traditional Okpa Khose of the Alago people, accessorised with the colourful Koro beads and Eggon waist apron and head gear, while the female dancers adorn modern camisoles, tights, and short skirts accessorised with colourful Koro traditional beads.

Significantly, all the contemporary costumes worn by the dancers are designed in the diverse colours which can be found in the Nasarawa traditional looms costume. The piece ends with the choreographers paying the artists handsomely, after a very successful outing. The choreographers and dancers are happy for being able to make substantial money, and thus, empower themselves financially.

Two Dances in Diverse Spaces: A Discussion on *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*

The two dance pieces, *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*, are enactments of the ideology and aspirations of the Nasarawa people. While *Su Dir* illustrates that true love conquers all, *Njieh Kreh* advocates for teamwork and collaboration for professional success and national development. The choreographic materials for *Su Dir* were extracted from the Ashim, Likya, Vringbe, Kabulu, Ompokwu, Omadegye, Oyarore festivals of the Eggon, Mighili, Mada, Gbagyi, Gwandara, Afo, and the Alago people respectively. The dance piece also derives from cultural nuances such as the Kayanmata bridal procession in Gbagyi traditional wedding ceremony and the *Nar Mbe* marriage by abduction practice of the Mada people. Similarly, *Njieh Kreh* derives from the Nzeh, Gyele. Gbogun, Owa, and Odu festivals of the Mada, Wamba, Gbagyi, Gwandara, and the Alago people respectively. For both dance pieces, theatrical elements like movements, gestures, costume, accessories, make-up, props, songs, chants, and music were harnessed from the various ethnic groups within the state to arrive at the final products.

Su Dir was first performed at the 2008 edition of the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), which was held in Enugu, Enugu State (Nigeria). That year, NSPT won the Best Overall state award at NAFEST. The dance piece was later performed at the Nasarawa State Cultural Festival and the Calabar Christmas Carnival, Cross River State, both in December 2008. It was also the NSPT command performance as part of the activities at the cultural festival aspect of the Zaragoza International Exposition in Spain in September 2008. The troupe subsequently performed the dance piece at the 2nd Pan-African Culture Festival in Algiers in July 2009, and the NEPAD Business Group-sponsored African Business Roundtable Membership Mobilization in Johannesburg in December 2009. In a similar vein, *Njieh Kreh* is one of the artistic outputs that earned the NSPT the award of the Best Overall State at NAFEST 2010, which was held in Akwa Ibom, Uyo State (Nigeria). The dance was later performed at the 2010 edition of the Nasarawa State Cultural Festival. It was subsequently staged at the FIFA World Cup Cultural Fiesta in Johannesburg in June 2010 and at the African Business Roundtable event in Kuwait. Back home in

Nigeria, both dances have been performed by NSPT at several state and national government events.

Figure 1. *Su Dir* in performance at the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), Enugu, September 2008. (Source: David Tume)

Figure 2. *Su Dir* in performance at the Zaragoza International exposition, Zaragoza, Spain, September 2008. (Source: David Tume)

It is interesting to note how *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh* have evolved in diverse places over the years. For the creation of these dances, the NSPT adopts a choreographic approach which de-emphasises mono-ethnic identities and projects state identity (Tume, 2022, p. 282)**.** The dances start out as authentic cultural expressions of individual ethnicities in Nasarawa state. However, after being blended

with cultural materials from various ethnic groups, they evolve from their mono-ethnic garbs to exude state identity. The implication is that when performed on national platforms such as NAFEST, the dance products are not viewed as individual ethnic dances, but as Nasarawa State dances. It then means that, at the local stage, the indigenous dances, though initially created for different purposes like worship, rituals, or communal edification, are re-created and moulded into a new form whereby they address contemporary issues. When moved to the international stage, the dances serve a different purpose of codifying and showcasing to the world the Nigerian cultural heritage in dance form. Resultantly, when performed at the international stage, members of the audience view them as Nigerian dances, not just Nasarawa state dances.

At national festivals like NAFEST the NSPT creative team observes other troupes and get new ideas which they inculcate into their performances. The same happens when the troupe performs at international festivals. The new ideas come in the form of new floor patterns, costume, and make-up design, as well as new ways of engaging with the audience. This ultimately causes a change in the forms of the dance theatres. According to the founding Director of the NSPT, Mallam Mohammed Egye, "the Nasarawa people proudly identify with these dances as they have been to places where the owners only dream of travelling to." The mobility of the dances imbues them with cosmolocal attributes, "and when the dances return home, the Nasarawa people are excited to see their dances in new sophisticated forms" (personal communication, April 20, 2019). Another respondent, Mrs Glorie Ashikeni, who is the current NSPT Director, claims that the Nasarawa people take pride in saying "my ethnic dance has travelled as far as Europe" (personal communication, November 14, 2023).

The following are the significant factors that come to play when performing these dances at different spaces:

Cast economy. One of the advantages of performing locally is that the troupe is able to work with a large cast. However, when travelling abroad, the exigencies of funding require the troupe to work with a limited cast. For instance, at NAFEST and other functions in Nigeria, *Su Dir* was performed with a cast of 21. However, when performed in Spain and South Africa, the cast was drastically reduced to 12. This also mounts a lot of pressure on the cast, as they have to do more with fewer people. Similarly, *Njieh Kreh*, which was initially performed at NAFEST with 22 cast members, had to make do with a 12-man cast when performed in South Africa and Kuwait.

Adaptation to new performance spaces. Most Nigerian theatres and performance venues are in proscenium structure. Hence, the dances under study were created in this consciousness. However, when the NSPT travels, they have to contend with new stage structures like theatre-in-the-round and open-air performance venues. Hence, the performers have to adapt to the new stage structures. This is a major factor which affects the existing body and floor patterns as well as exits and entrances in the dances.

Spectacle. Performing in foreign spaces also means that there is more liberty

with exploration of ideas. As such, there is no strict adherence to culture-specific make-up, costumes, and accessories used in the performances. The NPST liberally embellishes their costumes, make-up, and accessories to make their performances extravagant and larger-than-life. Another determining factor for choice of costume is the weather of the foreign country. The Nigerian climate is mostly tropical and Nasarawa is one of the states that experiences high temperatures. As a result, the Nasarawa dress culture generally favours moderately light fabrics and sparse costume designs. However, having to perform in extremely cold weather in foreign countries makes the NSPT creative team devise ingenious means of embellishing costumes to keep the performers warm.

Performance Timeframe. The two dances under study were specifically created for NAFEST bearing in mind the festival's rule on a fifteen-minute timeframe for dance performances (NAFEST Handbook, 2009). However, the performance timeframe of the dance's shifts depending on the nature of the event where they are being performed. For instance, when performing at state functions or at international festivals, the troupes are given more time allowance. Thus, they are able to add solo or duet performances and drum ensemble to the existing dances.

Conclusion

This paper has established that the NCAC mandate of the promotion, preservation and dissemination of the Nigerian diverse artistic and cultural expressions is actualized through the activities of the government-owned troupes. It also highlights the NSPT as one of the leading government-owned performing troupes in Nigeria. Through a performance analysis of *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*, the paper brings to light how the choreographic approach adopted by the NSPT blurs ethnic distinctions. The troupe focuses on projecting dance as a shared heritage for state identity and global appeal.

Before they were performed at international festivals, the dances under study went through a transformational process which situates them comfortably in the universal space. The main factors of consideration in this process include cast economy, structure of performance space, performance timeframe, and embellishments aimed at creating spectacle. The implications of performing the dances in diverse spaces is that there are several versions of the same dance: the local, the national, and the international. For instance, *Su Dir* has the NAFEST, Calabar, Zaragoza, and Algiers versions. Similarly, *Njieh Kreh* has the NAFEST, South African, and Kuwait versions. The choice to perform any of these versions largely depends on the nature and venue of the performance.

Evidently, traditional dances which are exported from Nigeria abroad somehow find their way back home in new forms. The new form of dances is categorised as contemporary indigenous or neo-traditional dances that are performed only at social and government functions. It is purported that the pure original dances which have remained "untainted" by modernity are the only acceptable dances for performance at the sacred spaces during traditional ceremonies and festivals. However, if dance as cultural products are viewed from the lens of "local

universalisms" and/or "local cosmopolitanisms," we will find that the "local, national, and universal" can run concurrently without contradictions (Lazarus, 2011, p. 1). We find instructive Simbao's (2018, p. 266) argument that "even sacred spaces in annual festivals are inevitably political to some degree and they involve ongoing negotiation and bargaining." With modernity, some of these cosmolocal dance products may begin to find their way into sacred spaces.

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Biography

Dr. 'Tosin Kooshima Tume is the current head of the Theatre and Media Arts department, Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE) in Nigeria and a Research Fellow with the Arts of Africa and Global Souths research programme, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. She is an award-winning playwright, performing artiste, theatre creator, and scholar. Her research interests include African festivals and theatre, feminist identities in African literature and performances, pop culture and social media representations, play adaptations, and trends in African music and practice.

"*Theatre is a white invention*"?: Politics, Polemics and Transition of Theatres

Önder Çakirtaş
Department of English Language and Literature, Bingöl University, Türkiye
e-mail: ondercakirtas@bingol.edu.tr

Abstract

This study focuses on the provocative statement "theatre is a white invention" put forth by the esteemed British actor, Janet Suzman. This assertion, deemed discriminatory and racialized, prompts the study to explore the theatre's history and performances resulting from interactions between the East and West. The primary aim is to challenge and refute the idea that theatre is inherently associated with a particular race, specifically 'white' in this context, while excluding or negating the contributions of others. The discussion focuses on two different theatre plays, illustrating the intergenerational, intercultural, and international journey of theatre heritage and showcasing the enduring appeal and relevance of older theatrical forms. In the play *Death and King's Horseman* by Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka, the mosaic of subjective rituals of the Yoruba tribe and postmodern theatre techniques is discussed. In the play *Hakawatis: Women of Arabian Nights* by Palestinian-Irish playwright Hannah Khalil, the fusion of various artistic elements, storytelling techniques, and performance styles from diverse cultural backgrounds are reflected through the narratives of the Arab and Muslim culture. Both plays make people witness the transboundary journey of theatre, emphasizing the interactive historicity of both Eastern and Western civilizations, and makes it clear that theatre has a rich history of cultural exchange and cross-pollination. In the same token, the two plays finalize that theatre transcends national boundaries and is a global art form and emphasize the dynamic, ever-evolving nature of this art form. They highlight how theatre continues to connect people across generations, cultures, and borders while celebrating its rich and diverse history.

Keywords: British theatre, eurocentrism, otherization, racialization, whiteness

Introduction

In 2016, actor Suzan's remarks *"theatre is a white invention, a European invention, and white people go to it. It's in their DNA. It starts with Shakespeare"* caused an outrage (Alberge & Brown, 2014). These words, which were thought to be particularly offensive to non-white people, were met with reactions from various segments of society. As a response and counter to this racialized polemic, this study has two objectives. The first of these is to briefly explain how theatre has progressed in its evolution with the interactions of both eastern and western civilizations in the context of theatre heritage, and the second is to document this interaction with the

plays of two important contemporary writers.

This study likely delves into the global and historical aspects of theatre, showcasing how diverse cultures across the East and West have played significant roles in shaping theatrical traditions. By examining the intercultural interactions and influences, it aims to emphasize that theatre is a collaborative art form that transcends racial or cultural boundaries. Additionally, the study might seek to promote a more inclusive and diverse perspective on theatre, advocating for the recognition of the varied contributions made by different cultures and societies. It likely argues against the notion that theatre belongs exclusively to a specific racial or cultural group while disregarding or marginalizing the contributions of others. By rejecting the association of theatre with a singular race and advocating for a more comprehensive view that embraces the rich diversity of cultural influences on theatrical traditions, the study aims to foster a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of theatre. This approach supports the recognition and celebration of the global tapestry of contributions to the art form, breaking away from any singular racialized ownership or exclusionary narrative associated with theatre.

Theatre Across Borders

Theatre, as an art form and a means of storytelling, is not limited to any single cultural or racial group. It has roots in various ancient civilizations, including the Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous cultures worldwide. While Western theatre traditions are well-documented and have made significant contributions to the art form, it is important to recognize that theatre has a global and multicultural history. The origins of theatrical rituals are deeply rooted in ancient cultures and can be found across the world. The theatre historian Paul Kuritz (1988, p.2) suggests, the most common 'theatrical' activity in the first civilizations on earth was religious ritual. While it's challenging to pinpoint the very first theatre rituals, there are some early examples to focus on. First of all, the ancient Greeks are often credited with the development of formalized theatre. They held religious festivals like the Dionysia, which featured dramatic performances as a way to honour the god Dionysus. Early Greek theatre was a form of ritual that included choral performances, tragedies, and comedies. Similarly, in ancient Egypt, rituals involving drama and storytelling were performed in religious ceremonies and festivities. These rituals often included the re-enactment of myths and tales, and they used elements of music and dance. The same can be attributed to the Chinese performances. Chinese theatre traditions, such as Beijing Opera, have a long history that dates back over a thousand years. These performances often had ritualistic elements, combining music, dance, and storytelling to convey moral and cultural values. Furthermore, many indigenous cultures worldwide have rich traditions of ritualistic storytelling through dance, music, and masks. These performances are integral to their spiritual practices and cultural preservation.

Shadow theatre as a form of theatrical expression dates back to early traditions of performance. Also known as shadow puppetry, it is a traditional form of performing arts that uses flat, articulated figures (puppets) to cast shadows on a screen

or wall. This art form has a long history and is found in various cultures around the world, with distinct regional variations. Some of the most well-known shadow theatre traditions include *Wayang Kulit* (Indonesia), *Karagöz* and *Hacivat* (This art form has a long history and is found in various cultures around the world, with distinct regional variations. Some of the most well-known shadow theatre traditions include *Wayang Kulit* (Indonesia), *Karagöz* and *Hacivat* (Türkiye),), Chinese Shadow Theatre and *Wayang Topeng* (Malaysia and Thailand) among others. *Wayang Kulit* is a traditional Javanese shadow puppetry from Indonesia, often performed with intricately designed leather puppets. It is accompanied by a gamelan orchestra and is used to depict ancient epics and stories. *Karagöz and Hacivat* are Turkish shadow puppetry traditions with humorous and satirical elements, often featuring two main characters, *Karagöz* and *Hacivat*, who engage in comedic dialogues. *Chinese Shadow Theatre* has a long history in China and is often used to depict historical and mythological stories. Chinese shadow puppetry uses intricate cut-outs and often features colourful backdrops. *Wayang Topeng* (Malaysia and Thailand) is the form of shadow theatre uses masks and shadow puppets to portray traditional stories. Shadow theatre is a fascinating art form that combines storytelling, puppetry, and the interplay of light and shadow. It continues to be practiced and adapted in various ways, both for traditional performances and as a source of inspiration for contemporary artists.

It's important to note that these early theatrical rituals were often deeply intertwined with religious and communal practices, serving to educate, entertain, and spiritually connect the participants. The exact origins of theatre rituals are difficult to trace, but they played a vital role in the development of theatrical arts as we know them today.

The Resonance of African Ritualistic Theatre in *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka

Death and the King's Horseman is a play written by Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka, and it draws inspiration from historical events. The narrative revolves around Elesin, the king's horseman, who, in Yoruba tradition, is expected to undergo a ritual suicide following the death of the king to accompany the king in the afterlife. The play is rooted in a real incident that occurred during British colonial rule in Nigeria. Soyinka's work is a dramatic interpretation of an event in 1946 where a British colonial officer prevented the ritual suicide of the Yoruba king's horseman, which resulted in a clash between Yoruba traditions and the imposition of British colonial authority. The story delves into the clash of cultures, traditions, and the complexities of colonialism. It explores themes of duty, honour, cultural identity, and the struggle between indigenous beliefs and the imposition of foreign values. Soyinka's play serves as a commentary on the clash between the indigenous Yoruba culture and the interference of colonial powers, reflecting on the broader themes of cultural imperialism and the impact of colonialism on traditional practices and values in Nigeria.

Andrew Gumbel of *The Guardian* (2009) stresses that *"More important than depicting cultural oppositions was his [Soyinka's] desire to create a space where*

cultures could come to a greater mutual understanding". Soyinka's desire to create a space for mutual understanding between cultures aligns with the spirit of cultural exchange, empathy, and the celebration of diversity. Such spaces become invaluable in a world where understanding and respect for cultural differences are crucial for global harmony and progress. They serve as meeting points where shared stories and experiences can transcend boundaries, fostering unity amidst diversity. Through this analysis, I can delve into how African rituals are incorporated into Soyinka's plays, how they shape the narrative, character development, and thematic elements. Understanding the way these rituals are presented in the context of modern theatre could shed light on the significance of what Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (2007, p.65) refers to as "cultural intertextuality"—the weaving together of multiple cultural references, traditions, and narratives within a single artistic work. Soyinka's resistance to interpreting *Death and the King's Horseman* as an essentially political play and his caution against reducing it to a 'clash of cultures' piece reflects his broader perspective on artistic interpretation and the potential pitfalls of oversimplification. Soyinka seems to be cautioning against approaching the play with preconceived notions that limit its interpretation to a one-dimensional narrative of cultural conflict. This aligns with his broader critique of analytical laziness, urging a more nuanced and thoughtful engagement with his work.

> "I find it necessary to caution the would-be producer of this play against a sadly familiar reductionist tendency," he says and continues, "At the time, the tendency - in the theatre, the cinema, and the novel - was to present everything that dealt with things outside western culture as being understandable only as a 'clash of cultures'" (Gumbel, 2009).

The play is set in Nigeria and revolves around the Yoruba ritual of the king's horseman, Elesin Oba, who is expected to perform a ritual suicide upon the death of the king. In Yoruba cosmology and religious beliefs, the king is considered sacred, and his transition from the earthly realm to the afterlife is a crucial and highly ritualized event. The role of the Elesin, the king's horseman, is to accompany the spirit of the deceased king to the afterlife, ensuring a smooth transition and preventing any negative consequences for the community. The concept is deeply rooted in Yoruba cultural and religious practices, emphasizing the interconnectedness between the spiritual and earthly realms. The failure to carry out this ritual with the Elesin's self-sacrifice is believed to disrupt the cosmic balance and lead to dire consequences for the community, as the spirit of the deceased king might bring harm and chaos if not properly guided to the afterlife. Thematically depicting interesting cultural subjectivities and realities, the play represents the intertwining of various elements of traditional ritualistic theatre and modern western theatre, especially with its combination of indigenous African and colonial British elements. In other words, *Death and the King's Horseman* explores the clash between traditional Yoruba rituals and the disruptive forces of colonialism, offering a rich ground for examining the transition from ritual theatre to postmodern theatre performance. The play highlights the intricate interplay between African theatrical effects, Yoruba cultural traditions, and the English dramatic tradition.

Regarding African theatrical effects, Soyinka places the ritualistic presences of African culture to the fore. He skilfully incorporates Yoruba cultural rituals and traditions into the fabric of the play. The rituals surrounding Elesin's role as the king's horseman and the accompanying ceremonies contribute to the distinctive African theatrical effects. Besides this, the play draws on rich symbolism and Yoruba mythology, adding depth and cultural significance to the narrative. Symbolic elements, such as the horseman's impending ritual suicide, are deeply rooted in Yoruba cosmology. Traditional rituals often involve specific ceremonial language and performances. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, the characters engage in poetic and symbolic dialogue that reflects the formal and ritualistic nature of their roles. Contrasting cultural perspectives, Soyinka, though not intentionally, implies the clash between Yoruba traditions and the imposition of colonial values. The contrasting cultural perspectives create tension and provide a lens through which Soyinka explores issues of power, identity, and the impact of cultural encounters. Soyinka, thus, incorporates multiple cultural voices, allowing characters to express diverse perspectives. This multiplicity reflects the complexity of cultural interactions and avoids presenting a monolithic view of African identity.

On the other hand, he stylizes English dramatic tradition with Nigerian flavours. While the play has the typical taste and texture of English drama, Soyinka infuses it with Nigerian flavours. The language, dialogue, and style exhibit a fusion of English literary tradition and the cadence of Nigerian speech, creating a unique linguistic and stylistic blend. The presence of English colonial officials and the use of the English language in the play serve as reminders of the colonial legacy. This layering of English elements over Yoruba cultural traditions reflects the historical and cultural complexities of Nigeria during the colonial period. Thus, Soyinka's play represents a synthesis of two cultural heritages – the indigenous Yoruba culture and the influence of English literature. This double heritage contributes to the uniqueness of the play, offering audiences a nuanced and layered theatrical experience. The play exemplifies cultural hybridity, where different cultural elements coexist and interact. This hybridity is not only thematic but is also embedded in the very structure and style of the play.

Postmodern theatre often involves the deconstruction of traditional narratives. In Soyinka's play, the clash between Yoruba rituals and colonial influence can be seen as a deconstruction of traditional power structures and cultural norms. Postmodern theatre frequently includes meta-theatrical elements, blurring the lines between reality and performance. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, the play-within-a-play technique is employed, challenging the audience to question the nature of performance and representation. Postmodern theatre often explores cultural hybridity and the blending of diverse cultural elements. Soyinka's play reflects this by juxtaposing Yoruba traditions with the influences of British colonialism, highlighting the tensions and interactions between these different cultural forces. Postmodern theatre often embraces multiple perspectives and rejects fixed identities. In Soyinka's work, characters grapple with shifting identities and conflicting loyalties, reflecting the destabilizing impact of colonialism on traditional roles and beliefs. Postmodern theatre often incorporates intertextuality, referencing and recontextualizing other texts. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka draws on

Yoruba mythology, historical events, and European dramatic traditions, creating a complex tapestry of references.

In conclusion, Soyinka's play explores the clash between traditional Yoruba beliefs and the colonial influence in Nigeria, raising complex questions about cultural identity, the impact of external forces, and the consequences of cultural disruption. The narrative serves as a vehicle for Soyinka to delve into themes of duty, tradition, and the collision of different worldviews. Soyinka's play thus serves as a dynamic bridge between ritual theatre and postmodern theatre, navigating the complexities of cultural collision, identity, and the repercussions of historical and social upheaval. The work encapsulates the multifaceted nature of performance, drawing on both traditional and contemporary theatrical elements to convey its complex narrative. It stands as a remarkable work that navigates the complexities of cultural identity, colonialism, and the blending of theatrical traditions. Soyinka's ability to seamlessly weave together contrasting cultural elements creates a play that is both distinctly African and globally resonant.

Arab Narratives in Hakawatis: Women of the Arabian Nights by Hannah Khalil

Hannah Khalil's *Hakawatis: Women of the Arabian Nights* promises a multi-layered and immersive theatrical experience that combines cultural richness, transformative storytelling, and the empowerment of women. The concept of *Hakawatis*, derived from the Arabic term *'hekaye'* (meaning a story) and *'haki'* (meaning to talk), sounds intriguing. By presenting an all-female perspective on the ancient tale of *One Thousand and One Nights*, it suggests a deliberate effort to re-examine and retell traditional stories from a unique vantage point. The fusion of ancient tales with contemporary perspectives creates a space where tradition and innovation converge in the service of a compelling narrative. The use of an all-female perspective could provide a fresh lens through which to explore the characters, themes, and narratives of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Traditionally, this collection of Middle Eastern folk tales features Scheherazade, a female storyteller, but many of the tales within it revolve around male protagonists. *Hakawatis* seems to be a departure from this tradition, giving voice to female characters and perspectives that may have been marginalized or overlooked in the original tales.

Co-produced by Globe and Tamasha and directed by their Artistic Director, Pooja Ghai, the play encapsulates a powerful and provocative premise, suggesting a rich and complex story. Khalil introduces her play by exposing a tyrant's revenge plot which is a classic trope often found in mythology and folklore. The tyrant seeks retribution for his wife's perceived infidelity by a gruesome cycle of marrying, bedding, and beheading a new bride each day. This setup establishes a dark and dramatic foundation for the story. The cyclical nature of the tyrant's actions—marrying, bedding, and beheading a new bride every day—creates a sense of ritualized violence. The consequences of this ritual extend beyond the immediate act, leaving a lasting impact on the surviving brides-in-waiting and the broader narrative. The fact that only five brides-in-waiting remain after years of this brutal cycle

suggests a prolonged period of suffering and survival. The resilience of these women becomes a central focus, highlighting their strength and determination to endure under oppressive conditions. The unity among the brides-in-waiting in their fight to keep themselves and all of womankind alive adds a collective dimension to their struggle. This unity suggests a shared commitment to resist the tyrant's oppression and protect not only themselves but also women more broadly. The narrative hints at a broader symbolism, with the survival of these women representing a larger fight for the well-being and empowerment of all women. The story transcends the individual experiences of the brides-in-waiting to encompass a collective struggle against oppression. The women's fight for survival against the tyrant aligns with themes of empowerment and resistance. The narrative seems poised to explore how these women navigate and challenge oppressive systems, potentially offering commentary on gender roles and societal expectations.

The play reveals as a unique and creative theatrical production or performance that involves three musicians, archetypal characters [Fatah the Young (played by Alaa Habib), Akila the Writer (Nadi Kemp-Sayfi), Zuya the Warrior (Laura Hanna), Wadiha the Dancer (Houda Echouafni) and Naha the Wise (Roann Hassani McCloskey)], and a narrative structure involving the passing of a candle. The narrative appears to focus on the intricacies and challenges of the characters' lives, with an emphasis on rivalries, frustrations, passions, and ingenuity rather than traditional derring-do. The mention of word coming back that their tales are not the expected fare for the king, and Scheherazade's response, adds an intriguing layer. The reference to Scheherazade suffering from Stockholm syndrome[1] suggests a self-awareness within the narrative about the complex dynamics at play in the storytelling. The decision of the characters to continue embroidering what they know despite the king's preferences could be seen as a commentary on the power dynamics in storytelling and the challenges faced by those who seek to challenge or deviate from established norms. Overall, this description hints at a multi-layered and thought-provoking performance that combines narrative, music, and character exploration.

Figure 1. *Hakawatis: Women of Arabian Nights* by Hannah Khalil (copyright © Ellie Kurttz)

The representation of Arab women in media and popular culture has often been marred by stereotypes that oversimplify and misrepresent their identities, roles, and experiences. By creating a play that actively works to break down these stereotypes, Khalil contributes to a more truthful and multifaceted portrayal of Arab women. Khalil's perspective on her role in addressing perceptions of Arabs, especially Palestinians, is interesting and reflects a nuanced approach. As she is reflected by interviewers,

> When she moved to the UK, *"what struck most was how people perceived Arabs, Palestinians in particular"*, but when asked whether she feels like it's her duty to teach people about her Palestinian heritage and history, Hannah confidently states that, *"I don't feel like it is my job to teach people stuff; I am offering a different perspective, surprising them, and making them look at their own biases"* (Saleh & Al-Dujaili, 2023)

Her statement that she doesn't feel it's her job to teach people but rather to offer a different perspective, surprise them, and make them examine their biases suggests a desire to foster understanding without shouldering the entire burden of educating others. This perspective aligns with the idea that individuals from different backgrounds are not obligated to serve as representatives or educators for their entire culture or heritage. Instead, by sharing personal experiences and narratives, they can contribute to a more nuanced and accurate understanding, challenging stereotypes and encouraging self-reflection.

The selection and curation of stories in Khalil's play demonstrate a thoughtful and intentional approach to storytelling. By including four stories from the original *One Thousand and One Nights*, she aims to provide the audience with tales that might not be as commonly known, moving beyond the frequently retold narratives. This decision aligns with her goal of offering a fresh perspective and surprising the audience. The stories she settled on—*The Fisherman and the Djinn*, *The Wolf and the Fox*, *The King and the Sage*, and *The Sparrow and the Eagle*—reflect a diverse range of themes and characters from the classic collection. The inclusion of an adaptation of an old Palestinian folktale adds a personal touch to the production, connecting Khalil's heritage with the storytelling tradition. Furthermore, the incorporation of three original new stories, commissioned from playwrights she admires, expands the narrative landscape, and introduces contemporary voices to the mix. Overall, this approach showcases a blend of classical and contemporary storytelling, providing a rich and varied tapestry that reflects both tradition and innovation.

As she underlines, her play is exploring the idea of storytelling written down, which is a very Western form of storytelling, and storytelling as in the spoken, the oral tradition, which is obviously much more from the MENA region (Shaffi, 2022). Her exploration of the idea of storytelling, contrasting the Western form of written storytelling with the oral tradition more common in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, adds an interesting dimension to her play. This dichotomy between written and oral storytelling traditions reflects cultural differences in how narratives are crafted, preserved, and transmitted. The Western tradition often places a significant emphasis on written literature, where stories are recorded and passed

down through written texts. On the other hand, the MENA region, known for its rich oral traditions, often relies on spoken narratives, where stories are verbally transmitted from one generation to another. By highlighting this difference, Khalil's play not only contributes to a better understanding of cultural distinctions but also challenges the dominance of Western narrative structures.

Overall, Khalil's approach showcases a blend of classical and contemporary storytelling, providing a rich and varied tapestry that reflects both tradition and innovation. It can provide an opportunity for audiences to appreciate and engage with the unique storytelling methods of the MENA region, which often involve a dynamic interplay between the storyteller and the audience. The exploration of storytelling forms can be a powerful way to bridge cultural gaps, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation. The observation that many versions of the stories from *One Thousand and One Nights* either side-line women, sexualize them, or present a less dark version than the original is significant. This issue speaks to a broader challenge in the representation of women in literature and media, often involving stereotyping, objectification, or the toning down of darker aspects of narratives.

Conclusion

This study challenges the notion that theatre is exclusively a white invention, and provides historical information and examines plays with racial, ethnic, and cultural implications to support this perspective. The study involves exploring the contributions of diverse cultures to the history and development of theatre and highlighting instances where theatrical narratives challenge the idea of theatre as solely a white creation.

As observed in the historical facts and implied by the two writers of the plays, theatre, as an art form and cultural practice, was not primarily developed and perfected by white, European, or Western civilizations. This view tends to downplay or ignore the rich and diverse traditions of theatre that exist in non-Western cultures and societies. In reality, theatre and performance arts have a long and multifaceted history that spans across different cultures and regions of the world. Many ancient civilizations, including those in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, had their own forms of theatre and performance long before European theatre traditions emerged. In both *Death and King's Horseman* and *Hakawatis: Women of Arabian Nights*, the playwrights explore and reflect the cosmopolitan nature of world cultures. Furthermore, they emphasize the perspective that theatre is not exclusively a creation of white culture but rather a product of the exchange and impact of diverse cultures on one another. In sum, the statement 'theatre is a white invention' is polemical because it makes a sweeping and divisive claim about the relationship between race and cultural practices, particularly in the context of theatre. The politics in these words relate to broader debates surrounding cultural appropriation, representation, and the power dynamics at play in the arts and society. These discussions often intersect with issues of race, identity, and access to cultural resources.

Notes

[1] Stockholm syndrome is a psychological response where hostages or victims develop feelings of affection, empathy, or alliance towards their captors, and here, it seems to be used metaphorically.

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Biography

Dr. Önder Çakırtaş is an Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Bingöl University, Türkiye, specializes in Modern and Contemporary British Drama and Literature, particularly in Political Theatre, Minority Theatre, Ethnic Theatre, Race-Oriented Theatre and Disability Theatre. He is currently under contract with Routledge to write a book titled *Staging Muslims in Britain: Playwriting, Performance, and Representation*. He is the author of the book *Ten ve Kimlik: Çağdaş Siyahi İngiiliz Tiyatrosu* [Skin Colur and Identity: Contemporary Black British Theatre], which was published in 2020. Dr. Çakırtaş is founding editor of Essence & Critique: Journal of Literature and Drama Studies and is an editorial member of Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance.

Titih Hala: Exploring Human-Tiger Entanglements in Malay Theatre, Ritual, Song, and Film

Patricia Ann Hardwick
Sultan Idris Education University
e-mail: hardwick.patricia@gmail.com

Abstract

The Malayan tiger is critically endangered. Its population has declined from more than 3,000 individuals in the 1950s to fewer than 150 left in the forests of Malaysia today. While the tiger continues to disappear from Malaysian forests at an alarming rate, the weretiger remains an important symbol of liminality, ancestral heritage, ritual, horror, and raw animal power in the arts of Malaysia and the Riau Archipelago of Indonesia. Human-tiger entanglements are referenced in oral-historical narratives, the traditional theatrical forms of *mak yong* and *nora* Melayu, and the ritual healing performances of *main 'teri*. However, the Malaysian fascination with the conflation of nature and culture, the animal, and the human, is not just confined to traditional dramatic forms and esoteric healing rituals. This paper will investigate the role of the weretiger and its links to history and healing in *mak yong* theatrical and ritual traditions and explore how the concept of *hala*, the weretiger continues to be invoked, reimagined, and recreated in popular genre like *dikir barat* and contemporary Malaysian film.

Keywords: *dikir barat, main 'teri, mak yong,* tiger, *Tiger Stripes*

Introduction

In many Southeast Asian cultures, humans are recognized as enmeshed in a web of interdependent relationships with plants, animals, spirits, and even important features of the landscape (Roseman, 1991; Arhem & Sprenger 2016). "Animals may fuse, refuse, and confuse nature–culture categories and ontologies," particularly in cultures that acknowledge a sense of continuity and kinship between animal, human, plant, and spiritual realms (Kirksy & Helmreich, 2010, p. 553; Willerslev 2007; Nadasdy 2007). Ancient lifeways that acknowledge a shared existence between human beings and animals are in the process of being lost at an incredible rate, in part due to the accelerating rate of mass extinction brought on by deforestation and rapid climate change. "While scientists scramble to conserve dwindling populations, writers and artists direct attention to the other horn of the dilemma: how to preserve ways of being in a world that humans traditionally shared with other creatures, and that along with them are threatened with conventions of modern living" (Woodward & McHugh, 2017, p. 2).

Since the 1950s, the Malayan tiger population (*Panthera tigerus*) has

precipitously declined from approximately 3,000 to fewer than 150 estimated individuals in the wild today (Chen Ly, 10 November 2023). Despite this rapid decline, tigers and supernatural tiger spirits have long been described within the oral history, folktales, and fables of the Malay world. Ancestral tiger spirits, tiger familiars and weretigers are common motifs in the historical literature of Java, Bali, Sumatra, and the Malay Peninsula. Tiger-human transformation is an important aspect of the history of the Malay theatrical tradition of *mak yong* in the Riau Islands (KEPRI), Indonesia, and in the *main 'teri* healing performances of Kelantan, Malaysia. This paper will investigate the role of the weretiger and its links to history and healing in *mak yong* theatrical and ritual traditions and explore how the concept of *hala*, the weretiger continues to be invoked, reimagined, and recreated in popular genre like *dikir barat* and Malaysian films.

The Tigrine Historicity of *Mak Yong*

In KEPRI, *mak yong* performers on Bintan Island and on the nearby island of Mantang Arang trace their ancestral and performance lineage to Patani, in Southern Thailand. According to Tengku Muhamad Satar, the leader of *Sanggar Seni Teater Mak Yong Warisan*, his maternal ancestors were Patani performers who passed through Kelantan and Temasek before settling on the island of Mantang Arang. Although the date of departure of his maternal ancestors from Patani is vague, Pak Satar estimates that they may have left as early as the 1780s. According to historian Francis R. Bradley (2013, p. 150), the defeat and destruction of the Patani sultanate by Siam took place over the course of five wars from 1785–1838. Bradley argues that Siam employed four tactics to subdue the polity of Patani including massacres, slave-raiding, environmental warfare, and the expulsion of refugees. "The Patani people, who escaped death or capture in 1786, fled by the tens of thousands into the neighbouring polities of Kedah, Kelantan, Perak and Terengganu" (Bradley, 2013, p. 157). Although it is impossible to ascertain if Pak Satar's maternal ancestors were Patani refugees, the estimated time of departure from Patani, and the stories of sojourn in Kelantan before migrating to Temasek and the Riau Islands, suggest that the political unrest in Patani in the late 18th and early 19th centuries could have provided a push factor for the emigration of refugees from Patani to the Riau Islands.

The late Pak Ghani, a *mak yong* performer from the island of Mantang Arang, told a different tale of the history of *mak yong* in KEPRI at his home on March 11, 2019. His grandfather passed to him a story of a Patani trader named Solat who went on a trading mission to Sumatra. After Solat had finished trading, he was caught in a typhoon, swept the length of Sumatra, and sucked into a whirlpool. Out of the centre of the whirlpool grew a sea coconut tree, the *pokok pauh janggi*, where a garuda came to feed before flying to land. Solat devised a plan to tie himself to the legs of the garuda to escape the barren wasteland where he was stranded. The garuda landed in a large field, and Solat freed himself to wander into the forest until he reached a cave where he met a tiger king. Solat was advised to hide by the tiger king under a large cooking pot. From the safety of the cooking pot, he observed tigers dancing during a festival. From his observations he learned *pencak silat*, *mak yong*, *zapin*, and *joget*

dangkung. Solat then travelled to the end of Sumatra where he met a sailor from the Malay Peninsula, who helped him sail back to Southern Thailand. Once he had reached home, Solat taught the arts that he had learned from observing the dances of Sumatran tigers. Subsequently, Solat and his family sailed from Patani to Kelantan to Singapore and finally to Mantang Arang where his family settled, bringing their mystically obtained *mak yong* tradition with them.

> What I know, I learned from my own grandfather. At that time, he told a story of a person named Solat who was a trader. He liked to sail here and there in a large boat. So, one day he went on a trading mission to the area surrounding the island of Perca. Perca is Sumatra. Before they arrived at the island of Perca they were hit by a typhoon, a typhoon storm. The boat broke apart. So, when the strong storm winds came, the boom of the sail was flattened and travelled the length of Sumatra, because Sumatra is very long, so said my grandfather. After the boat had run its course, it broke apart. He was stranded. Stranded in a place named *Pusat Tasik Pauh Janggi Tempat Air Lenggong.*
>
> There he was stranded and he broke away from that boat. He was under it like that, a brown cloth, under a twisted calico cloth. He took two nails and a hammer. At this place there was a *pauh* tree. Apparently at that place it appears that there are ships all around and very old, like a reef that rises up. But the largest exposed reef is covered by a *pauh* tree.
>
> Every day that *pauh* tree descended the largest garuda from the blue skies and it perched there. It ate that *pauh* fruit. After the garuda ate the *pauh* fruit it would fly to the fields and into the middle of the forests to search for its victims. So, after he was stranded, Solat was aware and used his reason. Because that place was far away, and there were no people, there wasn't even any water surrounding him. So, he had the thought to use a cloth to cling to the garuda to save himself from that place. And when the garuda was eating from that tree he tied the cloth to carry him to each of the garuda's legs here and there and he entered into the middle. And after that he clung there, the garuda descended to an open field to eat. At that time, he descended and began to walk wherever his feet would take him.
>
> He came to a cave. That cave was a tiger cave. When he had arrived the king of the tigers asked him "Where are you from? To this he answered "I am a person who is lost. When I left my home, I was a trader. I brought things to trade. My boat was wrecked in a storm." He spoke like this.
>
> "You" he said, "If it is like this then now where do you plan to hide yourself? Because my people are still roaming in the forest. Later this evening they will gather. If you do not have a place to hide later, they will eat you."
>
> So, it was forced. "What is the best way for me to be protected?" "Ok" said the king of the tigers, "it is better if you hide yourself in a large pan like this." So that day passed like that, and there was the sound of tigers. "Guam!" "Guam!" They want to come back, right? Pak Solat went under the cooking pan.
>
> And that night they held a big festival. With many types of dances. And from there,

> this Pak Solat got all the dances, *pencak silat*, *dangkung* and many types of dances and many types of performances. Because he spied on them, yes because he watched them all the tigers performed. So, when it was morning, he asked "Why did you hold the festival?" "Certainly, it is like that, every night we hold it."
>
> So, after that he said "May I excuse myself to find a place to return to my home. I want to go to the end of Sumatra. The very end." So he went to the very end, near the sea. And from there he saw a sailing ship, a sailor. When he was near, he called the sailor. It seemed that the sailor was from Malaysia, Malaysia is in the east *lah*. There he was able to follow him back to his home.
>
> When he returned home, he remembered dances like *zapin*, *mak y*ong, many forms of *dangkung*, *pencak silat* and many others. And when he was in Thailand, Terengganu, Kelantan he demonstrated and taught everything. And after that, the art grew . . .From Thailand to Kelantan, Kelantan to Tumpat. . . So, after that they brought it here [to *Mantang Arang*] (Ghani, 2019).

Pak Ghani's incredible tale of *mak yong* origins incorporates elements of the legend of the *pauh janggi* tree. The *pauh janggi* or the sea coconut, is the largest palm in the world. It is endemic to the Seychelles archipelago in the Indian Ocean. Variants of the Malay legend of the *pauh janggi* can be found in British anthropological texts including W.W. Skeat's *Malay Magic*, but tales of the underwater forests of sea coconut trees guarded by garudas drifted with the Indian Ocean tides back to 16th and 17th century Europe and the Maldives where the sea-coconuts were highly valued (1972 [1900]). Sea coconuts found in the sea or on shore no longer had husks, so they resembled a woman's voluptuous hips. Sea coconuts were prized by Europeans of the 16th and 17th century for their supposed healing and magical properties. In 1769, Jean Duchemin sailed to Praslin in the Seychelles, where he found many sea coconut trees. This discovery dampened the world market for the legendary fruit.

In Malay narratives, the navel of the sea continued to be said to drain the waters of the world, with the *pauh janggi* tree at its centre serving as a submerged *axis mundi* linking the underwater world to the human realm and the airy heavens. Malay variants of the legend describe a whirlpool in the middle of the sea, in which the *pauh janggi* tree grows. At the base of the tree sits a giant crab that controls the ebb and flow of the tides. A garuda nests in its branches, and a naga is often entwined with its roots. Like many tales of the Malay world, the drift of the *pauh janggi*, navel of the seas, is difficult to trace. Some legends place its location at the tip of Southern Sumatra, while others claim the whirlpool is in Bagan Datuk, at the mouth of the Perak River, the exact location of its waterborne cosmology perpetually afloat in waters of the Malay world.

Pak Ghani's tale links the cosmology of the navel of the seas to a KEPRI *mak yong* origin tale that claims that the art of *mak yong* originated from Solat's mimesis of the furtively observed performances of Sumatran tigers during their festivals. Solat's study of *mak yong* amongst Sumatran tigers is an interspecies exchange between human and animal worlds that gives birth to art forms that spread from Sumatra to Southern Thailand, the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula, and finally KEPRI. Pak Ghani's origin story further underscores the linkages between Patani,

KEPRI and Sumatran *mak yong* traditions, and exemplifies how myth and historicity, ontology and international commerce continue to intertwine in the oral histories in maritime Southeast Asia.

Tiger Trance and *Main 'Teri* in Kelantan

Main 'teri ritual performances have been used for generations by Kelantanese practitioners to treat spiritual disturbances, psychological conditions, and social disruptions. The term *main 'teri* is thought to be a shortened form of *main puteri* or *main peteri* (Laderman 1991). While some practitioners speculate that the term *main puteri*, to play the princess, originates from tales that link the birth of the genre to the legendary Kelantanese princess *Puteri Saadong*, researchers and performers that choose to emphasise the healing aspects of the performance, often interpret *'teri* as a shortened form of the Kelantanese Malay word *peteri,* meaning to solder (Ghulam-Sarwar, 2004; Laderman, 1991). Associating *main 'teri* with the metallurgy technique of soldering contributes to some practitioners' understanding of their art as a way to repair broken bodies and make whole fractured souls.

Main 'teri currently coexists with Western medical practice in Kelantan as a complementary medical system based on traditional East Coast Malay understandings of the body (Hardwick, 2013a). *Main 'teri* patients often seek Western medical care for their ailments first, turning to *main 'teri* practitioners only if they find that their condition is unresponsive to, or untreatable by Western medical practice (Hardwick, 2009, 2013a). Kelantanese healers regard each individual human body as a miniature state, metaphorically referred to in *main 'teri* as a royal palace ruled over by an embattled sovereign: the human person a microcosm that reflects the social macrocosm, full of contending forces (Kessler, 1977; Hardwick 2013a) Intrigued by the symbolic system at play in *main 'teri*, anthropologist Clive Kessler theorised that *main' teri* ritual events were a form of political negotiation as ritual specialists seemed to wage an internal battle for a patient's health through the use of political metaphors (Kessler 1977).

Angin hala, weretiger "wind", is a common affliction found in Malay communities that inhabit Southern Thailand and the East Coast of Malaysia and is treated through *main 'teri* performances**.** In this section, I will briefly explore the history of the *hala* phenomena in Malaysia's East Coast through an examination of legends regarding the origin of the weretiger. Then, I will explore how some Kelantanese Malay ritual healers continue to understand *hala,* the weretiger, as a *benda luar*, a phenomenon that originates from outside the body, but that can manifest in a patient with specific internalised physical and psychological symptoms. I will investigate how some Kelantanese *main 'teri* practitioners have begun a process of reinterpreting *angin hala,* transforming the aetiology of an affliction traditionally understood to manifest as a result of the neglect of an ancestral or supernatural tiger familiar to a psychological illness where *hala* is understood as a metaphor for various human desires and anti-social behaviours including repressed, uncontrollable anger. Finally, I will explore how patients are encouraged to *lupa,* or forget themselves, as they are transformed into tigers by *main 'te*ri ritual specialists through trance during

a theatrical form of healing that allows them release their weretiger wind.

Early ethnographers of the Malay Peninsula documented local legends regarding supernatural tigers, tiger familiars and weretigers. Walter William Skeat, of the Civil Service of the Federated Malay States, recorded the following legend regarding the origin of the weretiger in the late 19th century from a Malay man in Selangor:

> An old man picked up a boy in the jungle with white skin, green eyes, and very long nails. Taking the boy home his rescuer named him Muhammad Yatim (i.e. 'Muhammad the fatherless') and when he grew up sent him to school where he behaved with great cruelty to his school fellows and was therefore soundly beaten by his master (Toh Saih Panjang Janggut i.e. 'Toh Saih Long-beard), who used a stick made of a kind of wood called a los to effect the chastisement. At the first cut the boy leapt as far as the doorway; at the second he leapt to the ground, at the third he bounded into the grass, at the fourth he uttered a growl, and at the fifth his tail fell down behind him and he went upon all fours, whereat his master (improvising a name to curse him by) exclaimed 'This is of a truth God's tiger! (Harimau Allah) Go you', he added, addressing the tiger, 'to the place where you will catch your prey—the borderland between the primaeval forest and the secondary forest-growth, and that between the secondary growth and the plain—catch there whomsoever you will . . . Hence too, he carries on his hide to this very day the mark of the stripes with which he was beaten at school" (Skeat, 1972, pp. 158-159).

More than seventy-five years later, anthropologist Carol Laderman collected a version of this legend from Tok Daud, a *main 'teri* practitioner in Machang, Terengganu. Tok Daud told Laderman this legend to illustrate the origins of *hala*, the weretiger that is invoked during *main 'teri* ritual performances.

> Once there was a young virgin named Siti Zarah who plucked some *buah kemunting* [a kind of berries] and ate them. After a while her belly began to get big. She was pregnant, and she had no husband. The berries that she had eaten had drops of weretiger's semen on them. She gave birth to a son who she named Abdul Jinah. As the boy grew older, he acted more and more like a tiger. He started to demand raw meat for his dinner and he couldn't learn the Koran as quickly as other children did. Finally, his Koran teacher became furious at his behaviour and picked up a cane. He beat Abdul Jinah hard, marking his body with forty stripes like the fur of the tiger. The teacher chased Abdul Jinah into the jungle, where he turned into a dangerous weretiger (Laderman, 1991, pp. 71-72).

An examination of both versions of this weretiger origin story provides interesting insights into *hala*, the weretiger. Both tales stress the mysterious origin of the weretiger child. In the tale collected in late 19th century Selangor by Skeat, the weretiger child is a pale skinned forest foundling, in Tok Daud's tale, the weretiger child is the illegitimate offspring of a weretiger father and human mother. Both Muhammad, an *anak yatim*, or orphan and Abdul Jinah, an *anak haram*, an illegitimate child are individuals denied full incorporation into the fabric of Malay society due to their illegitimacy and lack of familial ties. Skeat's weretiger child, the orphan Muhammad, manifests his tiger-like personality through cruelty to his

schoolmates, while Tok Daud's weretiger child, Abdul Jinah, reveals his tigrine nature through his lust for raw flesh and his inability to recite the Qur'an. These events demonstrate that the weretiger is viewed as a cruel, antisocial being beyond the redemption of formal education or religious instruction. Both Muhammad Yatim and Abdul Jinah make their dramatic transformation from human to tiger as they are beaten with a cane by their school masters-figures of societal authority that whip the stripes of the tiger into the fur of their former charges before they banish them from human society. From the tale recorded by Skeat, we learn that weretigers are beings doomed to inhabit the liminal frontier between the human and animal worlds, cursed to wander the borderlands of human settlement – between the secondary growth forest and the plain.

Skeat notes that Betara Guru, or Shiva in his manifestation of Kala, the destroyer is understood by many Malays of the late nineteenth century to be an inhabitant of the liminal, or intermediate zones which are also understood as zones of spiritual and physical danger (Skeat, 1972). The frontier zone between the forest clearing and the primaeval forest, the village, and the jungle, is the home of the weretiger. The expression used to refer to the beast that inhabits this realm between nature and culture Skeat records as "Grandsire Long Claws", a polite euphemism for the tiger. Skeat speculates that the tigerine being that stalks the edge of human society may signify a special manifestation of Shiva on land in the guise of Kala.

While the primaeval forests continue to shrink as palm oil and rubber cultivation expand, *hala,* the weretiger continues to stalk the imagination of Malay communities. *Main 'teri* healing practitioners note both physical and psychological manifestations of weretiger wind in their patients. Physical manifestations can include high blood pressure, circulatory problems, or heart rhythm irregularities. Psychological manifestations of weretiger wind can include patients who are weak, quick to anger, lustful, deeply depressed, or often frustrated to the point of violence. Patients diagnosed by *main 'teri* practitioners with weretiger wind are led through a ritual process of releasing their inner tiger through specific songs and chants that call for the tiger spirit to arise.

On October 18, 2005, during the month of Ramadan, I discussed *angin hala* with the late Ali bin Ibrahim. The late Pak Ali was a renowned *mak yong* performer who often participated in village *main 'teri* healing performances as an actor and musician. Pak Ali classified *angin hala*, weretiger wind, as a *benda luar*, something that originates from outside the body. This he contrasted with characters that are also evoked and embodied in *main 'teri* healing performances but that are considered metaphors for the human embryo, the human placenta, the birth waters, and the amniotic sac. Pak Ali classified *hala* as *manusia ghaib*, or a supernatural being kept by people trained in traditional knowledge as a form of protection. *Hala* could be invoked by its keeper to *pagar kampung*, to gate the village, protecting it from outsiders or *pagar rumah*, to gate the house, protecting a home from robbery or forced entry. Attempting to enter a home protected by *hala,* was said to cause a tiger to appear. Tigers were reported to sit before the steps of village houses, guarding them while their occupants were away. Pak Ali explained that *hala* was often invoked by those who travelled at night to protect them from behind, and that in ancient times *hala* could be called upon as a form of transportation, even to Mecca.

During our conversation, Pak Ali explained that in our current age of electricity and airplanes, *hala* was no longer needed to guide people through the night or carry them over long distances. Pak Ali noted that while the practical needs for keeping a *hala* tutelary spirit may have decreased, *hala* and care for the spirit was something that continued to descend within family lines. If an ancestor had made use of *hala*, and an individual was aware of it, a sacrifice was required once a year to keep the tiger spirit satisfied. Otherwise, he or she could fall sick with *angin hala*, weretiger wind. Pak Ali claimed that in the past his own ancestors had kept *hala* and that once a year a sacrifice of a roast chicken, glutinous yellow saffron rice, puffed rice, one young coconut, and *menisang*, a ball like sweet similar to palm sugar, needed to be offered to feed the spirit of *hala* in order to keep it from turning to devour its masters.

Pak Ali's understanding of weretiger wind developing due to the neglect of an ancestral tutelary weretiger spirit is a belief that is undergoing a process of re-evaluation by many *main 'teri* ritual practitioners who are actively examining and reinterpreting the belief system that underpins their traditional healing practices. Malaysia and Indonesia have been experiencing a post-colonial Islamic revival since the mid-nineteen seventies, which has resulted in a proliferation of religious movements and the introduction of interpretations of Islamic theology and Islamic practice into local and national politics (Hefner & Horvatich, 1997). Part of this process of re-negotiating traditional belief systems in response to changing perceptions of Islam in Southeast Asia involves reframing long-standing concepts of supernatural beings as agents of disease. Many contemporary Kelantanese healers openly discuss the supernatural beings addressed, described, and confronted in *main 'teri* healing rituals as symbols or metaphors of an internalised physical or social dysfunction materialised in the body of a patient.

In the following excerpt from an interview with the accomplished rebabist, *mak yong* performer and *Tok Minduk*, Omar bin Awang, or Che Amat, Che Amat eloquently articulates how he understands *angin hala* not as a disease of the body, nor a supernatural affliction, but as an illness of repressed desire. He reasons that the offering of glutinous yellow rice, roasted chicken, flour, and young coconut that Pak Ali notes was necessary to offer to the tutelary spirit should be viewed as food offered to sustain a weakened patient. The weretiger of legend, he interprets merely as a sublimated symbol of the human emotion of anger. Che Amat notes that his chants and prayers are not meant to call the spirit of *hala* from the jungle to come to the ritual healing event, rather his words and actions are addressing the *hala*, the anger and frustration residing within a patient to arise and be released through ritual catharsis.

> *Hala* is not related to high blood pressure, diabetes, heart problems, no, it doesn't follow that. It doesn't follow that because the seven *hala* are our desires, that is the seven *hala*. . .When the seven *hala* appear in *main 'teri* we give it to eat water, yellow glutinous rice, grilled chicken, flour, young coconut, and so on because the patient has been ill for a long time and not eaten. We can eat all those things, no issue, but the other is symbolic as it is truthfully for the *hala Wali*. The seven *hala* then bless the seven parts of the body, the seven articles of faith, overall, what it means is that the blessings that God gives to us, that is the meaning. A person that makes us mad. When we want to become angry at a person, it is like we will look like a tiger. If we

> want to get mad at a person . . . people who make us angry will also look like tigers to us, they look like tigers. Their face will be red, and we will be frightened by their angry faces.
>
> The seven *hala* then bless the seven parts of the body, the seven articles of faith, overall, what it means is that the blessings that God gives to us, that is the meaning. . . That's it, there is nothing wrong, it is not that we want to call the *hala* tiger from the jungle to come to us, if we see it, we will take off running! It is the *hala* within us, let's not misunderstand these things. Because what we play, they don't understand, but they punish us for what, why don't they ask? They don't ask. They punish what they see as wrong, they confess that they see that the way Che Amat *main 'teri* is judged as forbidden, they are speaking about how it appears externally, they don't examine it in depth. (Omar bin Awang, August 2013)

Many *main 'teri* performers continue to acknowledge the existence of a parallel supernatural world, but, like Che Amat, have begun to emphasise that supernatural beings, like the weretiger, are but metaphors for unfulfilled human desires. Part of this adaptation includes *main 'teri* practitioners de-emphasizing their belief in tutelary spirits and spiritual possession–reframing their long-standing concept of supernatural beings like *hala*, the weretiger, as agents of disease as symbols of an internalised physical or social dysfunction that materialises in the body of a patient.

Weretiger Transformations in Song: *Titih Hala*

While *main 'teri* and *mak yong* have faced nearly three decades of prohibition by PAS in Kelantan, *dikir barat* performances by young men have continued unabated in Kelantanese villages. *Dikir barat* is a form of choral singing that originally arose from *zikir*, the repetition of the names of Allah in a collective communal prayer. Current performances of *dikir barat* are led by a *Tukang Karut*, or song leader who sings the initial chorus, that is repeated in a call and response pattern by a group of young men, or *awok-awok*, who sit in a circle and energetically synchronise their movements and clapping to embody the poetic phrases sung by the *Tukang Karut*.

The *dikir barat* song *Titih Hala* sung by Nasran combines the genres of *dikir barat* and *main 'teri* to create *dikir 'teri* a form of *dikir barat* that is used by some in place of a full *main 'teri* ritual healing performance to *segar angin*, or heal internal wind. *Titih Hala* references *main 'teri* in its melodious singing style, poetic ritual language, use of the *serunai*, and interlocking gendang drumming patterns that are used to signal *lupa* or trance in *main 'teri*. The lyrics of Titih Hala sung by Nasran describe the descent of a weretiger spirit from the hills, its country, to take part in a one day, one night healing event. The lyrics then address the patient, noting that a lullaby is being sung by the healer to awaken the weretiger wind of the patient from slumber.

The lyrics then describe the old one, the original one who awaits dawn in the river. This is possibly an allusion to the crocodile, who upon entering the hall of a home, a metaphor in *main 'teri* for the body of a patient, becomes a tiger. The crocodile and the tiger are symbols of liminality and danger as they reside in the

secondary forest and the intertidal wetlands and represent a powerful and potentially deadly concealed force that can strike humans without warning. Crocodiles and tigers are also often associated with ancestors who are said to transform into these animals when they leave their human forms behind. In Kelantanese legends, powerful *Tok Nora* are said not to die, but to become white crocodiles. In *Puteri Timun Muda*, a tale performed both in the *nora Melayu* and the *mak yong* theatrical traditions, one of the main characters transforms into a white crocodile. The Temiar indigenous people of Kelantan call their healers Hala'. Hala' are understood to have the power to turn into tigers both in life and when they die and become ancestral figures. The *mak yong* tale of *Bongsu Sakti* also features a tiger to human transformation.

The *Titih Hala* lyrics that describe the crocodile to tiger transformation note that the patient has become just any tiger, but the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening, the same tiger invoked in *main 'teri bangkitan* to raise the wind of the weretiger and the *mak yong* tales of *Dewa Muda* and *Bongsu Sakti*. The following verse describes how the patient in the guise of the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening is presented with the standard ritual offerings of a breast of roasted chicken and glutinous yellow saffron rice. *Tukang Karut* Nasran then addresses the beings that live in the village and the beings that live in the hills, metaphorical language for the unseen spiritual entities that are understood to inhabit these spaces alongside with human beings, to release the patient from illness. The last two lyrics sung by *Tukang Karut* Nasran allude to releasing the patient from weretiger wind. The *Tukang Karut* sends greetings for the patient, who is bathed in sweat from their exertions as the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening. That which has sprouted from the patient during the healing event is cast away, the sharp becomes dull, that which is hot is cooled through sweat, and *Tukang Karut* Nasran requests that the spirit of the weretiger to return back to the liminal realm of the twilight.

Titih Hala - As performed by Nasran

Ala bobon, bobonlah tabe	Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo	I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit	It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
Asal negoro, naik negoro,	It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeeee, Seghi semale	Awe-eeeee, One day, one night [of healing]
[chorus]	
Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek	Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo	I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit	It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
Asal negoro, naik negoro	It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeeee, naik negoro.	Awe-eeeee, goes up to the country
Aiiii kejut jago Awe diulik lego tido doh	Aiiii awake Awe, I sang you a lullaby as you slept soundly
Tido diulik jago digerok	Sleep, I sing you a lullaby to awake
kejut jago Awe lego tido	Awake Awe, I sang you a lullaby as you slept
Tido diulik jago digerok	Sleep, I sing you a lullaby to awake
Awe-eeeee. Seghi semale	Awe-eeeee, One day, one night [of healing]

[chorus]	
Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek	Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo	I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit	It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
Asal negoro, naik negoro	It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeeee, naik negoro	Awe-eeeee, goes up to the country
Aaa oghe tuo, seoghe berasal	Aaaa the old one, the original one
Mengaroh ceroh didale sungai	Directing the light of dawn in the river
Bilo naik dilame awah menyentap bulu	When he climbs into the hall, fascinated with fur
Menjadi rimau	Becomes a tiger
Awe-eeeee. Seghi semale	Awe-eeeee, One day, one night [of healing]
[chorus]	
Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek	Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo	I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit	It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
Asal negoro, naik negoro,	It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeeee. naik negoro	Awe-eeeee, goes up to the country
Aaa mu rimau besa' Sarje Kilat	Aaa you are the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening,
Sejano Wongi diberi gela'	Sargent Fragrant Lightening is the name you are called
Mu rimau besa' Sarje Kilat	You are the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening,
Sejano Wongi diberi gela'	Sargent Fragrant Lightening is the name you are called
Awe-eeeee. Seghi semale	Awe-eeeee, One day, one night [of healing]
[chorus]	
Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek	Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo	I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit	It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
Asal negoro, naik negoro,	It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeeee, naik negoro.	Awe-eeeee, goes up to the country
Aaa pulut kuning aye pangge dada pelepit	Aaa turmeric glutinous rice, roasted breast of chicken
Nok mintok ke pelepah, nok suruh pulih	I ask that you be released, I want you to be healed
pulut kuning aye pangge dada pelepit	Aaa turmeric glutinous rice, roasted breast of chicken
Nok mintok ke pelepah, nok suruh pulih	I ask that you be released, I want you to be healed
Awe-eeeee. Seghi semale	Awe-eeeee, One day, one night [of healing]
[chorus]	
Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek	Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo	I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit	It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
Asal negoro, naik negoro,	It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeeee naik negoro	Awe-eeeee, goes up to the country
Aaa hok dok kapong, de dudok di bukit	Aaa those living in the village, those living in the hills
Mintoh tabek belako-lako	I ask all of you for permission
hok dok kapong, de dudok di bukit	Those living in the village, those living in the hills

Mintoh tabek belako-lako	I ask all of you for permission
Awe-eeeee. Seghi semale	Awe-eeeee, One day, one night [of healing]
[chorus]	
Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek	Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo	I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit	It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
Asal negoro, naik negoro,	It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeeee. naik negoro.	Awe-eeeee, goes up to the country
Berkak tanggoh, demi saghi soghilah,	Thank you for your blessings one day at a time
Lacek gak, silo ucap bicaro sale	Sweating then, I give my greetings
Aaa guru turun melepah turun	Aaa the teacher descends, and is released
Guru turun, lacek gak	The teacher descends, I am sweating then
Membwe cendeh	Casting away that which has sprouted
Aaa wak taje jadi tumpul	Aaa may that which is sharp become dull
Wak panah lacek gak	That which was made hot, be cooled through sweating
Balek senjo	Return to the twilight

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEtorsHcXH

Titih Hala continues to be a popular *dikir barat* song and is often performed both in Kelantanese villages and on proscenium stages in cities in Peninsular Malaysia. These performances often include performers who take on the dramatic roles of a *Tok 'Teri* and a patient who undergoes the enactment of a ritual "healing" embodying the actions described in the song. *Main 'teri* healing rituals to release weretiger wind are encapsulated and referenced in *Titih Hala*, which in turn has become a musical reference that continues to inspire a new generation of Malaysian artists to explore their fascination with the weretiger and the boundaries of human-animal entanglements in Malaysia.

Tiger Stripes: Horror and Tigrine Feminist Critiques in Malaysian Film

Tiger Stripes is a Malaysian Malay-language horror film produced in 2023 that was written and directed by Amanda Nell Eu. *Tiger Stripes* won the Critics Week Grand Prize at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival. The film features a twelve-year-old Malay girl, Zaffan. Zaffan is portrayed as non-conforming schoolgirl who removes her uniform headscarf to film TikTok dances in the school toilet with her friends during class time. Zaffan and her friends Farah and Mariam often play in the forest and rivers on the way home from school, and the audience witnesses Zaffan removing her river drenched school uniform to walk home in her undergarments, flesh-coloured shorts and a tank top. Once she arrives home, her mother, newly returned from work, is appalled both by Zaffan's river-soaked school uniform and her lack of modesty. She further humiliates her daughter by chastising her loud enough for the entire village to hear and physically throws her out of the house in her wet undergarments in an attempt to shame her into more appropriate, modest, "lady-like" behaviour.

Zaffan is soon disturbed by the physical changes to her body as she undergoes

the process of puberty as she is the first in her peer group to get her period. Her friends notice that she is beginning to wear a bra, and that she has been excluded from Muslim prayers by the school *ustazah* during her menses. Horror begins to overtake Zaffan when she discovers that her fingernails and toenails are dropping off as she grows claws, her body is covered with purple bruises, whiskers begin to grow on her face, and she begins to bald. Beyond alerting her mother that she needs to have her blood-soaked bed linen changed and requiring her maternal assistance to unclog the family toilet when accidentally flushing a sanitary pad, Zaffan avoids communicating with her mother about her concerns regarding her troubling physical changes. Zaffan's mental state continues to deteriorate as her hearing and eyesight are affected, she begins to bound up the trunks of trees, and to feast on the blood of animals. Zaffan is ashamed and continues to hide her physical changes from her mother, teachers, and friends with even more layers of modest clothing, donning gloves and refusing to remove her headscarf, even when she sleeps. Zaffan's physical changes mean that she is increasingly isolated from her peers Mariam and Farah. She begins to take solace in being alone in the forest, where she sits on a rock in the river or floats near her favorite waterfall.

Mariam and Farah begin to remark frequently on Zaffan's poor physical hygiene and note that she has begun to smell horrible. After Zaffan urinates in class when denied a bathroom break by their teacher, Mariam and Farah begin to ostracise her. Eventually Mariam and Farah corner Zaffan in their former TikTok haven of the girl's school toilet. Farah leads the bullying, dragging Zaffan out of a toilet cubicle to beat her and accuse her of promiscuity. As Mariam and Farah attack Zaffan she escapes, crawling away from them, snarling, on all fours. The girls who attacked Zaffan in the school toilet are suddenly overwhelmed by fits of hysteria. Their young female teacher is alerted by their screams and comes to investigate. She is also overcome by the mass hysteria and required to take a leave of absence from teaching. As a result of this incident, the girl's toilet is locked by the school and made unavailable for student use.

Soon after the mass hysteria, a jauntily dressed young *ustaz*, made famous by his healing sessions featured on social media, visits the school making his presence known at a school assembly. The *ustaz* and his assistants begin to search the school for the source of the spiritual disturbance. Zaffan is identified as the cause of the school's mass hysteria and a communal healing event is organised in a village home. During the healing session the *ustaz* sprays water in Zaffan's face with a spray bottle and tries to verbally goad her into anger so that her inner tiger emerges. The *ustaz*'s performative actions of spraying water in the face of a sick and emotionally distressed girl leads some villagers to question if his methods are efficacious, or if he is indeed just a charlatan.

Echoing the weretiger legends recorded in Skeat and documented by Laderman, the *ustaz* decides that the only way to get the beast to emerge from Zaffan is to beat it out of her. The *ustaz* begins to flog Zaffan with a metal rod, beating the stripes of the tiger into the flesh of the schoolgirl as she tries to escape him and begs him to stop. Zaffan, like Muhammad Yatim and Abdul Jinah before her, transforms into a weretiger as she is brutalised by the *ustaz*. However, in a feminist twist to the tale, she attacks the *ustaz* in her tigrine form and beheads her tormentor before fleeing

the village for the safety of the jungle. Zaffan is chased cautiously out of her village by scared neighbours carrying farming tools as improvised weapons.

At the end of *Tiger Stripes*, the audience witnesses Mariam beginning to undergo her own transformation. The radio tells us that it has been two weeks since Zaffan's disappearance, and now it is Mariam who is wearing long gloves and a headscarf to hide her claws and balding head. Mariam sneaks out of her house in her pyjamas, past her sleeping parents, to play in the forest at night with her friend, Zaffan the weretiger. Farah follows Mariam, and the fate of all three girls is left ambiguous as the film ends. The audience is left to assume that all three girls are now experiencing the horrors of bodily changes as their girlhood worlds collapse around them. Zaffan and Mariam rebel against the patriarchal status quo, choosing instead to embrace a wild, but powerful tigrine femininity that isolates them from Malay village society. Farah, the school prefect who has been the most critical of Zaffan's non-conformist behaviour, follows her friend Mariam into the darkness, trying to bring her back home. Ultimately Farah is gouged in the leg by a weretiger, foreshadowing that she will also become what she has most feared, a wild non-conforming woman in the guise of a weretiger.

Conclusion

The Malayan tiger is critically endangered, and yet the weretiger remains an important symbol of liminality, ancestral heritage, ritual, horror, and raw animal power in the arts of Malaysia and the Riau Archipelago. Human-tiger entanglements are referenced in oral-historical narratives, the traditional theatrical forms of *mak yong* and *nora Melayu*, and the ritual healing performances of *main 'teri*. However, the Malaysian fascination with the conflation of nature and culture, the animal, and the human, is not just confined to traditional dramatic forms and esoteric healing rituals. Contemporary performances inspired by *Titih Hala* are examples of how legendary creatures like weretigers and werecrocodiles continue to be referenced and invoked, and how the lineages of human-animal-spirit entanglements continue explored through the medium of popular song. In turn, the independent film *Tiger Stripes*, provides a feminist spin on an old legend that explores how the flogging of a socially isolated teenager by a religious teacher continues to have the power to turn anyone into a beast.

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Biography

Patricia Ann Hardwick is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University. She holds a dual PhD in Folklore & Ethnomusicology and Anthropology from Indiana University, Bloomington. Her research has been published in Asian Ethnology, JMBRAS, Folklore Forum, Midwestern Folklore and Music and Medicine. Her research has been supported by the Institute of Sacred Music (Yale), Fulbright (MACEE 2003-2004, AMINEF 2018-2019), AIFIS and the Jacob K. Javits Fellowship Program (U.S. Department of Education). Dr. Hardwick's current research interests include intangible cultural heritage, digital humanities, archiving and cultural sustainability. Currently she is leading a Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) project funded by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education titled Sustaining Sustainability - Fundamental Research Strategies of Resilience and Adaptive Management in Malaysian Performing Arts.

Sanggar: A Contemporary Platform for the Evolving Tradition of Balinese *Gender Wayang*

Ako Mashino
Tokyo University of the Arts, Japan
e-mail: akomas@sky.email.ne.jp

Abstract

This paper discusses the modernization of Balinese *gender wayang*, a form of traditional music ensemble traditionally performed during rituals and as accompaniment to shadow puppetry. In the past, the music was most often taught and learned individually in private settings. Once considered to be the most difficult gamelan in Bali, competent performers were relatively few. However, since the 2010s, a new platform, s*anggar gender wayang*—privately-owned locations and organisations for teaching the music—have emerged, successfully producing many competent young players. The development and flourishing of *sanggar gender wayang* corresponded to the increasing number of children who became interested in studying the form, as a result of the great popularity of *gender wayang* competitions in South Bali, which began in 2005. Since then, *sanggar* have powerfully influenced the *gender wayang* ecosystem as a whole, providing a new form of social network to support children learning the music, with an economic impact on the musicians and musical industries, and developing new pedagogies and performance styles. Today's *sanggar* teachers basically maintain their traditional way of teaching, as in the private lessons of the past. They still play together with their students and prefer a holistic approach whenever possible. On the other hand, they have also developed new pedagogies and techniques, such as systematising teaching methods, especially in teaching the basics to beginners, and categorising the repertoire. They also created a new performance style especially for competitions to efficiently display the competence and skills of the musicians, as well as large ensembles consisting of many performers, never seen before. Thus, *sanggar* embodies the Balinese concept of being *modern* (modern) in their own way, simultaneously preserving and modernising the tradition.

Keywords: children, education, teaching method, tradition

To be *Moderen* in Balinese *Gender Wayang*

This paper discusses modernization in teaching and learning *gender wayang*, a Balinese traditional music ensemble form. *Gender wayang* consists of one or two pairs of bronze metallophones and is traditionally performed during rituals or as accompaniment to *wayang kulit*, shadow puppetry. Because of its complicated musical structure and demanding technique, it has been considered one of the most difficult gamelan to perform (see Gold, 1998, p. 23). Before the 2000s, there were only a few children *gender wayang* players. Today, however, it is not difficult to find

children skilfully playing music throughout Bali.

Adrian Vickers writes that Balinese have "their own distinctive version of being modern" (Vickers, 1996, pp. 1–2), describing the quality of being *moderen* (an Indonesian word which originated from Dutch, meaning modern), as a form, process, or experience associated with progress and development (Vickers, 1996, p. 6). Here, I focus on *sanggar*, private organisations for teaching the music, as primary agents transforming the pedagogy and performing style of *gender wayang* to become *moderen*, and bringing changes to the musical ecosystem (Gold, 2016).

Venues for Teaching and Learning *Gender Wayang*

Teaching and Learning Privately

The most popular path to learning *gender wayang* is that one personally asks a senior musician to teach, arranges the dates, and visits the teacher's home for instruction. This type of private lesson is still common, and until the late 2000s it was the only way to learn music. While I have often observed Balinese studying with senior musicians, some say that it is not comfortable for Balinese to personally ask specialists to teach them their valuable knowledge unless they have a close relationship with them. Some musicians added that older musicians in the past were rather "stingy," declining to share their knowledge with others. The instruments were expensive and only a limited number of people could afford them at home. Thus, access to *gender wayang* study was heavily dependent on personal circumstances and the available social network.

Traditionally, it was uncommon to pay lesson fees in cash, although this is not to suggest that teaching is free of charge (see also Heimarck, 2003, p. 65). Instead, learners usually show their gratitude by bringing rice, sugar, coffee, and so forth, or by offering their labour for rituals held in the teacher's home. The exchange process could be indirect and might continue for years after the actual lessons in some cases. Even today, teachers seldom set a price for their private lessons. How much the apprentice owes to the teacher is assumed to be immeasurable in monetary terms.

Sanggar

Sanggar refers to a space and organisation for performing arts, usually directed by an individual owner-artist—most often an experienced performer and alumni of the Institute of Indonesian Art (Institute Seni Indonesia, or ISI). Many *sanggar* have regular classes for children, while some *sanggar* focus primarily on performances.

The majority of the students at *sanggar gender wayang* are students of elementary or junior-high school age. In some *sanggar*, there are a few of kindergarten age and some in high school, as well. Boys and girls are approximately equal in number. The lessons are held according to a fixed schedule, and the students pay regular fees for participation.

Most *sanggar* members arrive from the neighbourhood, while some are accompanied by their parents, who bring them by car or on motorcycle. *Sanggars*, particularly large-scale ones, resemble schools in that they consist of one or a few

teachers and many children, and in that the students are often categorised into several classes according to their competence. Some *sanggar* use a grading system and exams to move up to advanced classes, and some have their own uniforms and membership cards.

Sanggar in Bali first emerged in the 1970s (McGraw, 2013, p. 107) and flourished since the 1990s (see also Downing, 2019, pp. 42–67). But *sanggar* dedicated to *gender wayang* have appeared only since the 2000s, when competitions in the music gained popularity in South Bali. In 2005, the firs*t gender wayang* competition was held as part of the annual Youth Art Week (Pekan Seni Remaja, or PSR), in Denpasar, where students competed representing their schools, and other local competitions followed. As I have described elsewhere (Mashino, 2009), these competitions successfully motivated many children to learn music. Many parents brought their children to the *gender wayang* specialists, who opened *sanggar*, arranged the lesson schedules, and purchased additional instruments to accommodate many students. Today, more than a dozen *sanggar* are actively teaching children in Denpasar. Since 2013, the Bali Art Festival (Pesta Kesenian Bali, or PKB), has also held an annual Bali-wide *gender wayang* competition, which enhanced *sanggar* development over broader regions. Competitions and *sanggar* of *gender wayang* have developed in parallel since then.

Teaching and Learning in *Sanggar*

Below, I describe two *sanggar* lessons in *gender wayang* which I observed during my fieldwork in 2018 and 2022.

Sanggar Gangsa Dewa (2018)

Sanggar Gangsa Dewa in North Denpasar was established in 2008 by Ni Ketut Suryatini, a former instructor at ISI. She said more than 400 children had been registered (meaning that they had come to the *sanggar* at least once and their names and addresses were documented), and around 50 students were actively coming to the lessons at the time of my visit in 2018.

When I visited the *sanggar*, 16 instruments set in rows fully occupied a room of her family property. The *sanggar* was open on Saturday and Sunday, from 9:00 to 16:00, while the students, accompanied by their parents, came in twos and threes, and replaced each other. I observed the afternoon class for beginners. First, eight children, including both girls and boys, started by playing "Tulang Lindung," a basic piece popular for beginners. All played the *polos* part, one of the paired parts of *gender wayang*, together. After that, three of them repeated it once more, while another tried to play *sangsih*, the other part of the musical pair, of the same piece with them. Then, one of them proceeded to the next piece, "Sekti," alone, probably because the others had not yet learned it. Next was another small boy of kindergarten age, who presumably was there to learn the music for the first time. Suryatini explained to him how to sit correctly, grasp the *panggul* (beaters), and strike and mute the keys. After he tried to strike and mute the keys several times, he was replaced by three other children, who played "Sekti" together. In this way, various pieces were performed a

few times each, and the students constantly replaced each other. While waiting their turn, they chatted with each other, buying, and eating snacks, or just stared blankly at the lesson. Even though many do not attentively observe the lessons of others, their presence and hearing the music would provide an opportunity for legitimate peripheral participation, that is, to unconsciously prepare an image of what they would learn in the future (Lave & Wenger, 1993).

Suryatini put a list of 32 pieces to be learned on a wall of the room, categorised by complexity into five classes: "*dasar* 1" (basic 1), "*dasar* 2" (basic 2), "*mahir* 1" (advanced 1), "*mahir* 2" (advanced 2), and "*maha"* (excellent). Each category comprised four to nine pieces. Most pieces on the list, including those originally from other areas, belonged to the so-called Style Kayumas (Kayumas-style) repertoire, which she inherited from her father, the late I Wayan Konolan, who was respected as a master of *gender wayang*. While Konolan also identified some basic pieces to teach beginners and some others for experienced players, he never tried to systematically categorise or characterise his repertoire. It is basically Suryatini's own initiative to clearly categorise her repertoire and systematise the teaching methods according to their complexity and requisite performing skills, while other *sanggar* teachers around Denpasar also employ similar classification systems, so that the students have clear targets at each stage and can proceed gradually, step by step.

Sanggar Suara Murti

Sanggar Suara Murti was organised in 2013 in Sukawati, Gianyar, by I Ketut Buda Astra, a *gender wayang* specialist and graduate of ISI. He has directed *gender wayang* teams representing Gianyar regency in Bali Art Festival competitions several times and won first prize in 2013 and 2015. His village of Sukawati is widely known as a centre of shadow puppetry, where many puppeteers and *gender wayang* musicians live, while his Suara Murti is at present the only *sanggar* specially dedicated to teaching music to children. According to Buda's wife, around 150 students have registered in the *sanggar* and 100 are actively studying today.

When I visited the *sanggar* in 2018, Buda and his young assistant were teaching 14 beginners in one *kelas* (class); according to Buda, three of them were complete beginners, and the others had just started to learn a week before. They tried to play a short entry piece together that Buda composed for beginners. After Buda demonstrated the melody, they tried to play together. But soon, they drifted apart, as most of the students only partially understood what they should do. Buda and his assistant went to the confused students to teach them one-by-one, indicating the keys to be struck from the opposite side, while some other students tried to play by themselves and some others just sat absent-mindedly. As everyone was playing independently, it sometimes became chaotic. After Buda and the assistant went around, they tried to start together again, but the group soon fell apart. This repeated in the same way several times. Although Buda knew it was difficult to teach so many at once, he said he could hardly refuse people asking for lessons, so he tried to teach them as a *kelas*. Buda and his assistant were amazingly patient and highly concentrated with each targeted student amid the many instruments chaotically ringing out.

When I again visited his *sanggar* in 2022, they had stopped teaching the large *kelas* and shifted to private or small-group teaching, which he called "*privat*" (private), which, Buda said, more parents preferred, as they found it more efficient. Now his daughter and senior students had become his assistants, teaching one or two children each, simultaneously but separately at different locations in his family compound. This enabled all teachers and students to be more focused and able to concentrate on each other than in a larger class. Buda does not clearly classify his students according to skill, though he considers what they should learn next by observing each student's competence.

Sanggar as a Contemporary Platform for Teaching and Learning

Sanggar Activity as Social Networking

Most *sanggar* classes are basically open to anyone who would like to join, even if he or she does not have a personal connection to the teacher. On the day of *sanggar* activities, many people gather at the teacher's house: the students' parents attentively observing their children's lesson or recording videos; their little brothers and sisters; the teacher's family members supporting the *sanggar* activities as assistant teachers or secretaries. All are involved in the activities, developing a social network, which as a whole contributes to supporting the children in learning and performing. The experiences of learning and performing together in *sanggar*, as well as waiting, chatting, or exchanging information, shapes a specific community based upon and focused on the music. The uniform T-shirts with *sanggar* logos also contribute to a sense of belonging to one community. Trophies which some students won at competitions are usually displayed in the *sanggar* rehearsal space, as an honour for the *sanggar* as a whole.

Sanggar and Competitions

The development of *sanggar gender wayang* has definitely corresponded to that of competition. According to I Ketut Agus Swastika, a *gender wayang* musician leading Sanggar Swasti Suara in Denpasar, the most common motivation for students to start learning *gender wayang* at his *sanggar* is to participate in competitions (Swastika, pers. comm.). Competitions have provided opportunities for young musicians to appear in public and gain social attention, which motivates them to learn the music further. In addition, if the children successfully win prizes, they earn advantage points for entering junior-high or high school. Even if they do not win a prize, their parents are very proud to see their children performing the music on stage. *Sanggar* significantly supports them in preparing for competition, and thus have contributed to the flourishing of competitions as well, by supplying many of the participants.

Sanggar Economy

While the *sanggar* lesson fee is usually inexpensive and affordable, the income from *sanggar* activities as a whole is significant, as it enables the owners to buy more

instruments, employ assistant teachers, and support their lives. Fixed payment systems clearly setting fees simplified and modernised the traditional gifting custom in which teachers never set a price, so that their special knowledge became more accessible to the learners and their parents.

The development of *sanggar* has had an impact on the music industry as well. *Sanggar* students buy their own *panggul* (beaters) to use at home and bring them to *sanggar* lessons, and today, most have their own instruments at home. Increasing numbers of people can afford to own expensive bronze instruments privately, while less affluent people would buy iron instruments which are inferior in resonance but are regarded as adequate for learning at home and can be purchased at an affordable price. Additionally, if the children participate in competitions, parents need extra money for participation fees, make-up, hair-setting, and costume rental.

The growth of *sanggar* has been seen as a consequence of a rising middle class and aligned with the performers' desire to pursue their interests more independently (McGraw, 2013, p. 108; Downing, 2019, p. 38). I would add that affluent parents' passion for their children to develop competence in performing arts is another powerful factor promoting *sanggar* activities, as the development of *sanggar gender wayang* is supported by many parents who spare no expense for their children.

Pedagogy of *Gender Wayang*: Continuity and Change

Traditional Pedagogy Continued

As previous studies have described (McPhee, 1970; Bakan, 1999; Gray, 2011; Minagawa, 1994; Umeda, 2009) to mention only a few), Balinese artists have always taught their arts through performing together. This means that the students learn a piece through intensive observation and listening to their teacher's performance, while playing together with them. Nick Gray writes that multi-sensory perception and imitation of the teacher's performance enabled him to learn "not just notes but the teacher's whole manner while playing," and that he sometimes felt as though his teacher was "physically forcing the piece" into him (Gray, 2011, p. 42). This "playing together" pedagogy basically endures today. Even in the large *sanggar* classes I described, the teachers play together with students and also often individually attend to a targeted student, so that the student can perceive the body movements and sound of the teacher directly at very close range, although the degree of intimacy between teacher and student in a private lesson would be different from that when many students learn together.

Traditional Balinese pedagogy also favours a holistic approach. In 1937, Colin McPhee observed that when teaching children, a gamelan musician performed complete musical patterns without dividing them into short units, and at tempo (McPhee, 1970). Michael Bakan also described his drum teacher's holistic approach (Bakan, 1999, p. 284), citing McPhee's observation that "the teacher is merely the transmitter" who just shows "the complex design hung on the wall" and tells his student to copy it (McPhee, cited in Bakan, 1999, p. 282). Umeda Hideharu, a Japanese ethnomusicologist, also describes his experience in the early 1990s when

his *gender wayang* teacher taught him by repeating a complete long piece without a break for hours (Umeda, 2009, p. 34).

I agree with Bakan and McPhee, from my experience as a gamelan student, I also often felt as if my teachers kept going ahead unmindful of me. However, as I have observed the lessons of others since the 1990s, I found that most of the *gender wayang* teachers, whether in *sanggar* or privately at home, were considering the student's specific competence. Experienced musicians always carefully observe and evaluate each other's competence while playing together, whether in teaching or in performance. Choosing a piece that fits the student's competence, controlling the tempo, and managing the length of the phrase to be repeated, the teachers, to a greater or lesser degree, compromise their holistic approach, even though they might still appear to the student's eye to be showing "the complex design hung on the wall." How far they actually compromise may depend greatly on personality and circumstances. There are many stories about short-tempered gamelan teachers (Minagawa, 1994; Umeda, 2009). However, these *sanggar* teachers are generally calm and patient. They seldom scold or show signs of frustration even if their students cannot smoothly understand, and make conscious efforts to foster children: they divide a phrase into short units, and repeat them one by one before proceeding; they physically touch the students' hands to correct and indicate where to strike; they often verbally communicate with the students, asking *"sudah*?" (already?) or encourage them with words such as "*bagus!"* (good!) or "*yah!"* (yes!).

Developing Teaching Methods

While traditional pedagogies persist, *sanggar* teachers have also developed new methods and tips corresponding to changes in the teaching-learning circumstances. For example, Suryatini has developed a unique method to teach students how to correctly grasp the *panggul*: first, she told her students to make fists and open two fingers, then placed the *panggul* in the correct position there, told them to put their thumb on it, and then adjusted the other fingers to the right positions. When both hands were ready, she told them to watch her demonstration of how to make a sound. Then she told the students "*pukul"* (strike) the keys, "*angkat"* (raise) the hands, and "*tutup"* (mute) with both hands, showing the necessary hand movements. She then proceeded to a section of a piece called "Tulang Lindung," verbally directing "*Pukul, tutup, pukul, tutup.*"

She often used kinesthetic terms such as "*bersama"* (lit., being together, which means that both hands move simultaneously), "*sendiri"* (alone; only one hand moves), "*lompat"* (jump; striking a key which is not adjacent), or "*mundur"* (return to the original position), but did not use solmization of each note, as in *ding dong deng dung dang,* when teaching beginners.

Training for Competition

Another distinctive teaching style developed in *sanggar* is that for competition. *Gender wayang* competition has developed a specific performing style to efficiently demonstrate the performers' skillfulness in order to win the prize. The performers

usually play at a faster tempo than in rituals, emphasising cohesion and accuracy, and displaying their competence visually through decorative gesticulations (Mashino, 2020).

Before competition became popular, at the point when the student could understand the melody and was barely able to follow the teacher, the lesson usually ended, or the teacher would proceed on to another piece. My teachers preferred to play various pieces during lessons, as they quickly got bored of repeating the same piece many times. Further, teachers seldom teach or explain in detail the delicate movements of the *panggul* or subtle adjustments to the dynamics or tempi. Lisa Gold writes that players expect to have this freedom when playing, and they feel it brings the pieces of music to life (Gold, 2016). Spontaneous reactions to their co-performers on the spot, individual creation of new ornamentation, and subtle hand movements could not be taught, but should be acquired through and during the performances (Gray, 2011, p. 126).

In contrast, the performance on the competition stage is the complete, finished product of a longer process of rehearsals, in which the tempi, timing, breath, and body movements are perfectly elaborated and fixed before the performance, so that the musicians can play in perfect synchrony. Particularly for high-stakes competitions, teachers may intensively and generously teach the techniques they have, as the students represent their *sanggar* as a whole.

The *sanggar* teacher is responsible for supervising the performance throughout the process, during which the students repeat the same piece numerous times. On the day of competition, *sanggar* teachers also often take care of their students by taking them to the site, bringing instruments, and preparing offerings, though the participants' parents may sometimes take on these roles. The *sanggar* teacher is virtually the director and conductor of the competition performances, which are the product of collaboration between the teacher and students.

Conclusion: Change for Continuing

All *sanggar* teachers I met during my fieldwork emphasised that their motivation to organise *sanggar* was to keep alive their tradition, their own regional performing style, repertoire, aesthetics, and philosophy, which they inherited from their family or forerunners. They expect that their *sanggar* children will somehow carry on what they are performing today. Teaching the basics to beginners—especially child beginners—naturally demands extraordinary perseverance and specific methodology. Many established musicians admit that they cannot or will not teach beginners. The musicians who organised *sanggar* have a special passion to nurture the next generation. Suryatini thought that teaching beginners is the most important and the most difficult. She said to me "If the students have already mastered the basics, they can go anywhere, learn from anyone." (Suryatini, personal communication, August 25, 2018).

On the other hand, *sanggar* shapes a new type of socio-cultural space for experiments that may transform traditional pedagogy, custom, and performing style, and produce a new aesthetic value. Brita Heimarck writes that modernization in

Balinese music is an alteration of past traditions, adapting them to modern needs (Heimarck, 2003, p. 9). Two different but interrelated approaches of *sanggar*, carefully teaching the basics to beginners or refining and elaborating competition performance, embody the Balinese concepts of continuing their tradition and becoming *moderen* at the same time.

In an anniversary event in 2015, Denpasar City included a massive *gender wayang* performance by 100 children; Gianyar also followed that example, with 150 child players to which *sanggar* of Suryatini and Buda contributed (see also Gold, 2016). Each regency showcased amazing numbers of child musicians proficiently playing the old, difficult, and sacred music. These massive performances, in which many musicians perform together in a cohesive manner, were uncommon in the past and would be impossible without the development of *sanggar*s, which supplied many players who learned the same piece in the same style, as well as many instruments with the same tuning. The performances at public events presumably displayed the traditional values in a *moderen* manner. Lisa Gold writes that built into Balinese "tradition" is innovation and "tradition and innovation are lively organisms that play off of one another" (Gold, 2016).

While large-scale teaching and performance were not allowed during the COVID-19 outbreak, the *sanggar gender wayang* continued their teaching activities. Avoiding larger classes, dividing their students into smaller groups, wearing masks, and using hand sanitizer, most *sanggar* continued their classes. On-line competitions were also held so that the children kept their motivation to learn. Many musicians were critical of and unsatisfied with evaluating the recorded performance, but they mostly admitted that it was better than nothing. When the emergency declaration was lifted in 2022, competitions and other performance opportunities for *sanggar* returned. For example, Buda's *sanggar* performed *gender wayang* as a group in the temple ceremony at Pura Dalem Sukawati in September 2023, where twenty instruments were played together and around seventy children participated in total (Buda, Facebook, September 30, 2023). His daughter Sendy, who was one of Buda's first child students who won a competition in 2013, has already graduated from ISI and is leading other young *sanggar* musicians, actively performing *gender wayang* and other gamelans, such as *selonding* and *gamelan semar pegulingan* in the *sanggar* (Buda, Facebook, September 27, 2023).

Sanggar is a contemporary platform not only for teaching and learning *gender wayang* to keep the tradition alive, but also for creating new types of performance. They simultaneously produce a driving force to continue the tradition and transform it to be *moderen*.

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Biography

Dr. Ako Mashino acquired a BA in 1991 and an MA in 1996 from Tokyo University of Arts. She earned her doctoral degree (PhD) from Ochanomizu University, Japan, in 2002. She currently teaches ethnomusicology, Balinese gamelan, and other courses at several universities, including Tokyo University of Arts, Meiji University, and Kunitachi College of Music in Tokyo. She is the editor of an anthology titled *Minzokuongakugaku juuni no shiten* (2016) (12 Perspectives of Ethnomusicology) and has written several articles and papers in both Japanese and English. She is also an active performer of Balinese gamelan gong *kebyar*, *gender wayang*, and *geguntangan*.

Experimental Theatre and Way Forward: Mapping the Current Trends in Modern Malay Theatre

Mas Rynna Wati Ahmad
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
e-mail: masrynna@ukm.edu.my

Abstract

Malay theatre in Malaysia has been evolving. The forms and contents of modern Malay theatre change as Malay playwrights respond to the dynamic political and social milieu. Theatre experts on local Malay theatre used the term modern Malay theatre to refer to all the plays that were written within the period of Realism during the 1960s. Solehah Ishak (1990) categorized three major theatre periods in Malay theatre, namely, *sandiwara*, realism, and experimental/ contemporary theatre. However, the categorization of such periods stopped in the 1990s, even though modern Malay theatre kept on progressing until the present. With this advent progression, there is no specific category had been recorded in which able to periodize this new form of Malay theatre in history. This paper intends to trace the missing period after the Experimental Theatre trend which ended in the 1990s. Therefore, the research will focus on the works that were produced during the years 2000-2020 onwards, in which proper research has been found lacking. Using ethnographic approach, this research will attempt to reassess the facts that prove there is a continuance from the last recorded period. Findings will be beneficial for further studies, especially on the forms and contents of the works examined. Efforts to sustain modern Malay theatre history and its development is a strategy to promote Malay theatre as part of Malaysian national cultural heritage and thus in line with the Malaysian National Culture Policy that emphasizes restoring, preserving, and strengthening national culture through joint research, development, education and cultural expansion and global connections.

Keywords: modern Malay theatre, mapping current trends, globalization, heritage, national cultural heritage

Introduction

Malay theatre in Malaysia has been evolving through time. From *bangsawan* plays to contemporary plays, Malay theatre production has experienced many changes influenced by modernization in the country. The forms and contents of modern Malay theatre change as Malay playwrights respond to the dynamic political and social milieu. From the period after the Second World War until the present day, there has been no definite theatrical form that dominated local theatre productions. Theatre experts on local Malay theatre use the term modern Malay theatre to refer to all the

plays that were written during the period of realism in the 1960s. It is believed that the realistic plays then marked the breakthrough in the history of local productions. Plays like *Atap Genting Atap Rumbia* (*The Tiled Roof and the Thatched Roof)* and *Tamu di Bukit Kenny* (*Visitors at Kenny Hill*) are two plays produced in the 1960s, which reflected the advancement in local theatre trends.

When *Bukan Lalang Ditiup Angin* (*It is Not The Grass that is Blown by The Wind*) by Noordin Hassan was first staged in 1970, the play reflected the first transformation in modern Malay plays. The play, first staged in Petaling Jaya Civic Centre, shocked the audience. Throughout the play, the stage displayed no sitting room set. Noordin Hassan made a new transformation which no other playwright had done before. Many plays written by later playwrights such as Johan Jaafar, Dinsman, and Syed Alwi seemed to follow the trend of removing the sitting room as a stage prop, and therefore, this marked a departure from realistic plays. A proper set, such as a sitting room set, that was once believed to lie at the heart of realistic plays, could no longer sustain its dominance in the local productions.

New experimental plays written by contemporary playwrights during the 1970s and 1980s marked a drastic change in the theatrical scene in Malaysia. Many later productions benefited from these bold changes made in the techniques, styles, and approaches in experimental plays. Nowadays, many new eclectic approaches have become prominent in the current local productions as the local theatre scene becomes more confident and breaks away from conventional and stereotypical theatre arts. This represents a positive approach towards the advancement of theatre as an art, which reflects the current social and political stability of the country. This is seen in Krishen Jit's opinion in an interview published in *The Star*, dated 23rd May 2003, "There is something about Malaysian plays. They are more textured and complex, as there is this reluctance to make things simple. There never has to be finality" (Krishen Jit quoted in Lim, 2003, p. 3). Hence, some new theatrical styles and approaches later contributed to a more progressive development of Malay theatre productions to the present.

Problem Statement

Modern Malay theatre has been categorized into three major periods, namely, *sandiwara*, realism, and contemporary/experimental theatre. Unfortunately, no particular periodization has been made to classify the dynamics of new Malay theatre forms in the era of the millennium in Malaysia. Studies of periods and trends in modern Malay theatre stopped abruptly in the 1990s. However, there was an attempt made by theatre critics to highlight Islamic theatre trends in the 1980s after the popular experimental theatre period ended in the late 1970s. This was related to Islamic revivalism in Malaysia that shaped and influenced the theatre productions at that time. On the contrary, such attempts have created huge confrontations and debates, hence the study on classifying this trend has not achieved much attention ever since. Since there is no study or attempt to categorize a new periodization in promoting millennium theatre productions, from the year 2000 till 2020, this study is a continuation of the last effort made by Solehah in 1990. This offers a detailed study

of Malay works specifically. The new periodization is important not only because it fills in the gap left for so many years, but also because this new periodization can become a point of reference for future research and studies pertinent to modern Malay theatre in general.

Literature Review

Solehah Ishak (1990) in her article, "Trends in modern Malay theatre" deduced three major trends in local theatre productions. Namely:

Zaman Sandiwara (Sandiwara Period)

The turning point of the transitional period from traditional plays or *bangsawan* plays to modern plays, marked the *zaman sandiwara* or *sandiwara* period. Although *sandiwara* plays represent stories that are from Malay classical history which deal with Malay warriors, kings, and princes or are stories that are creatively produced by the playwrights, *sandiwara* plays still differ in many ways as compared to traditional Malay plays. *Sandiwara* plays require scripts and practice before the real performance. Traditional plays do not have a script and are performed spontaneously. A *bangsawan* play contains many episodes and sometimes is staged continuously for several nights. *Sandiwara,* in contrast, has very limited episodes. A *sandiwara* play was staged on a proscenium stage and improvises the *bangsawan* technique of extra-turn which is also known as interval during the next setting. This extra-turn is often not in line with the plot. Instead, the *sandiwara* plays use background music that is suitable for the plot during the intervals of the next setting. Though *sandiwara* has replaced many of *bangsawan*'s theatrical techniques, the performance technique is very much the same. Examples of famous *sandiwara* plays include: Shaharom Husain's *The Hunchback of Tanjong Puteri* (*Si Bongkok Tanjong Puteri*), and Kalam Hamidi's *The Child of Vows of Seven Scared Places* (*Anak Nazar Tujuh Keramat*).

Zaman Realistik atau Moden (Realism or Modern Period)

The 1960s also marked the emergence of realistic plays whose setting is the sitting room. These plays are also known as "sitting room plays" as the entire play takes place on a proscenium stage. Realistic plays have removed the extra-turn techniques and as a result, the plays are smoothly staged without any intervals in between the scenes. Plays of this period mostly deal with the Malays of the post-independence era who either lived in the *kampung* (village) or even if they lived in the *bandar* (town), they still adhered to traditional values. Often the plot will be based on the process of modernization and how the process has improved the infrastructure of the *kampung* and offer a better lifestyle for the society. Examples of famous realism plays include: *The Tiled Roof and the Thatched Roof*, (*Atap Genting Atap Rumbia*) by Mustapha Kamil Yassin, also known as Kala Dewata and Usman Awang's *Flute of the Night* (*Serunai Malam*).

Zaman Kontemporari (Contemporary Period)

Plays that fall under this period were written and published in the 1970s and 1980s. These plays have moved forward and left the village environment by the government's policies for restructuring the society by encouraging massive rural-urban migration and more Malay participation in the Malaysian economy. The plays were concerned with the change in the social milieu of the Malays who became the new rich Malays; the products of the implementation of the New Economic Policy of the post-1969 era. Bidin Subari's *Ayam Jantan Ayam Betina* (*The Cock and The Hen*) was first produced in 1973 and published in 1974. The play was produced four days after the riots; in response to the Malaysian state's efforts to improve the life of the Malays. Bidin Subari illustrates how wealth, education, and progress can raise the standard of living of the majority of the Malays. The Malaysian state has succeeded in implementing policies that encourage rural-urban migration. Bidin highlighted this vividly in his play that although these villagers have moved out from the village to the town, they are still trapped in poverty and continue to live on the fringes of these towns. It seems that these people inherit poverty and are powerless to change their lives. Bidin also pointed it out that power corrupts and is abused among the new rich Malays. The content of Bidin's play is very provocative yet the setting of the play remains in the sitting room; this kind of setting has never changed since.

Dato' Noordin Hassan represents a breakthrough in theatre experimentation, which marked the decade of the 1970s. Noordin's play, *Bukan Lalang Ditiup Angin* (*It Is Not The Grass That Is Blown By The Wind*) shattered the dominance of realistic plays and replaced them with experimental theatre, which was performed in experimentation theatres. The most interesting part of the play was that during the performance, the setting differed greatly from the traditional ones. The play was Noordin's response to the May 13, 1969 riot. The underlying message was that Malays should be united and take pride in their culture and tradition. The past will always be the guide, as history will repeat itself. Modernization has resulted in many ill effects and many issues being raised. Noordin Hassan and Syed Alwi were not the only two playwrights who were concerned with the change in the social milieu of the post-1969 era. The decade of the 1970s witnessed some playwrights who experimented with new theatre techniques and approaches. They used their plays to comment on Malaysian society. The period of the 1970s was also known for its "absurd plays". Playwrights such as Dinsman, Johan Jaffar, and Hatta Azad Khan wrote, directed, and acted in their plays. Dinsman with his play, *Protes* (*Protest*), *Bukan Bunuh Diri* (*It Is Not Suicide*), and *Ana*, are concerned with self-integrity and individualism. Dinsman's characters were often portrayed as those who wander far to find the meaning of themselves and their existence.

Johan Jaaffar and Hatta Azad Khan were more concerned with the social ills arising as a result of modernization. In Johan's *Angin Kering* (*Dry Wind*) published in 1976, he portrays a society falling apart because of social ills. In *Dia* (*Someone*) published in 1982, the playwright highlighted characters that seek the meaning of their lives, and through them, Johan aims to illustrate the eroding moral values of a society. Hatta's concern is on the moral decadence and the erosion of self-dignity of the poor and the gutter-dwellers of his society, who were left behind during the

flourishing economy and social development that is enjoyed by the society at large. This was vividly portrayed in *Mayat* (*The Corpse*). In *Kerusi* (*The Chair*) published in 1976, Hatta warns the audience of the fact that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Theater of the Absurd became a trend in Malaysia during the 1970s and later in the mid-1980s. Playwrights like Dinsman, Hatta Azad Khan, and Johan Jaaffar, presented their absurd plays to reflect the myriad meanderings of dramatists who are on the threshold of a newly restructured Malaysian society. The absurd dramatic form further illustrates the absurdity felt by these young, highly-educated Malay playwrights. The feeling of their inabilities and helplessness reflects the shortcomings of their society.

Post 1990s. Ever since the absurd theatre ala Malaysia was the prominent style found in the contemporary period of Modern Malay theatre, no attempts have been made by local theatre experts to embark on the next periodization. Solehah Ishak in her paper, "Aesthetics of Modern Malay Theatre Productions Which Are Predominantly Islamic Themes" mentioned that theatre productions took a slight turn from producing experimental plays to plays that portray Islamic themes. It was the decade that launched and perpetuated Islamic revivalism in the country (1989, p. 37). A study conducted by Fazilah Husain, Zulkifli Mohamad & Zariat Abdul Rani (2022) pointed out some elements pertinent to staging Islamic theatre suggested by the Dato' Noordin Hassan plays that fall under this category which he termed *Teater Fitrah* or theatre of faith. It is to be mentioned that, for the plays to stage theatre of faith, the performances must adhere to apply Islamic elements in various aspects and approaches including acting, characters, and issues about Islam. The issues raised include the life history of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, and contemporary problems faced by the Muslims today (Fazilah Husin et al., 2022, p. 144). However, it could be said that the emergence of such theatre trends was not deemed as coincidental with previously selected Malay playwrights of the 1970s since they have been predominantly concerned with Islamic themes way before. Therefore, Solehah highlighted that "but if there is to be an 'Islamic theatre', it must take into consideration and resolve the inherent contradictions between religion and theatre" (Fazilah Husin et al., 2022, p. 36). Hence, Islamic theatre of faith became unable to be categorized as the major theatre period after the contemporary period.

The period of 1990s witnessed many eclectic plays and indie plays became one of the major contributions to the local theatre industry during this time. Indie theatre is a new genre that developed greatly in the creative arts industry post-millennially, and Malay theatre was not excluded from its emergence back then. Syarul Azlina and Zolkipli Abdullah (2020) mentioned that the reason behind such emergence was the establishment of many Malay theatre indie groups during this time. They suggested that "the existence of indie theatres in Malaysia started with the staging of *Misi*, *Wangi Jadi Saksi*, and followed by *Jerjak*, *Parah* and other performances which keep the same characteristics as in indie theatres" (Syarul Azlina & Zolkipli Abdullah, 2020, p. 295). The plays were staged in the Theatre Store in Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka (DBP) which was known to be supporting indie group performances. Not only that, but the plays were also staged in Pentas 2, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts (KLPAC) one of the famous indie theatre companies in this country. In Malaysia, indie theatres are usually put into motion by young activists such as

Playground Production, Instant Café Theatre Company, Rumah Anak Teater, Revolution Stage, Paradoks Production, MASK Team, Ayaq Hangat Studio, and various other productions. With small spaces, young theatre activists produced their scripts and productions.

The era of the millennium marked a different trend in the local theatre industry, in which plays that were performed in this era contained elements of different styles of surrealism and psychological representations in the plots and characters. In the blog post by Walid Ali "*Perkembangan psikologi dan trend teater millennial di Malaysia*," he emphasized that any forms of theatre productions and performances from 2000 onward could easily be categorized as millennial theatre (2018). Millennial theatre is found to be a popular style that was popular in the West and local theatre was not left behind from its influence. Millennial theatre protested the idea of using a proper stage and it adopted free performances without any space restrictions. Nowadays, we can see these forms of free theatre styles and elements being staged in many theatre houses and the current audience welcomes such changes.

From the 1990s until the present, modern Malay theatre productions and performances have gone through so many changes, and yet there is no proper documentation has been created to record this beautiful progression in Malay theatre history. We should not repeat the past mistakes made by the earlier generations who did not see the importance of keeping a record and marking the periods in the earlier Malay theatre developments. This has created so much ignorance and confusion for the current generation about their rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions. Therefore, it is important to have a new framework to chart this progress and these developments before they become forgotten and unknown.

Proposed Methodology

This is qualitative research, in which an approach in ethnography studies would be its prime method of conduct. The researcher will study the historical and developments of Modern Malay theatre from the earlier periods up to where it was left for more than 20 years. It is the research's main focus to identify the gap and later to create a new periodization as an attempt to continue the studies of theatre and performing arts in this country.

Next, data collection primer is very important to identify the plays that belonged to the specific periods according to when the plays were produced and staged. Among other efforts, the researcher will also be involved as an active participant in the observation of performances either live or recorded versions of collections of plays that were produced and staged during the past 20 years, beginning in the year 2000. In addition to that, through this active participating observation, the researcher will conduct interviews and surveys about the experiences of the respondents. Elements that will be emphasized in this process will be: (a) themes, (b) play structures, (c) performance concepts, (d) directors' ideologies, and (e) issues highlighted.

Finally, this research will come to the stage of data coding. This will help further map out all the analysis and findings into a model category. From this mapping

analysis, a new category of Modern Malay theatre will be produced.

Conclusion

From the discussion stated above, it appears to be that, there is a huge gap in the unidentified category of new theatre that has been productively produced and performed for the past 20 years. Therefore, there is a call for a new category that can be a point of reference not only in the study of modern Malay theatre but also in mapping out its significance in the national art heritage of Malaysia.

It is hoped that this study will be able to fulfill one of the main objectives of the Malaysian National Cultural Policy which is to strengthen national unity and country with culture. Since Modern Malay theatre promotes harmony in a vortex of change in a multiracial nation, then it is seen as a culture capable of strengthening national unity. Not only that, but this is also seen as a potential that meets the strategy that supports this objective. Among the following strategies are; (a) The restoration, preservation, and development of culture towards strengthening the foundations of National Culture through joint research, development, education, development, and cultural relations; (b) To increase and strengthen cultural leadership through efforts to guide and train fans, support and promote culture as widely as possible as an effective development machinery; (c) To create effective communication toward national awareness, Malaysian statehood, and nationalism; (d) To meet sociocultural needs; and (e) To raise the level and quality of art at the international level.

Hence, it is important to highlight that, this newfound period, would encourage the continuance of social and cultural study which was stopped in the 1990s. This effort is crucial in bringing back the study of theatre and performance in this country and promoting the uniqueness of Malaysian art, culture, and heritage as the main catalyst for the growth in the area of education, tourism, and national culture toward globalization and its challenges.

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Biography

Dr. Mas Rynna Wati Ahmad is a senior lecturer at the Centre for Research in Malay Language, Literature and Culture in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Her research focuses on comparative literary studies in Malay translated works, specifically on drama and theatre. She is currently writing papers on the elements of cultural perspectives in Modern Malay eclectic performances. She read English Literature at university but decided to focus on English and Malay works for her doctorate. She received her PhD from Universiti Putra Malaysia, and her thesis was about comparative philosophy in Malay translated existential dramas.

Deconstructing Prejudiced Narratives Through Participatory Musical Engagement

Suwichan Phatthanaphraiwan & Benjamin Fairfield[1]
Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand
e-mail: chipgazknyau@gmail.com

Abstract

Political and popular narratives in northern Thailand from the 1950s largely glossed over all non-Thai highland groups under the monolithic "Hilltribe" label as destroyers of national forests, drug trade enablers, and communist harbourers. Karen activists and NGOs have, over the past few decades, had some success in challenging the label, adding nuance and understanding to the diversity of highland groups, and reframing the Karen in particular as indigenous and eco-friendly champions of the environment. Yet in the hot season of 2020 when the nation (and region) experienced its worst air pollution in recent memory, old tropes were resurrected in the media and by government officials as highlander's agricultural practices were blamed as the source of the pollution. Seeking to encourage critical media consumption, enable cross-cultural understanding, and humanise a stigmatised population, Chi Suwichan organised a musical project bringing two schools together to learn from, with, and about each other. This project argues for and also demonstrates the power of musical collaboration as an alternative and participatory tool for intercultural engagement, challenging misconceptions, deconstructing narratives, and leveraging peer-to-peer relationships for social and environmental change.

Keywords: music for climate change advocacy, music for deconstructing prejudiced, music for peace communication, music for peaceful living together

Introduction

Many kingdoms in the region now known as Northern Thailand rose and fell throughout history (such as Siam, Lanna, Lan Xang, Sukothai, and others), and none of them could truly claim an ethnically unified mono-cultural society. The region, characteristic of Southeast Asia as a whole, has long been shaped by migration, movement, trade, and flows of people, ideologies, and technologies. And yet, with the influx of national borders and accompanying nationalist ideology in 20th century Thai rhetoric, the reframing of "non-Thai" ethnic groups created distinctive narratives regarding indigenous populations. Some of these narratives proved careless, uninformed, and lacking nuance (Winichakul, 2011). At one point or another in the region's history, the Lao were seen as distinctive from the Thai, as were the Yuan, or Shan peoples (sometimes labelled as Lanna-Tai now). Such distinctions from "the centre" still remain in the form of "dialects": though "Northern Thai" and "Isaan"

populations speak languages that was at one point in history distinctive from "Thai," under the national umbrella these languages become dialects of the master language, again confirming the national frame that seeks to hold all together under one ethno-national label. As Thongchai Winichakul points out in *Siam Mapped*, forcing the ethnic label to match the national border has been an ongoing project of nationalist education.

While these marginally "Thai" and regional populations are included in the ethno-national labelling now as Thai-Lao or Lanna-Thai, the hill-dwelling highland groups – Hmong, Mien, Akha, Lisu, Lahu, H'tin, Lu, Khamu, and Karen – remain on the outskirts of the nation, both geographically and ethnically. Though these highlanders are diverse in livelihood and agricultural methods, they have historically been lumped together as "chao khao" ("hill tribes"), most egregiously from the 1950s through the 1980s, under negative monolithic labels such as "forest destroyers and opium growers" (Laungaramsri, 2003, p. 37) or the "hill tribe problem" (Buadaeng, 2006, p. 361; McKinnon, 2011, p. 56-61). Some highland dwellers' agricultural methods (shifting cultivation or swiddening) or products (poppies for opium production) made them enemies of a state-backed Royal Forestry Department seeking to stop deforestation, punish unregistered "squatters" occupying protected forests, and persecute fleeing leftists seeking refuge and anonymity in highland areas (Buergin, 2003).

Indigenous highland groups (if they may be recognized as such) also can access only marginal institutional support when it comes to perpetuating local cultural knowledge. The legacy and history of central government assimilation policies and programs have worked, forcibly at times, to attempt to turn all indigenous groups into Thais (Kesmanee, 1994; Forbes, 1982, p. 1065; Jonsson, 2004, p. 677 and p. 685; Hayami, 1996, p. 345; Numnonda, 1978). Some of these educational measures have included forbidding the use of their (non-Thai) languages in school and government settings, mandated dress codes in schools that disallow for culturally significant ethnic costumes, and relocation of students from villages where there are no schools to centralised dormitories away from parents and elders. Sgaw Karen scholar and educator Esther Dangpongpee noted that this second-class status attached to indigenous (non-Thai) identity is perpetuated at home as well:

> When they go to school, they never use Karen. Some of the parents, they think we are a tribal people, from the mountain, so we don't speak Thai very well. So, they want their children to speak Thai like real Thai, so they try to let their children speak Thai. Even at home they don't speak Karen, so that is the way to make our language and culture to be lost. (Personal communication)

While some families feel forced to assimilate and blend in as a means of escaping continuing stigma, Karen activists since the 1980s have worked to counter narratives of the Karen as "just another forest-destroying hill tribe," working instead to present Karen cultural as eco-friendly and grounded in an ecological symbiosis of human, nature, and culture. A strategic and urgent appeal to eco-indigeneity has evolved into a near "consensus" for Sgaw Karen (Pgaz k'Nyau) amongst activists, academics, and NGOs (Walker, 2001). By the early 2000s, due to decades of activism

and campaigns, "the" "Karen" were becoming increasingly known as "the eco-friendly" hill tribe (Henry Delcore, 2007, p. 101).

But in the past decade and to a new generation it seems that some of the old stereotypes have been making a resurgence, as they prove politically expedient. Consider the case of Pawlajee Rakjoncharoen (also known as "Billy"), an indigenous activist and champion of Karen human rights. Various news agencies and NGOs noted his seemingly convenient disappearance in 2015. Billy was arrested in Kaeng Krachan National Park for gathering honey (an indigenous practice on ancestral lands now deemed illegal with the declaration of the area as protected forest). His disappearance coincided with the recent lawsuit he brought against park authorities for the confiscation of Karen homes and property in the park—with the declaration, they were told to leave and then forcibly evicted without being given ample time to vacate, their "abandoned" belongings left in their homes were by authorities who burned the homes down. The case went to court in 2016, where judges levied a fine on the park officials for not removing the belongings before burning the houses down but otherwise affirmed that the eviction of "the squatters" was appropriate and legal (Rujivanarom, 2016)[2]. Billy, after being arrested and held in custody by police authorities, was never seen again. His bones were discovered in September of 2019, and while murder charges were initially brought against the authorities, they were dropped in 2020.

For Billy's case, the portrayal of the Karen as "illegal occupiers" (rather than indigenous stewards) of Thailand justified and necessitated the eviction. Such scapegoating (blaming hill tribes for destroying national forests) soon became expedient again in 2020 as northern Thailand faced an air quality crisis. Smoke and air pollution in this region is colloquially tied to agricultural activities and the burning of forests to the west along the border with Myanmar, and in 2020 the pollution in Chiang Mai and surrounding provinces reached 30 (μg/m3),[3] outpacing the chronic pollution of urban Bangkok and even that of Beijing, one of the world's most polluted cities (See figure below). This was especially problematic for Chiang Mai due to its reputation as a serene getaway for tourists seeking to escape urban metroscapes for a countryside retreat (Ferguson, 2010).

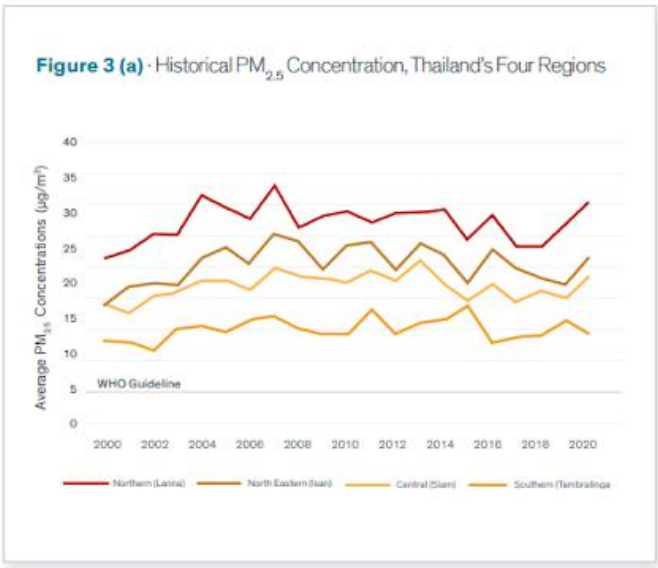

Figure 1. Historical PM25 Concentration, Thailand's Four Regions

While smoke obviously is not bound by national borders and could have easily been sourced from nations and peoples further west, social and conventional media reports began pointing the finger at those closest to the national forests of Thailand, and the "hill tribe problem" cliché was at the ready to be called up again.[4] The following two images give evidence of this official narrative in action:

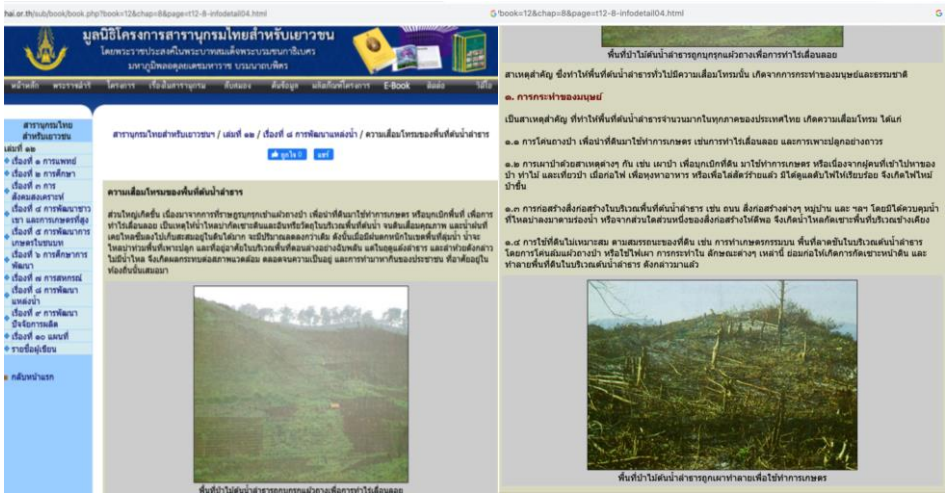

Figure 2: Thai Encyclopedia Foundation for Youth (an official government-sponsored information source used by educators and government institutions targeted at Thai youth) blames pollution on the degradation of watersheds and streams caused by *shifting cultivation* and forest burning (in text), but the images used picture the less-destructive *rotational farming* methods of the Karen as illustrative.

Shifting cultivation (used by groups other than the Karen) is an exploitative and pioneering technique (where forests are burned to clear fields, crops are grown until the soil is depleted, and then abandoned as adjacent areas are cleared), whereas rotational methods (used by Karen agriculturalists) allow for use, fallow periods, and return. This report shows how official narratives act as a source of misinformation and misunderstanding of highland communities and agricultural methods, lumping all practices together as equally destructive when in reality there is a plurality of agricultural practices in use in the highlands.[5]

Chi Suwichan (principal Investigator of this project), an active member and spokesperson for Karen environmental networks, saw a need and an opportunity to address, challenge, and counter these harmful and untrue narratives being called up again. How to best help the public understand that these problems are transnational, tied to agroforestry and other actors, and not solely the result of a small and vulnerable population?

Public calls for action were growing, including increasing calls for eviction and removal of the Karen and other highlanders from these forest areas. The lessons of the past, and the educational campaigns of a previous generation of Karen eco-activists, seem to have been forgotten. Chi's project outlined below seeks to be an initial step toward reconciling urban Chiang Mai preconceptions with the realities of Karen lifeways. To accomplish this task, he turned to music, education, and dialogue.

As Chi has noted elsewhere in our co-publications, in an already tense political situation, one's vocal protestations are unlikely to be heard by the other side, no matter how loudly one screams. If two opposing sides are yelling platitudes at each other across the divide, how will either be able to listen to what the other has to say? Enter music, an alternate form of human communication with the potential to disconnect us from mundane and "general space time" and place us into a more active and contained activity where we are, to a degree, preconditioned to listen, or at least to listen differently (Seeger, 1951, p. 240-248). When social media and other narratives reaffirm deep-seated stereotypes, perhaps a project that emphasised listening and learning could have some impact.

Chi identified two schools to work with on a collaborative project. For the Karen group, he chose Somdejya Learning Community Demonstration School Mae Cheam, a school that infuses indigenous Karen learning modes into the standard curriculum to the extent allowed by Thai educational laws accommodating local wisdom. For the urban students from Chiang Mai, he selected the School for Inheriting Lanna wisdom. Both schools have built into their missions an appreciation for localism as well as instructional materials highlighting the artistic and cultural output of the region. The project sought to harness both of these capacities.

The Issue and the Participatory Learning Process

Each group engaged in guided discussions about the pollution problem, where they listed the narratives they heard and the feelings aroused by these. For the Lanna-Thai students, they mostly matched what was being broadcast publicly. Their recalling of media narratives repeated back the common understanding that the "hill tribes" explicitly (and Karen implicitly) lived in the forest and burned them as part of their

standard agricultural practice, thus ruining the forests and skies and causing pollution for the nation. The Karen school group, for their part, noted hearing these reports, feeling blamed, targeted, and sad. They also felt wronged and misunderstood. As residents of these areas, they could attest that some burning did take place, but only in very controlled spaces and conditions. Controlled burning instigated by Karen communities never extended beyond three hours, was limited to very specific agriculturally zoned areas and not as a pioneering technique to open up new forest lands for agriculture, and was nothing like and not related to the wholesale destruction and wildfire footage shown on TV.

Three representative quotes from the highland students below (who could provide nuance as eyewitnesses to Karen agricultural activity) illustrate that the methods shown in media and government information sources misrepresent their communities' activities on the ground:

> *"We burn* fields*, but we don't burn the forests."*
> *"We burn but we contain the fires. We don't let the fires get out of control or past prescribed boundaries."*
> *"The smoke disappears [usually within a few hours]."*

Bridging Communities

Students were led through activities meant to provide a safe space for dialogue and discussion. Each group was encouraged to come up with messages they'd like the other to hear from their own perspectives. What would the urban population like to communicate to the highlanders, and vice-versa? To avoid repeating and localising the general and impersonal messaging of the media, the project involved a residential component with shared activities. Students stayed in a shared dormitory, living together, eating together, and taking tours of each other's residences, seeing firsthand how each lived.

For the urban students, they came to realise that the situation was not as stark as depicted in the media, where forests are portrayed as clear-cut, ravaged, and demolished. For these urbanites, reality on the ground in the visited Karen communities was much different than media-fuelled preconceived notions had prepped them to expect. A regular recurring sentiment expressed in these discussions was that *"the forests weren't as destroyed as we thought*."

Children from mountain communities, too, realised they had more in common with their urban counterparts than first assumed, and that communion was possible, as illustrated by the following reflection: *"They are friendly, eat like we eat, and they listen to us."*

The Action

As both groups came to better understand the other's concerns and where stereotypes and media narratives diverged from realities, the task then was how to convey these lessons to extended networks and the broader community. Chi again turned to music as a medium for better communication. Each youth group was tasked with composing

a song to showcase their new understanding and continued desire for a cleaner environment. This tangible output was meant to serve an ambassadorial purpose and reach an older generation through interpersonal connections (rather than via impersonal media, social media, or detached misinformation). Both groups came away from the activity with a better sense of a mutually shared responsibility to protect nature.

The students from Chiang Mai clearly expressed a need for environmental cooperation and better understanding of their highland neighbours, composing a song called *Rak Lanna* (Love for Northern Thailand). The English translation is provided below:

> *The Kasalong [tree jasmine, or* Millingtonia hortensis*] blooms along the Ping River.*
> *Our beloved river that nourishes the heart*
> *The Ping River flows down from the mountain.*
> *Connecting highland to lowland throughout Lanna*
>
> **Come join in singing the melody.*
> *Play the lullaby far and wide*
> *Unite our hearts with song*
>
> *** Eat sticky rice, marinated crab, and pork chops together.*
> *Play the sueng [lute], Salaw [fiddle] and Tena [harp] together,*
> *Let us bring happiness.*
> *Unite our minds, our peoples*
> *Let us come together to create our Lanna paradise*
> *Karma is real, as is Dharma.*
> *Just now, the fires came and the forest was completely destroyed.*
> *But the Melientha suavis came back*
> *The Oecophylla smaragdina also revived.*
> *So let our song express these feelings (repeat * and **).*
>
> *The smoke hurts my ears, it hurts my eyes, it hurts my face.*
> *My nose stings. I don't know what to do.*
> *Please don't burn the forest, help us put out the fire.*
> *Let's have empathy for all (repeat * and **)*
>
> *Don't blame, don't belittle, don't disrespect.*
> *Don't rush your judgement about who to blame.*
> *Consume the news with critical caution.*
> *Help each other discuss, learn, and solve our common problems (repeat * and **).*

For the students, the perspective shifted from an ethno-national scapegoating to a more globalist eco-narrative, from "*They*/the Hilltribes destroy *our* forests" to "There is no us/them. Protecting the forest is everyone's responsibility." Also

noteworthy in their closing stanzas is a shift in how media should be consumed. Clearly these students grappled with how official narratives, both in government and media, diverged from realities they witnessed by touring villages with their counterparts. Challenged here were ethnic stereotypes as well as the reliability of media tropes. Students involved in this project also learned how to better critically engage with their world.

The Karen song, *Leaves Change the World*, also contained thematic elements in the lyrical call for cooperation and collaborative change, as well as an elevated understanding of Karen eco-sensitivities. The English translation of their song is next:

> *We grow up with our forests, we don't consider destroying them.*
> *We seek to preserve and maintain the forest as it was, has been, and always shall be.*
> *Please look into our eyes, and let us ask of you:*
> *Please listen.*
> *Look at the vast mountain sky.*
> *Do you see its beauty?*
> *Can we just think together and help each other?*
> *Leaves change the world, together we can*
> *Leaves have value. Let us help each other.*
> *Let's change this fate*
> *Reduce forest fires and smog day by day*
> *For our world.... (For our world)*
> *Let us take care of it, let it take care of us,*
> *before it's too late.*
> *Forests and trees allow us to breathe.*
> *The forest existed before us and did not belong to anyone.*
> *It is everyone's gift, everyone's responsibility.*
> *It takes care of us, gives us life.*
> *We don't wish for pollution,*
> *Let's think about it for a bit.*
> *The weather grows unfriendly.*
> *Let's think about it.*
> *It causes global warming.*
> *For everyone's life....*

Repeated throughout the lyrics of this Karen song is the same call to collaborative, critical, and participatory measures echoed in the educational activities leading up to the songs' creation: think, listen, work together. Needed here is analysis of the problem but also analysis of the messages shared in the media. The Karen composers here beg to be heard, to be seen as humans, to be looked at in the eye and not blamed uncritically. But they also extend a hand to call for collaborative action on the known and shared environmental problem.

Expanding the Audience

Finally, the messages via song were rehearsed and performed at a public concert. Public officials, school staff, parents, and community members attended. Village members from highland and lowland were able to observe their children standing shoulder to shoulder with "the other" to express their dedication and desire for a common goal. This was a concert about preserving the environment, and it was cooperative in nature, involving institutions, communities, and youth in bringing attention to a common problem. The main accomplishment here is exactly this shift in perspective: media narratives point out "the problem" as a legacy of "the hill tribe problem," turning human capacity and attention away from resolution and toward ethnic labelling and division. With music as a tool for participatory learning, dialogic engagement, and creative thinking, "the problem" can be reframed as a shared one, the people as a shared community, the environment not as national property or as national resource but as a human responsibility.

Previous attempts to shed light on these issues by indigenous artists have had limited reach. One solitary voice, even that of a talented and famed spokesperson, puts the focus on the individual, the performer. In these formats, the audience is passive and the responsibility to do something falls to each individual. To "speak for the trees" highlights the sole speaker, but to collectively compose a song in a manner that brings two divergent groups together in sustained, participatory, and engaged activities allows for an ever-widening and involved audience invested in the project. One song has multiple composers, each allowed ownership and potentially connected to their own newly attentive elders, communities, and peers.

Extending the Coverage

For the duration of this project, a film crew from Thai PBS attended and documented sessions and the final outcome of the project.[6] In their final feature, "Two groups (Highlanders, urbanites), one home," they broadcast the uniqueness of this project, highlighting the shared learning spaces, participatory educational engagement, and the uniqueness of each group coming together for a mutual goal, shared environmental mission, and new understandings of "the other." The songs, according to the report, acted as a reflection of local ways of life and the importance of collaborative efforts and understanding.

Notes

[1] This research project was assisted by students and merged into the curriculum of Chi Suwichan's geo-cultural management courses at Bhodhivijjalaya College of Srinakornwirot University. Benjamin Fairfield (PhD, ethnomusicology) assisted in an advisory capacity and with the write up.

[2] Also see http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/rights-land-naturalresources/news/2016/09/thailand-karens-appeal-court-verdict-legalizing-th

[3] Also see https://aqli.epic.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Thailand-FS_03.03.pdf

[4] See Dominik Sipinski. "How Chiang Mai became the world's most polluted city". *Al*

Jazeera. April 12, 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/12/how-chiang-mai-became-the-worlds-most-polluted-city

[5] Also see มูลนิธิโครงการสารานุกรมไทยสำหรับเยาวชนฯ (saranukromthai.or.th)

[6] Also see https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=523760822651536

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Biographies

"Chi" Suwichan Phatthanaphraiwan is assistant professor of Geo-Cultural Management at Bodhivijjalaya College, Srinakharinwirot University. He has published two books on Pgaz k'Nyau music (Rao Khue Tehnaku and Phleng Tong Haam Khong Pgaz k'Nyau), is vice president of the Foundation for Culture and Environment (FCESA), and co-founded the Karen Community Ecomuseum.

Benjamin Fairfield received his PhD and MA in Ethnomusicology from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He served as a Peace Corps volunteer (community-based organizational development) in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 2007-2009, where he lived in a Karen (Pgaz k'Nyau) village. His current research focuses on ethnic identity in northern Thailand as mediated by music with a particular emphasis on participatory genres and religion. He currently serves as affiliate faculty at the University of Hawai'i Music department and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, and works in the East-West Center Education Program.

Zhao Si Anak Yatim (The Orphan of Zhao): A Contemporary Bangsawan Performance Structure

Marlenny Deenerwan
Drama Department, Faculty of Creative Arts Universiti Malaya
e-mail: marlenny@um.edu.my

Abstract

This investigation is in the context of my continuous learning and research on the art of Bangsawan with Rahman B. between 2000 and 2018. This is the period when Bangsawan experienced another important step in its development in Malaysia through the establishment of Istana Budaya, which led to the use of sophisticated technology in its production. This period also saw the introduction of the Semarak Bangsawan project, which has been offering monthly Bangsawan performances since 2007 to date. In my previous study on Bangsawan, I highlighted nine fundamental aspects of contemporary Bangsawan. This paper specifically focuses on performance structure, one of the nine conventions applied in a 2018 Bangsawan production titled *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim* (*The Orphan of Zhao*). Through the design of the practice-led research, I defined a contemporary approach by revealing not only current visual elements in the performance, but also the theme and idea of the story, which is unusual for a traditional art form. While the structure of the performance remained true to the traditional framework of Rahman B., the visuals, the essence of the story as well as the interpretation were developed through my contemporary thinking. The performances have shown how various elements of the Bangsawan tradition can be successfully received/modified in a contemporary socio-political context. Moreover, a creative activity is an important work that has real social relevance and becomes part of performance history itself.

Keywords: contemporary Bangsawan, practice-led research, Semarak Bangsawan, Rahman B.'s conventions

Introduction

More recently, and particularly since 2000, the actual structure of a Bangsawan performance in Malaysia has been a source of contention. As someone who has followed the development of the art form over the last fifteen years, I believe that the absence of written sources of Bangsawan's structure and conventions is the main factor behind this prolonged dispute. Resources on Bangsawan's structure and conventions have fully depended on oral transmission, without any written documents to serve as references.

Thus, in 2011, I began my PhD research, seeking to establish a series of conventions as a guideline for a contemporary Bangsawan performance. Following

the completion of my degree in 2016, a series of Bangsawan conventions was produced, based on the practice of the late Rahman B. (see figure 1), a Bangsawan *guru* who was awarded National Artiste by Malaysian government in 2003 for his timeless contributions in the development of the Bangsawan art form. This paper is specifically highlighting the performance structure, one out of nine conventions that have been applied in a 2018's Bangsawan production entitled *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim* (*The Orphan of Zhao)*. This practice-led research involved a group of young performers who willingly participated in my production, to test the effectiveness of the conventions.

Figure 1. The late Seniman Negara Tuan Haji Abdul Rahman Bakar (Rahman B.), 2020.

The production involved 80 cast and crew (see figure 2), consisting of young performers community selected through an audition process. The practice-led component of this project involved a full theatre-making process, divided into three stages: pre-production (September, 2018), production (October-December, 2018), and post-production (December, 2018). Three nights of performances were staged from 21 to 23 December 2018 in Auditorium Tunku Abdul Rahman Malaysia Tourism Centre (MaTiC), with a duration of 120 minutes.

Figure 2. The cast and crew of *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim*, 2020.

The live performance was stage under the project *Semarak Bangsawan* (The Invigoration of Bangsawan), another community engagement organized by Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara (National Culture and Art Department) or JKKN, a government agency under the Ministry of Information, Communication, and Culture of Malaysia. In close cooperation with the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL, Kuala Lumpur City Hall) since 2007, a government agency that offers the City Hall Theatre as the city's official theatre, the project supports the monthly staging of Bangsawan productions. Providing funds and resources to institutions and individuals, it invites selected groups to produce and stage a Bangsawan performance.

My role in this performance project is mainly as a scriptwriter and director. An original script was completed based on the internationally known of *The Great Revenge of The Orphan of Zhao*, a Chinese play from Yuan era in 13th century, written by Ji Junxiang with the title in Malay: *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim* (*Bangsawan The Orphan of Zhao*). The story was adapted to the taste of a contemporary Malaysian audience while retaining the strong influence of Chinese cultures (Han Dynasty). The aesthetic and creative sides of the production were wholly designed within the framework of Rahman B.'s conventions.

Figure 3. Promotional poster of *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim*, designed by Rime Nazren Abdul Razak, 2018.

The Performance Structure

In a Bangsawan performance practiced by Rahman B., the whole composition from the overture, the acts, the extra turns until the final curtain call contribute to forming its dramatic impact, differentiating Bangsawan from the other traditional or even modern art forms. The elements of performance structure in Rahman B.'s conventions are outlined as follows:

a. Overture

Rahman B. often begins his performance with a special introductory music. Following the appointment of Rahman B. as an *adiguru* in the National Academy of Arts Culture and Heritage (ASWARA), Bangsawan at that institution was greatly influenced by the practice of his professional group Bintang Timur. Among these influences was the inclusion of that group's signature Bangsawan overture in performance which came to signify the musical identity of ASWARA's Bangsawan. Currently, this same music is also used by most contemporary Bangsawan groups in Kuala Lumpur as their opening musical number. These groups might well assume the music is the compulsory opening melody for all Bangsawan performances. There is remarkable similarity between Bintang Timur's overture music and the overture of Franz von

Suppe's operetta *Light Cavalry* that premiered in Vienna in 1866. Given the fact that Bangsawan's music reflects a mix of Malay and Western elements, this similarity should not be surprising (Tan Sooi Beng, 1993, p. 83).

The overture music is of short duration but specifically composed as the opening tune. In his productions, Rahman B. followed a convention of combining the sounds of horn and timpani at the beginning of the song, building to a drum roll at the peak, an effect which provides the audience with an adrenaline rush at the beginning of the show. After the overture segment, Rahman B.'s productions featured a fast beat opening dance (*tarian pembukaan*), accompanied by a song with lyrics that welcomed and thanked the audience for their attendance. The songs commonly used for the *tarian pembukaan* included *Bolehlah Dipandang* (It Can Be Seen) and *Rumba Rumba Rhythm*. This was followed by the recital of traditional poetry to a soft and melodious tune. The quick paced welcoming song and its soft poetic melody in the overture is designed to sway the audience's emotions.

I sought to trigger a dramatic impact in the similar way through the overture segment. Thus, in my performance, I combined the overture and poetry recital in a Prologue scene instead of presenting three consecutive opening pieces. At the beginning of the overture segment, a credit list appeared electronically on a large screen on the right stage, accompanied by an original composition by the musical director, Tengku Zainuddin. The recital of the Chinese poetry form then took centre stage, conveying the synopsis of the story in song form. Featured in dance movement that imitate the Chinese Opera form, the Prologue scene showed a narrator in Chinese Opera costume, narrates the conflict of the story (see figure 4 and 5). At the end of the Prologue scene, which was also the end of the complete overture segment, the music shifted from Tengku Zainuddin's original composition to Rahman B.'s trademark overture music, followed by the raising of the curtain of Act 1.

Figure 4. Mohd Nazrin Manterang performed the Bangsawan Prologue in the form of Chinese Opera, 2018.

Figure 5. Mohd Nazrin Manterang performed the Bangsawan Prologue in the form of Chinese Opera, 2018.

The changes that I made in the overture segment were intended to engage with my contemporary audience. The opening scene of *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim* provided the audience with a new look by featuring contemporary choreography by Mohammad Nazrin Manterang, followed by Rahman B.'s overture music. I decided to remove the welcome dance in order to shorten the opening. However, we retained two of Rahman B's essential conventions in the overture, the recital of traditional poetry, and his trademark overture music.

b. Recital of Traditional Poetry

As a Malay figure who puts Malay arts and cultures above everything else, Rahman B. made traditional poetry obligatory in all of his performances. He saw the potential of the Bangsawan art form as being a treasured repository for *adat-istiadat*, arts, and culture in the future. In Rahman B.'s productions, excerpts of traditional poetry performed in the opening segment convey the synopsis of the story presented. Normally, the poetry sets out the name of the King and the ruling country, and summarizes the conflict caused by an evil power that destroys the peace. The recital ends in cliff-hanger form, with the final stanza highlighting the sadness and sorrow of the kingdom due to a calamity.

The type of traditional poetry used depended on the culture of the story being represented in the play. For example, when Rahman B. staged *Bangsawan Laksamana Cheng Ho* with Bintang Timur Bangsawan Association in March 2009, he used the Chinese classical form of poetry (in Malay) in the opening segment. Similarly, an Indian form of poetry was used to open ASWARA's 2010 *Bangsawan* production of the Indian classic *Shakuntala*. The form of *syair* or *gurindam* appears as the most common opening poetry for Malay stories. *Syair* and *gurindam* are the principal forms of Malay traditional poetry. *Syair* is a longer piece, often an extended

narrative poem contains a story, attempts to present some sort of teaching or message, possibly moral in character. Meanwhile, a *gurindam* is a two-line piece, with a single rhyme. The *gurindam* generally contains advice or teaching, presented through elegant similes or metaphors.

I chose the form of Chinese traditional poetry for the opening poetry in *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim.* The fact that the form originated in the Chinese world reflects the culture of this play. In addition, this poetry shares a similar function with the Malay forms *syair* or *gurindam,* which is a traditional oral poetic form. Instead of directly giving the summary of the story to audience, I preferred to use poetic diction combined with music to highlight the strongest emotions in the story. Compared to the *syair* or *gurindam* which is more narrative in style and sung softly with fixed rhythm, Chinese traditional poetry is often presented by the singer in a very powerful and soulful voice. Below is the poetry sung by the vocalist Sabihah Wahid, which opened the performance. I wrote the words for the poetry and the melody was composed by Tengku Zainuddin, the music director:

Di sebuah negeri bernama negeri Jin	In the Kingdom of Jin
Di dalam istana Maharaja Ling	Within the Palace of Emperor Ling
Ada dua jeneral kesayangan diraja	Two generals have won the trust of the Emperor
Panglima negeri yang paling berharga	The most valuable is being the Royal Commander
Namun dalam sebuah kapal	But in a ship
Hanya boleh ada seorang nakhoda	There can only be one master
Yang tak mahu berkongsi pangkat dan nama	No one wants to share the rank and title
Apatah lagi kuasa	What more power!
Dendam menjadi racun	Revenge becomes poison
Racun membakar khianat	Poison fires up treachery
Khianat memanggil maut	Treachery invites deaths
Maut menghidupkan dendam yang lain pula	Death gives life to another revenge
Ini kisah dendam seribu musim	This is the story of a thousand seasons of revenge
Ini kisah dendam si anak yatim	This is the story of an orphan's vengeance

The stanzas stated the revenge and vengeance of an orphan due to the act of deception. The poetry delivers the synopsis of the story in ways consistent with the conventions of Rahman B. and it provided the audience with the key emotions of the whole play through carefully selected diction. For instance, the imagery of *revenge becomes poison (dendam menjadi racun)* and of *treachery invites deaths (khianat memanggil maut)* describes the emotion of rage and anger. Phrases such "*and this is the story of a thousand seasons of revenge (ini kisah dendam seribu musim)* as well as *this is the story of an orphan's vengeance (ini kisah dendam si anak yatim)*" symbolized the fury and anger of the deceived orphan.

c. Plot/Act

A conventional Bangsawan storyline features the journey of a hero, a characteristic shared by most Malay traditional theatre forms such as *Makyong, Wayang Kulit*

Kelantan and *Mek Mulong*. Rahman B. asserted that the first and final scene of Bangsawan should be placed at the palace, regardless of the total number of scenes in the play. The King is obliged to give the opening and final speech to his people, which contain moral instructions that form part of Bangsawan's didactic nature.

Convention dictates that in the introductory part, the whole palace is alerted to a conflict that has arisen, followed by the orders the King has given to overcome the crisis. The hero emerges as the only person capable of solving the conflict. The hero then begins his journey to confront the evil character and after facing many constraints and obstacles, he wins the fight and restores the peace. The success of the hero marks the integrity of the royal institution.

Building the dramatic content was undoubtedly the most challenging part of adapting *The Great Revenge of the Orphan of Zhao* into *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim.* This adaptation work required setting out the story thorough the many act divisions required in Bangsawan that show the art of scene changes. After a dramatic Prologue scene which reveals the roots of the conflict in the story, the play starts at the palace with General Zhao pay a visit to the Emperor of Ling. In the meantime, the King, closely watch by General Tu'an Gu is releasing the arrows to the citizens outside the palace as the target. Zhao rebukes the King's attitude which he considers as an oppressing the weak people. This angered General Tu'an Gu who accused Zhao of being rude. Apparently, the King appreciates Zhao's courage and presented him with a royal necklace. This makes Tu'an Gu even angrier and starts planning revenge (see figures 6-9).

Figure 6. Act 1 in the Emperor Ling's palace. The King and his General is releasing the arrow to the citizen, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 7. Act 1 in the Emperor Ling's palace. General Zhao appears and criticizing the King's attitude which angered General Tu'an Gu, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 8. Act 1 in the Emperor Ling's palace. The King awarded the royal necklace as the appreciation of Zhao's service, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 9. Act 1 in the Emperor Ling's palace. Tu'an Gu plotting with Mei the royal concubine, to set a trap for Zhao Dun. *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

The second act introduces the character of Cheng Ying, Zhao's very loyal assistant. They are both waiting for their wives to give birth, which eventually both wives simultaneously deliver a son. When Zhao wanted to go to the palace to inform the birth to the Emperor, he was attacked by a group of people wearing masks. Zhao defended himself and killed one of the attackers. Apparently, the murdered is the royal beloved concubine. At the same time, Tu'an Gu appears and orders the army to arrest Zhao on charges of killing the royal concubine. Zhao was taken to the palace (see figures 10-13).

Figure 10. Act 2 outside the House of Physician. Zhao Dun and Cheng Ying waiting for their wives to give births, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 11. Act 2 outside the House of Physician. Zhao Dun attacked by a group of attackers, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 12. Act 2 outside the House of Physician. Zhao Dun found out the person that he murdered is Mei, the royal concubine, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 13. Act 2 outside the House of Physician. Tu'an Gu appears and accuses Zhao Dun intentionally murder Mei. He ordered his knights to take Zhao Dun before the King for punishment, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

In the Act 3 in the palace, the King is so disappointed with Zhao's actions that he killed his beloved concubine. Zhao wanted to give an explanation but was often stopped by Tu'an Gu. Due to the Tu'an Gu's incitement, the King sentences Zhao to death. Tu'an Gu also incites the King to kill all Zhao's descendants to eliminate the potential of rebels in future. In a state of sadness and frustration, the King could not think rationally and left it to Tu'an Gu to carry it out. Tu'an Gu took the opportunity to order that all Zhao's descendants be killed, including the newborn (see figures 14 and 15).

Figure 14. Act 3 in the palace of Emperor Ling. Zhao Dun defending himself in front of the King, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 15. Act 3 in the palace of Emperor Ling. The King surrenders his sword to Zhao Dun for Zhao Dun to kill himself instead of being killed by the King, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Next in the street scene, Cheng Ying finds out that Zhao's wife has committed suicide after hearing her husband was killed. A maid immediately escapes Zhao's newborn and take the child to Cheng Ying. At the same time, Tu'an Gu has ordered that all newborn boys in the state be killed if Zhao's infant has not been found. Remembering Zhao who once saved his life, Cheng Ying has decided to hide Zhao's newborn who also the Zhao's last descendant, and bring his baby instead, to the palace to be handed over to Tu'an Gu (see figure 16).

Figure 16. Act 3 in the street scene. Cheng Ying decided to take his, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Returning to the palace setting, Cheng Ying and his wife bring their newborn before Tu'an Gu and inform that it is Zhao's sought-after newborn. Cheng Ying tries to persuade Tu'an Gu, asking for mercy not to kill the child as Tu'an Gu's wife also just gave birth to a baby girl. But without a word, Tu'an Gu kills the newborn, who was actually the son of Cheng Ying and his wife, in front of their own eyes. Tu'an Gu is satisfied, but this has caused a very deep revenge on Cheng Ying (see figure 17).

Figure 17. Act 3 in the street scene. Tu'an Gu kill Cheng Ying's newborn in front of the parents' eyes, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Act 4 introduces the character of Cheng Bo (son of Zhao who was raised by Cheng Ying) currently twenty years old, and Tu'an Ni the daughter of Tu'an Gu.

These two young men are in love without realizing the dark history that has happened between their descendants. In the similar act, Cheng Ying reveals to Gong Sun that the relationship between Cheng Bo and Tu'an Ni is his plan, as part of his revenge to General Tu'an Gu. He takes the revenge not only for the death of his son, but also for her wife who turn out to be mentally and physically ill after the tragic incident (see figures 18 to 21).

Figure 18. Act 4 in front of Cheng Ying's house. Cheng Bo and his friends are practicing their martial arts lesson, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 19. Act 4 in front of Cheng Ying's house. Cheng Bo informs his friends about the painting that his father currently prepares for his twentieth birthday gift, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 20. Act 4 in front of Cheng Ying's house. Cheng Ying told Gongsun about his plan to first match Cheng Bo and Tu'an Ni, then to destroy the relationship in order to seek revenge, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 21. Marlenny Deenerwan, Act 4 in front of Cheng Ying's house. Cheng Ying's wife come to be ill after watching her son murdered by Tu'an Gu twenty years ago, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

In Act 5, Tu'an Gu announces his plan for the marriage of Cheng Bo and his daughter Tu'an Ni. The Act 6 is the celebration of Cheng Bo's twentieth birthday. It was at this time that Cheng Ying revealed to Cheng Bo that Cheng Bo was not his biological son, but the son of General Zhao Dun who was killed by Tu'an Gu twenty years ago (see figures 22 and 26).

Figure 22. Act 5 in the garden. The lovebirds, Cheng Bo and Tu'an Ni expressing their love through a song entitled Sehidup Semati (*To Live and Die Together*), *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 23. Act 5 in the garden. Tu'an Gu appears and announces the wedding day of Cheng Bo and Tu'an Ni, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 24. Act 6 in Cheng Ying's house. Cheng Ying prepares to pull the cover of the painting to reveal it for Cheng Bo, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 25. Act 6 in Cheng Ying's house. Cheng Ying reveals that Cheng Bo is not his biological son, but the last descendants of Zhao, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 26. Act 6 in Cheng Ying's house. No words after knowing the truth. Only desire for revenge, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Act 7 is the final act where the wedding day of Cheng Bo and Tu'an Ni turn into a tragedy when Cheng Bo kills Tu'an Gu in revenge for his father's death twenty years ago. Cheng Bo apologizes to Tu'an Ni by saying that Tu'an Ni may have lost a father, but he, Zhao the Orphan, has lost himself (see figures 27 to 30).

Figure 27. Act 7 in the house of General Tu'an Gu. Wedding day celebration of Cheng Bo and Tu'an Ni, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 28. Act 7 in the house of General Tu'an Gu. The celebration turns into tragedy when Cheng Bo reveals the dark secret of Tu'an Gu who murdered his father and eliminate all the descendants of Zhao, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 29. Act 7 in the house of General Tu'an Gu. Cheng Bo ended up stabbing Tu'an Gu after an intense fighting between them, causing the death of the General, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 30. Act 7 in the house of General Tu'an Gu. "I want to apologize to you Tu'an Ni, but in my heart now is a pain that has no relief. You may have lost a father, but I, Zhao the orphan, have lost myself," *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

In the conventions of Bangsawan reflected by Rahman B.'s practice, the journey of the hero typically involves travel across the land, forest, or sea to confront evil and to restore the peace. Because no physical journey is undertaken by the main characters in *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim*, their emotional journey becomes the fundamental element on which to plot the storyline. Cheng Ying's anger and desire for revenge activated the story by plunging Cheng Bo's life into a crisis. Cheng Bo, as a tragic hero, completed the journey and achieved poetic justice by taking revenge.

d. Extra-turn

The extra-turn is a unique feature of the Bangsawan. The curtains are lowered, so the crew can change the set, while in front of the curtain the audience is treated to various performances. It might be a comedy skit, traditional dances, a rendition of a popular song by a well-known singer, a magic show, or a martial arts performance. There is no exact explanation from Rahman B. or any other practitioners on the term extra-turn. Literally however, the word "extra-turn" or *giliran tambahan* in Malay, carries the meaning of an additional segment/scene/act that presented within every acts. In the past, extra-turn had no connection with the plot of the story.

The extra-turn differentiated Bangsawan from the other genres, even distinguishing the art form from *Wayang Parsi*. Bangsawan is a theatre adapted from the *Wayang Parsi* (Persian Theatre) brought in from Bombay, India. Ghulam Sarwar-Yousof (2002) traces the origin of Bangsawan as beginning in India, with the development of musical theatre or operatic theatre style in the north Indian province of Awadh as early as the nineteenth century. This theatre developed in the court under the ruling of the last *Nawaab* (Emperor), Wajid Ali Shah (who reigned from 1847-1856). When Wajid Ali Shah was exiled in 1856, the performers originally based in

his court, became peripatetic until a wealthy Parsi community in Bombay provided them with financial support. This became a turning point when the then unnamed art form adopted the name of *Wayang Parsi* and was performed commercially in the city's permanent theatre. The genre that in time would become Bangsawan arrived in Penang in the 1870s, following a visit by one or more troupes of Wayang Parsi, possibly from Bombay.

This is strengthened by Rahman B.'s statement that in earlier times, particularly in the era of *Wayang Parsi*, no interval segment was presented. Upon completion of the first scene, the second scene's backdrop was lowered, and the second scene began immediately. Behind the curtain, the crew changed the set and backdrop, preparing for the third scene. Upon completion of the second scene, the curtain was lifted and the next act began, with this process repeatedly done until the end of the show. At one point, this method began to bore the audience, making them lose interest in watching Bangsawan. Desperately needing to restore the audience's attention, the producers at that time came up with the idea of an extra-turn segment, featuring popular celebrities of the era. When the extra-turn was introduced, as expected, they managed to draw the audience back to Bangsawan theater. Initially, it was only a strategy to bring the audience in to watch Bangsawan. Eventually, it became an essential component of the art form, and is still one of the attractions in contemporary Bangsawan performances.

In selecting the types of extra-turns to feature in *Bangsawan Zhao Si Anak Yatim*, I felt it essential to maintain the pace and tempo of the performance. For Rahman B. the extra-turn was merely an entertainment segment while waiting for the next scene to start; hence, he was never concerned with the details of this segment of the performance. He usually allowed the music director to choose the songs and singers they deemed appropriate. However, in my performance, the extra-turn renditions were carefully selected in order to enhance the feeling of Chinese culture.

The first extra-turn song, entitled *Hoi Fut Tin Hung* (The Boundless Sea and Sky), a popular Hong Kong song in Malaysia sang by Sabihah Wahid, was followed by an agogo dance for the second extra-turn. The third extra-turn was presented in the form of a street scene and featured a martial art of Wushu presented by a group of kids from E-Martial Arts Group, Putrajaya. At the end of the extra turn, the curtain raised up as the mark of the starting of Act 4 (see figures 31 and 32).

Figure 31. Extra-turn segment. The E-Martial Art Group Putrajaya, presenting a group of children Wushu performers, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 32. Extra-turn segment. In the middle of the segment, the curtain raised marking the beginning of the Act 4, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Two of the kids, a boy and a girl, keep demonstrating their fighting skill. At one point, these kids exit the stage, immediately replacing by the appearance of Cheng Bo and Tu'an Ni, continuing demonstrating their martial arts. This exchange of actors had amazed the audience, a practical yet spectacular way of informing the audience of the twenty years of time-lapse in the storyline (see figures 33 and 34).

Figure 33. Act 4 outside Cheng Ying's house. A boy and a girl demonstrating their Wushu skill, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Figure 34. Act 4 outside Cheng Ying's house. Cheng Bo and Tu'an Ni appears replacing the kid's actor, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Extra-turn 4 showed a performance of solo Guzheng instrument by Wan Syamel, followed by a beautiful rendition of Chinese version of *Cindai*, a popular Malay song by Sabihah Wahid. The cabaret concept of *Gamanyeh* song entertained the whole audience in the final extra-turn segment of the night (see figure 35).

Figure 35. Extra-turn segment, the performance of Gamanyeh song in cabaret concept, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

As previously noted, the selection of the extra-turn was not a crucial element in Rahman B.'s practice. However, I wished to extend the production's theme, style and key concepts into all segments (the scenes and the extra-turns) in order to increase the level of professionalism and make the show more appealing to a contemporary audience. Combining a classical Chinese story with contemporary Chinese-inflected entertainment was a strategy I used to keep the audience in the mode of pleasure associated with the performance.

e. Tasmat (Spectacle created by special effects)

Tasmat is the element of special effects or spectacle in a Bangsawan performance. When skillfully applied in a particular scene, *tasmat* adds to the prestige of the production through the creation of a miracle onstage through manual means, which involves the use of the human body (crew members) instead of the utilization of machine technology. Rahman B. defines *tasmat* as "a scenario that totally changes the stage visuals using explosive elements in a state of magical atmosphere". He also asserted that *tasmat* is meant to surprise and impress the audience; thus, it can only happen once throughout the show, as a second surprise would not be a surprise.

His favorite example is from his play *Bangsawan Puteri Gunung Ledang* when Tun Mamat (a Malacca warrior) follows an old woman to climb Mount Ledang. Upon reaching the top, *tasmat* occurs when the mountain changes into a palace in front of the audience, and the old woman is turned into a beautiful princess in the blink of an eye. According to Rahman B., an effective *tasmat* is produced by "cheating" the audience, making them wonder about how the trick was accomplished. The feeling of wonder was strong enough to bring viewers back again to watch the play the following night. In the past, *tasmat* was considered the measure of the quality of a performance. The creation of *tasmat* contributed to the prestige and prowess of the production and the company.

The *tasmat* in my performance took place in Act 6 when Cheng Ying decided

to tell the truth to Cheng Bo during his twentieth birthday celebration. From the beginning of Act 4, the story had established that Cheng Ying is in the midst of completing a mystery painting, that only be revealed during Cheng Bo's twentieth birthday. The painting is a picture of a newborn being stabbed with a sword. The painting was painted by the production painter on calico fabric and colored black. When installed on stage and projected spot lights from behind, combined with the stage lights design, it creates a profound tragic effect when viewed from the perspective of the audience (see figure 36). When Cheng Ying pulled the cloth to reveal this painting, Tengku Zainuddin accompanied it with a thrilling sound and music effect, with the traumatic screams of Cheng Ying's wife who had become insane after seeing the murder of her baby twenty years ago.

Figure 36. Tasmat or spectacular element generated from a painting, accompanied by the music, sound effect, lighting and sound of the mother screaming. A boy and a girl demonstrating their Wushu skill, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Such *tasmat* presentation is to return the audience's memory to the tragedy at the beginning of the story and also provide a spectacular experience of a Bangsawan for the audience to enjoy. I followed the concept of Rahman B.'s *tasmat* by offering a scenario that totally changes the stage visual using explosive elements in a state of magical atmosphere.

f. Closing song

As a tradition for the closing, all the actors (and crew) gathered onstage to sing the finale while saying goodbye to the audience. The song praises the audience and also offers a prayer for everyone. Below is the song typically used by Rahman B. as the closing tune for his productions:

Terima kasih kami ucapkan	We say thank you to all
Kepada sekalian peminat Bangsawan	You our Bangsawan audience
Kami di bawah satu naungan	We are unified
Persatuan Seni Bangsawan	In our Art of Bangsawan
Bintang Timur Kuala Lumpur	Eastern Star of Kuala Lumpur
Alhamdulillah waja laksana	All praise be to God
Berkatnya nabi wali saidina	Peace and blessings on the prophet
Hajat di hati sudah sempurna	Our hearts are pure
Dijauhkan Allah bala bencana	Allah protects us from misfortune

This song was also used by ASWARA as their permanent Bangsawan closing song from their first Bangsawan performance in 1996. They changed the fourth and fifth line in the first stanza to the name of ASWARA.

In my performance, the closing song adapted from one of DBKL's popular theme songs entitled *Kuala Lumpur*, a song that describes the harmony and the prosperity of Kuala Lumpur. I used the melody of the song and I wrote new lyrics as follows:

Kepada semua penonton budiman	To all our wise viewer
Terima kasih diucapkan	We say thank you
Jauh dan dekat semuanya datang	All have come from far and wide
Menyaksikan kami main Bangsawan	To see us perform the Bangsawan
Segala yang baik Allah yang berkati	All good things come from Allah
Salah dan silap maafkan kami	Forgive us for our wrongdoings
Semoga kita akan berjumpa lagi	We hope to meet you again
Opera Sri Bandaraya mengundur diri	We at the Opera Sri Bandaraya bid you farewell

Rahman B. recounted in the past the finale was often the performers' favorite segment in that audiences tended to show their appreciation by throwing gifts in form of flowers, clothing, and even money towards the stage. Audiences typically sang together with the performers, waving their hands and showing gratitude to each other. On some occasions, the main sponsor or financial patron would come onstage to meet the cast.

In a contemporary performance, though the act of throwing gifts towards the stage is no longer practiced, performers and audience members can still exchange their appreciation of one another through gestures and vocal utterances. Actors often wave their hands in the air in unison, while the audience claps vigorously and calls the names of the actors.

In my performance, the special guests of JKKN and DBKL came onstage on the closing night to meet the cast. The closing segment of Bangsawan never fails to fully engage the whole theatre because it is the time where all the performers appear

onstage in their glittering costumes and make up, under the brightest lighting effects, accompanied by the most cheerful music, listening to the appreciation from the audience before the final curtain is lowered (see figure 37).

Figure 37. The curtain call, a closing segment where all the cast and crew appear on stage to engage with the audience, *Bangsawan Zhao si Anak Yatim* Auditorium DBKL, 2018.

Discussion

Explorations involving contemporary innovation in Bangsawan production are most welcome, provided the contemporary performer understands the essential foundation of Bangsawan. By having this sense of understanding, contemporary performers are able to see the implications of their changes and adaptations. At the same time, they are also in a stronger position to identify those conventions that need to be maintained. The willingness of contemporary performers to participate in this preservation process will ensure the continuation of Bangsawan, without disconnecting its foundation from the past practices.

Overall, throughout this production process, I identified and documented Rahman B.'s (till now) orally transmitted framework, the components of which he relayed systematically for the first time to me. It has also produced a live Bangsawan performance based on his framework, that is generated from tacit knowledge, transmitted explicitly through a Practice as Research methodology, a framework that makes Bangsawan available to be performed in the contemporary arts scene in Malaysia. The application of this method opens up the opportunity for this study to be academically enhanced in future.

That Bangsawan has survived through periods of significant social and political change establishes the form as a cultural symbol. Though stories performed can vary depending on the culture one chooses to present, it is not the story or culture that matters, but rather the strong conventions that have been imprinted orally though the ages that make Bangsawan a solid Malay traditional art. The journey of Bangsawan from its traditional roots through its life as a commercial, urban, and popular theatre, enables it to stand in the twenty-first century as a contemporary

Malay traditional form, which openly interacts with and is flexible enough to absorb various cultures from all over the world.

Thus, the establishment of a conceptual framework for Rahman B.'s Bangsawan practice, aims to help young performers to better understand Bangsawan and distinguish it from the other art genres. The effectiveness of the conventions was successfully tested in this performance project. This success measured through the accomplishment of the key objective of this research by this production, that is to make Bangsawan available to be performed in the contemporary era by remain true to the key conventions.

The production process of nearly five months provided performers with a deeper understanding of the art form. With the existence of a group of trained young practitioners, the conventions can in the future be applied and practiced more effectively and continuously.

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Biography

Marlenny Deenerwan holds a PhD in Theatre Performance from Monash University, Australia (2016); a Master of Arts (2011) and Bachelor of Performing Arts in Drama (2007) from Universiti Malaya; and a Diploma in Creative Writing from the National Arts Academy, now known as ASWARA (2002). Her research spans the field of Malaysian traditional and ritual theatre as well as Bangsawan, and is currently focused on the development of DraFDidik, a model of interactive theatre as an alternative teaching and learning method for young children. She is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Creative Arts, Universiti Malaya.

Yogyakarta Dance Tradition: The Challenges of Shared Heritage

R. M. Pramutomo
Indonesia Arts Institute Surakarta
e-mail: rmpram60@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the process of reviving and revitalising Yogyanese Court Dance as a shared heritage, focusing on the significant role played by the *sanggar* (dance studio) in preserving and promoting this traditional art form. Drawing on ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviews, and document analysis, the study delves into the strategies, experiences, and challenges encountered by dance practitioners, teachers, and stakeholders in breathing new life into Yogyanese Court Dance within the contemporary cultural landscape. By examining the practices and beliefs of individuals involved in the preservation and transmission of Yogyanese Court Dance, the research seeks to illuminate the cultural dynamics at play within the sanggar. Through the voices and narratives of dancers, teachers, and community members, the study explores the processes of knowledge exchange, skill development, and cultural adaptation taking place within the sanggar, while considering the evolving socio-cultural context. The study investigates the delicate balance between tradition and modernity faced by practitioners, as they navigate the demands of preserving the essence of Yogyanese Court Dance while responding to contemporary influences and audience expectations. It also examines the intergenerational dynamics within the sanggar, including the transmission of knowledge and the engagement of younger generations, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities arising from this interaction. Moreover, the research delves into the role of the sanggar as a catalyst for community building, cultural identity, and heritage appreciation. It explores how the revival efforts foster a sense of belonging among members and contribute to the wider society's understanding and appreciation of Yogyanese Court Dance as a living art form. The study also considers the potential for cultural exchange and cross-cultural dialogue facilitated by the revitalisation initiatives. By presenting rich qualitative data and narratives, this research offers insights into the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding Yogyanese Court Dance and the efforts to revive and revitalise it. The findings inform cultural policymakers, educators, and practitioners by providing valuable perspectives on effective strategies for preserving and promoting traditional dance forms within a contemporary context. The study emphasises the importance of honouring historical roots while embracing innovation to ensure the continued vibrancy and relevance of Yogyanese Court Dance as a cherished shared heritage.

Keywords: revitalizing, reviving, sanggar, shared heritage, Yogyanese court dance

Introduction

Traditionally, Javanese dance learning can be seen through direct practice between students and teachers in a studio. The imitation method is a practice method that is most often found inherited from Yogyakarta traditional dance in the process of learning dance in studios. This is actually a form of shared inheritance derived from the origins of classical dance at the Yogyakarta Palace. In the Yogyakarta Palace, the initial achievement aimed at the practice of imitation was a memorisation of the form of movement and the process of performing certain movements. The achievement of memorising movement forms can be demonstrated directly at that time by looking at the way the teacher gives examples. Likewise, in the performance of certain body movement processes, this can be observed directly by following the teacher's practice of giving examples of each body segment that moves according to the rhythm being carried out. The level of achievement of memorisation is the most elementary achievement of classical dance learning at the Yogyakarta Palace. This means that a student learning classical Javanese dance requires a level of memorisation first before moving on to the next level. Memorisation is the initial capital for a student to correctly imitate the form of movement and movement process as exemplified by a teacher. By imitating someone who studies classical dance, they also become an actor in the revitalisation of cultural identity and heritage appreciation. By examining the practices and beliefs of individuals involved in the preservation and transmission of Yogyanese Court Dance, this paper seeks to illuminate the cultural dynamics at play within the studio. Moreover, this paper delves into the role of the studio as a catalyst for community building, cultural identity, and heritage appreciation. It explores how the revival efforts foster a sense of belonging among members and contribute to the wider society's understanding and appreciation of Yogyanese Court Dance as a living art form.

Several literary facts have also been proven by other authors. Imitation as a form of shared heritage in classical dance education in the studio has a very important meaning (Damayanti et al., 2022). Apart from that, there is inheritance in building cultural identity within the studio (Ramdani & Restian, 2020) and instilling moral values (Rosala, 2016). On the other hand, by imitating the method, students in the studio can also gain a sense of self-confidence which is absorbed by the sense of sight (Putri & Desyandri, 2019). In the end, through imitation in practice in the studio, a student can also develop multiple intelligences (Putraningsih et al., 2019). Meanwhile, the social fact of the form of shared heritage in the reviving and revitalising model in Yogyakarta style classical dance studios is a breath that continues to breathe in society. The study emphasises the importance of honouring historical roots while embracing innovation to ensure the continued vibrancy and relevance of Yogyanese Court Dance as a cherished shared heritage.

A similar method has been proven by the writings of Qu and Zollet in observing the potential for cultural exchange and cross-cultural dialogue facilitated by the revitalisation initiatives of a festival event (Qu & Zollet, 2023). Apart from that, the aim of this article is to provide a perspective to examine how socially engaged Yogyanese Court dance can represent an effective tool for revitalising communities and strengthening their resilience. We examine the case of Yogyanese Court Dance

in the Sanggar of Yogyakarta.

Methodology

This article is a case study on the achievement of educational outcomes in studios by implementing performance practices on stage. The case study in this paper uses qualitative data. There are very varied types of case studies. The implications of the results of this paper show the importance of researchers' ability to understand how to approach case studies appropriately, how to determine cases and research limitations, and how to analyse data carefully (Nurrahma et al., 2021). This article was written using qualitative research methods. Data collection techniques are carried out using steps as stated in Ridwan's (2010) statement: the meaning of data collection techniques in qualitative research is often done in various ways. This article examines the intergenerational dynamics within the studio, including the transmission of knowledge and the engagement of younger generations, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities arising from this interaction. The study also considers the potential for cultural exchange and cross-cultural dialogue facilitated by the revitalisation initiatives. By presenting rich qualitative data and narratives, this research offers insights into the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding Yogyanese Court Dance and the efforts to revive and revitalise it. The findings inform cultural policymakers, educators, and practitioners by providing valuable perspectives on effective strategies for preserving and promoting traditional dance forms within a contemporary context. The study emphasises the importance of honouring historical roots while embracing innovation to ensure the continued vibrancy and relevance of Yogyanese Court Dance as a cherished shared heritage.

Results

Historically, there are only two studios that implement inheritance patterns in the form of non-formal dance education, namely the Among Beksa Student Foundation and the Pamulangan Beksa Sasminta Mardawa Foundation. The interesting thing is that both studios adapt their students through the experience of practising dance performances in several places. This effort is another way to revive and revitalise the Yogyakarta style dance material that is trained in each studio.

Dance education at the Among Beksa Student Foundation is currently the oldest in Yogyakarta. Founded in 1952, and it has more than 4000 alumni in various cities in Indonesia. The Siswa Among Beksa dance studio received a shared inheritance from Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX when he started establishing a Yogyakarta style dance school outside the walls of the Palace in 1952. This dance school model is similar to the method used by Sultan Hamengku Buwana VIII when, in 1918, he founded a dance school outside the palace called Krida Beksa Wirama. The joint inheritance model applied in the form of the non-formal dance school Sanggar Siswa Among Beksa is managed in a more modern way using a semester pattern for five semesters. Every semester, a level advancement exam is conducted for students. Then at the end of the semester, an exam is held to obtain a Dancer

Candidate certificate (Hermana and Putra Jalu, personal communication, October 12, 2023).

The semester-by-semester pattern with an increased exam model every semester is also carried out at the Pamulangan Beksa Sasminta Mardawa Foundation. The final semester exam pattern is also carried out to obtain a Dancer Candidate certificate (Rahma Indrasari, personal communication, October 24, 2023). Apart from the two studios in Yogyakarta using a non-formal educational basis, the Among Beksa Student Foundation and the Pamulangan Sasminta Mardawa Foundation also use dance performance events as a form of experience for students and alumni in front of an audience. The dance presentations are used in addition to fulfil educational materials; they also have revitalisation roles for traditional Yogyakarta style dance, which is rarely performed. Several performance stages were used as a medium for testing experiences and revival models for the two studios, Siswa Among Beksa Dance studio and Pamulangan Beksa Sasminta Mardawa dance studio.

Figure 1. Prince Tejakusumo is teaching Krida Beksa Wirama students in the 1950s in the courtyard of Ndalem Tejakusuman (Photo of Krida Beksa Wirama archive document)

This paper is the effort to revive and revitalize it. The findings inform cultural policymakers, educators, and practitioners by providing valuable perspectives on effective strategies for preserving and promoting traditional dance forms within a contemporary context. The tabels below shows practical in dance education from the sanggar

Figure 2. The practice of male dance education at the Among Beksa Student Foundation (YSAB document photo, 2019)

Figure 3. Female dance exam at the 2019 Among Beksa Student Foundation (YSAB document photo, 2019)

Figure 4. Dance maestro of the Among Beksa Student Foundation R.M. Dinusatomo (YSAB document photo, 2015)

Figure 5. Practicing the Yogyakarta style of refined male dance using the Wejedan Method. (Yogyakarta Palace document photo, 2019)

Figure 6. Graduation of prospective dancers from the Among Beksa Student Foundation dance education (YSAB Document Photo, 2017)

Figure 7. Practice the Yogyakarta style of female dance using the Wejedan Method (Yogyakarta Palace document photo, 2015)

Figure 8. Practice of the refined male dance using the Wejedan Method at the Among Beksa Student Foundation (YSAB document photo, 2018)

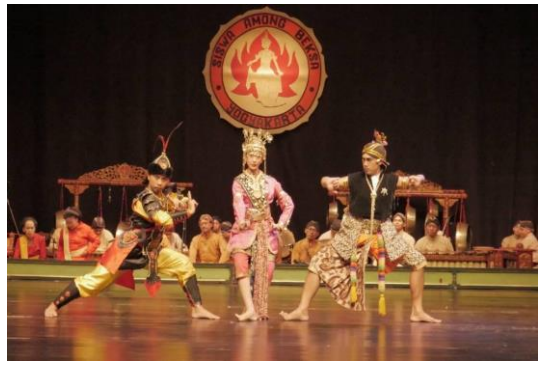

Figure 9. Reconstruction of ancient manuscripts by the Among Beksa Student Foundation (Photo of Yogyakarta Cultural Park Document, 2022)

Figure 10. Practical performance experience of students and alumni of the Among Beksa Student Foundation Wayang Wong dance drama (YSAB Document Photo, 2015)

Figure 11. Practical experiences of students and alumni from the Among Beksa Student Foundation in performing the Ramayana dance drama for tourists (YSAB Document Photo 2022)

Discussion

At the beginning of this discussion, it is necessary to recall David Parkin's question when he asked Hughes-Freeland (2003) about the importance of an explanation of the attainment of meaning in the performance of Yogyanese Court Dance. Parkin asked, "How far do we now view 'meaning' not as given to us by signs but as placed by ourselves on and through the objects and acts we see and experience?" The problem becomes clear that the meaning of the Yogyanese Court Dance performance is related to the dance artistry achievements of a dancer who performs the dance. This, then, becomes a value dimension of the inheritance of dance culture in the studio. In this context, Putraningsih (2015) states that studios or dance organisations also produce new generations who will maintain, preserve, and develop classical dances in the future. The answer to Parkin's question will be stronger by remembering a shared heritage value from the achievements of learning Yogyakarta style classical dancing in the form of character building. In this sense, the value of revival becomes the basis for remaining alive in the spirit of Yogyakarta dance tradition in the practice of performance experiences.

A statement also needs to be remembered from the writings of Prince Surjobrongto from the Yogyakarta Palace in seeing the relationship between dance as a cultural text and as strengthening character building. It was stated in his writings when he was still a teenager, he was reminded by Sultan Hamengku Buwana VIII (his father) that if someone could not dance, he was considered an under educated person (Surjobrongto; 1971, pp. 4-6). The assumption of this statement is that someone can be called educated or literate if they have experienced learning Javanese dance. This statement is very logical because the practice of imitation in studios currently still uses the wejedan method (Personal communication, November 4, 2023 with Putra Jalu, 29 years old). The wejedan method is a practice method with extra stressing by a teachers inherited from the Yogyakarta Palace. This expression is linked with the trend of ethnochoreology as the science of understanding humanity through the dance.[1]

Meanwhile, Merriam (1974) sees the trend in ethnochoreology into three models, namely: (a) a model that discusses dance as body movement, (b) a model that discusses dance as behaviour, and (c) a model that connects dance studies with other studies (Merriam, 1974). If in the first model the subject of discussion is physical behaviour, then in the second model what is at issue is social behaviour, both from the dancer and the audience: what is their learning behaviour, what is their understanding behaviour, which underlies their attitudes and stance regarding dance. In the third model, dance is used to explain other problems, for example regarding the survival of innate culture in human groups that move from place to place.

In the model of ethnochoreology offered by Merriam, it seems that this second model is a major contribution to the study of dance to the social character of society. This is in line with measurements in looking at the influence of learning dance on people's behaviour, both for dance students or dancers, and dance audiences. What is measured in dance learning behaviour in any dance cultural domain in the archipelago will have an impact not only on aesthetic sensitivity, but also on the sensitivity of social behaviour and attitudes in our society. In the case of the Yogyakarta Palace classical dance, this expression almost resembles Surjobrongto's statement when looking at educated people, which can be indicated by the sensitivity of dance learners. This means that this comparison becomes the basis for exploring how the revival efforts foster a sense of belonging among members and contribute to the wider society's understanding and appreciation of Yogyanese Court Dance as a living art form. This is a special way to explore reviving, and revitalising in a shared heritage model of Yogyakarta style Javanese Palace dance. It is another way of exploring how revival efforts foster a sense of belonging among members and contribute to the wider community's understanding and appreciation of Yogyakarta Palace Dance as a living art form. The study also considers the potential for cultural exchange and cross-cultural dialogue facilitated by revitalisation initiatives.

This paper will specifically look at two important stages in the case of performance practice as a revitalisation initiative. First is the stage of the Yogyakarta Sono Culture Museum. This stage is managed by the Yogyakarta Government as a tourist attraction. Presentations in Yogyakarta style classical dance performances are presented in turn by several dance studios, including the Among Beksa Students Foundation and the Pamulangan Sasminta Mardawa Foundation. Interviews with dance performers at both studios show the contribution of the studios to revitalisation initiatives in several Yogyakarta style classical dance genres. This can be seen from the choice of the opening show repertoire which presents extra dance creations from each studio (Tetet Ragamulya, personal communication, October 7, 2023). Apart from that, according to other dance performers, with the availability of the Sono Budaya Museum stage, there is a new social relationship between the studios and the audience who come from various regions, including domestic tourists and from abroad (Personal communication with Hermawan, 33 years old, October 7, 2023).

Figure 12. Model revivaling and revitalizing on the Sana Budaya Museum stage (Sana Budaya Museum Document Photo, 2023)

Figure 13. Practical experience of dance drama performance by Yayasan Pamulangan Sasminta Mardawa (Sana Budaya Museum Document Photo, 2022)

In addition to the stage provided by the Yogyakarta Government, the private sector also plays a major role in navigating the demands of preserving the essence of Yogya Palace Dance while responding to contemporary influences and audience expectations. Private contribution is the second stage besides the Government stage. An example that can be mentioned here is the Hamzah Batik Stage. The location of this stage is very strategic at the southern end of Malioboro, a famous street in Yogyakarta. The studio that is active in performances on the Hamzah Batik stage is the Among Beksa Student Foundation. This stage was originally the performance stage for Cabaret Hamzah. However, at the beginning or opening of the show, there is always space for Yogyakarta style classical dance from the Among Beksa Students Foundation to perform Yogyakarta style classical dance (Personal communication with Tetet Ragamulya, 43 years old, October 4, 2023). Even on Sundays, Yogyakarta

style dance is given the opportunity to perform more than one repertoire as a space for innovation and creativity for the studio.

Figure 14. Revivaling and revitalizing model in the Hamzah Batik Stage (YSAB Document Photo, 2023)

Figure 15. Practical experience of men's dance performances on the Hamzah Batik stage (YSAB Document Photo, 2022)

The phenomenon of reviving and revitalizing has also been discussed by several authors in different studies. Several articles can be used as a source of comparison in exploring revitalizing construction using the shared heritage model. This can be seen in constructing alternative learning in an innovation strategy of art education of drama, dance, and music (Bramantyo & Tjaroko, 2022) and Mai's writing which questions How to learn and feel the dance culture? (Mai, 2022). Or what is more comprehensive is shown by Pyne. In his writing, Pyne looks at the issues faced by these heritage resources and offers recommendations for enhancing community engagement, initiating co-management and developing common goals among contemporary communities in the Calcutta region (Pyne, 2021). It also appears that innovative strategies are needed in responding to reviving and revitalizing

patterns in the shared heritage model (Zhang et al., 2022). On the other hand, a critical view is also needed in looking at the position of classical dance studios, most of which are located in urban areas (Fathinnaufal & Hidayati, 2020). There is a risk of reduced inheritance that occurs in the process of learning classical dance in urban areas. This is also a difficult challenge for the life of the Sanggar which is just recovering from the pandemic (Yuliati et al., 2023). All Sanggar experienced how the existence of Javanese Court Dance was worrisome when the Covid-19 pandemic emerged that restricted people's movement throughout the world.

Conclusion

This study ultimately looks at the delicate balance between tradition and modernity faced by practitioners. Apart from that, this paper also examines intergenerational dynamics in studios, including the transmission of knowledge and involvement of the younger generation, as well as highlighting the challenges and opportunities that arise from the inter-relationship between educational practices and performance experience practices. With dance education based, studios that produce graduates who are prospective dancers are challenged to survive in Yogyakarta Style dance as a living tradition in the contemporary era. This paper also looks at the studio's role as a catalyst for community development, cultural identity and appreciation of cultural heritage.

By taking the case of the stage owned by the Yogyakarta Government, Sana Budaya Museum and Hamzah Batik, this paper also looks at the challenges of how dance studios respond to accepting a shared heritage. Large dance studios such as the Among Beksa Student Foundation and the Pamulangan Sasminta Mardawa Foundation are taking an important role in exploring how revival efforts foster a sense of belonging among members and contribute to the wider community's understanding and appreciation of Yogyakarta Palace Dance as a living art form.

Notes

[1] See more at https://educationireland.wordpress.com/2015/04/30/ethnochoreology-understanding-humanity-through-dance-ul/

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Biography

R. M. Pramutomo, born in Yogyakarta in 1968, earned a bachelor's degree in dance at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta in 1992 and later pursued a master's degree in humanities in the Performing Arts Studies program at the Graduate School of Gadjah Mada University (UGM) Yogyakarta, completing it in 2001. Subsequently, he participated in the Culture and Performance Studies program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2001-2002, ultimately obtaining his doctoral degree in Performing Arts Studies at UGM Yogyakarta in 2008. In 2009 and 2010, he took part in the Senior Lecturer Fellowship Program of Academic Recharge (PAR) at Leiden University, Netherlands. Concurrently, he served as the Chair of the Expert Council of the Study Center, the Center of Arts Archives and Documents Studies KRT Wiroguno, which he founded in 2006 and is based in Yogyakarta. He has taken part in and conducted workshops at dance festivals in Asia, America, Europe, and Australia. He is also the chairman of the Among Beksa Student Foundation, the oldest non-formal dance school in Yogyakarta. Dr. Pramutomo is a prolific author, having written many books on dance and performing arts. His dedication to academia is evident through his research and community service, along with the publication of scientific articles in various national and international journals. He has held leadership roles at ISI Surakarta, including serving as Chair of the Research Institute from 2013 to 2017 and Deputy Chancellor III for Student Affairs and Cooperation from 2017 to 2021. Dr. Pramutomo is currently a permanent lecturer at the Faculty of Performing Arts and the postgraduate program at ISI Surakarta.

Ritual Dance and Performance in Contemporary Borneo: A Study of the Kadazan and Sama-Bajau Communities of Sabah, Malaysia

Hanafi Hussin
Universiti Malaya Cultural and Heritage Research Centre (UMCHRC)
e-mail: hanafih@um.edu.my

Abstract

The state of Sabah, comprised of various indigenous ethnic groups, has inherited traditional beliefs and practices practised for a long time. Ritual practices carried on through inheritance have contributed to the musicscape and dancescape in Borneo. The Kadazan community of Penampang district inherited the *sumazau* dance, which used to be the main practice of rituals manifesting the balance between the physical world and the spiritual world, such as *monogit* and *humabot* rituals. Meanwhile, the Sama-Bajau Community in Sabah's Semporna District manifests the bond between humans and spirits in the physical and spiritual realms through music and dancemaking in most rituals. The rituals are held periodically every three months, six months or annually, like *magpaigal-jin, magpaii-bahau-magduwata, poon tahun*, and others, requiring the inclusion of music and dance to host the ancestors and spirit through trance music and dance. Thus, the presence of ancestors and spirits in the ritual signifies a balanced relationship between humans and spirits. This paper will present the importance of music and dance among Kadazan and Sama-Bajau. Based on an ethnographic study with observational methods and in-depth interviews with ritual specialists and contemporary music and dance practitioners of both communities, this paper will also present the current development of the music and dance of those rituals. This study concludes that the music and dances of these communities are important for preserving identity and nation building.

Keywords: *igal*, Kadazan, ritual dance, Sabah, Sama-Bajau, sumazau

Introduction

Kadazan of Sabah, Borneo

Music and dance play important roles in some communities like the Kadazan and Sama-Bajau of Sabah, Borneo. It works as an agent of social service and entertains all kinds of people. It helps to unify the communities and works as an agent of socialisation. It has a great impact on emotional and physical development. Furthermore, in some cases, music and dance strengthen social relations that no other tool could do (Lull, 1985) and boost inter-ethnic relations (Tassanawongwara & Hussin, 2019, pp. 1-18). Music, sounds, and dances often link the seen and the unseen (spiritual) world in ritual performances (Blacking, 1985).

The Kadazan of Penampang is a branch of the Kadazan Dusun ethnic group of Sabah, Borneo. They speak the Coastal Kadazan dialect of the Kadazan Dusun language. Kadazan Dusun is one of the Dusunic Family of Languages. The Kadazan Dusun is the largest indigenous and largest overall ethnic group in Sabah. They are defined by their traditional geographical location in the Penampang District, which encompasses part of Sabah's west coast (Figure 1). The Kadazan of Penampang traditionally relies on subsistence agriculture. They plant wet padi and other crops, including fruits and vegetables. They also rear livestock, including chickens, pigs, and buffaloes. Within their community, they differentiate themselves according to location and topography such as the "Kadazan," the lowlanders (people living near the coast), "Tangaah," middle inhabitants, and "Potiang," the Highlanders. Notwithstanding the minor differences stemming from their geographical distribution, these groups shared various common myths, practices, beliefs, and language (Hussin & John Baptist, 2015).

Figure 1. Sabah Map and locations of the District Headquarters in Penampang (Source: "Discover Sabah" [2018]).

The traditional Kadazan believed that the world they lived in was divided into the spiritual world (*pogun do hozob*) and the physical world, and balance between the two parts ensured the continuity of the humans' welfare (Pugh-Kitingan, Hussin, & John Baptist, 2011). For the coastal Kadazan, the two worlds had three realms: The upper realm or heaven (*hibabou* or *diwato*), the earth (*hiniba*), and the underworld or hell (*dahom tana*) (Hussin, 2007a). The organisation of the spiritual universe, in which human beings and spirits lived in separate parallel worlds, both groups lived

with families and offspring, was believed to be very complicated. The ideal relationship between the human and spirit worlds was one of balance or neutrality, described as "cool" (*osogit*). According to the traditional belief system, any transgression by the human community or its members would cause an imbalance between the two worlds and produce trouble in the natural environment, which would further warm the earth, making it "hot" (*ahasu*) — the heated earth results in disasters and misfortunes such as sickness, infertility of livestock and unproductive lands. Thus, transgressions are avoided.

If the natural and social environment experiences calamities, the traditional Kadazan of Penampang would call *bobohizan* or priestesses to restore the order and balance between the worlds by performing rituals which were embedded with long poetic chants (*inait*), gong ensemble music, and dancing called *sumazau*. *Bobohizan* also helped the communities to fulfil other religious and moral obligations (Hussin & John Baptist, 2015). Rituals, which include *sumazau* dancing and gong ensemble music, are traditionally performed to summon the spirits in the spiritual world to cure illness, to allow a good harvest (celebrated by both traditional feasts and modern harvest festivals), and are also performed in celebratory contexts such as the wedding ceremony.

Sama-Bajau communities on the East Coast of Sabah in Malaysia, including Bajau Laut or Sama Dilaut, live harmoniously with the spiritual, whose presence is liked and favoured for countless community benefits. However, the spiritual world is also deemed dangerous if the communities do not make certain arrangements; thus, in order to balance the two worlds (physical and spiritual), Sama-Bajau perform ritual performances not only fulfil the agreement between the physical and the spiritual worlds, but they believe that through *igal* soundscape and *igal* dancescape they create an environment that pleases the spirits so that life will always be balanced (Hussin et al., 2018, pp. 181-204). There are various dimensions to such dancescape and sound/musicscape among Sama-Bajau but unknown to the world. This article, therefore, would like to investigate those manifest and latent functions and dimensions of dance and music/soundscapes of Sama-Bajau communities, especially the significance of these scapes in sustaining the Sama-Bajau identity of these areas, particularly to Malaysia and the Philippines.

This paper will discuss the *sumazau* and *igal* among the Kadazan of Penampang and Sama-Bajau of Sabah which contribute to soundscape and dancescape of Borneo. Among the Kadazan and Sama-Bajau, the spiritual world is highly significant and living in harmony with this world is extremely important for the longevity and survival of the communities. Hence, the musicscape and dancescape play vital roles in communities' cultures and meeting their spiritual needs. Understanding the vital role of *sumazau* and *igal* as a musicscape and dancescape in different social, cultural, and religious dimensions has gained little attention in the literature. In this paper, therefore, the author would like to focus on different and interlinked dimensions of the musicscape and dancescape of *sumazau* and *igal* with the traditional rituals and contemporary events of the Kadazan and Bajau and the wider Kadazan Dusun and Bajau of Sabah related to *sumazau, igal* and other music and dances. This is because *sumazau, igal* and similar music and dances in related contexts are very important in sustaining the communities' identity.

Methodology

This study is based on research conducted from 2001 to 2022 on the Kadazan community of Penampang and the Sama-Bajau community of Sabah, Borneo, who were involved in *sumazau* and *igal* music and dance performances. The research began with a literature review based on past research and publications on the rituals of the Kadazan of Penampang and the Sama-Bajau of Semporna, Sabah. The literature review also covers other events such as ceremonies and festivals involving music and dance performances related to the *sumazau* and *igal* dance. Data were collected through observations, primarily participant observations in several rituals. These included the *monogit* rituals conducted in 2001 and 2004 among the Kadazan of Penampang, Sabah, and rituals of the Bajau-Sama such as *Magpaii-bahau*, *Magduwata*, *Mag-Kok Tahun*, and *Poon Tahun*. The Kadazan rituals were observed in several villages in Penampang, particularly in Kampung Kituau, Penampang, Sabah. The Bajau rituals were observed in several villages in Semporna, Sabah, such as Kampung Kabimbangan, Bumbum Island, and Kampung Bangau-Bangau.

Interviews were conducted with the ritual practitioners, particularly the Kadazan priestesses, known as *bobohizan*, led by their chief, *bohungkitas*, and the Sama-Bajau families who inherited an heirloom or *langkapan* called *Jin* (*Jin Lella*/male Jin and *Jin Denda*/female Jin). These interviews were conducted to gather information and knowledge from local experts, especially the ritual practitioners. Rituals, *sumazau*, and *igal* dancing were filmed, and the music of the *sompogogungan* (Kadazan music ensemble) and *Tagunggu* music ensemble of Bajau-Sama were also filmed and transcribed. Observations and interviews were also conducted with several *sumazau* and *igal* practitioners—musicians, dancers, and cultural organizers—who appreciate *sumazau* and *igal* for their creative work in the creative industry.

Ritual of Kadazan and Bajau

Rice Farming Ritual

Before Malaysia's formation in 1963, the Kadazan planted rice and other plants for their consumption and survival. Their life's routine also depended on the cosmological order and organisation. At each stage of the rice planting or farming, rituals were performed by the Kadazan priestesses. They believed the rice spirit was present in the physical world and connected with the other spirits. The ritual implemented the ancestral myth (concerning the *pampang* or primaeval stone from which the Creator and his wife emerged before they created the world) and belief in the rice spirits. The ritual was performed by a *bobohizan*, who played an important role in transferring the myth and its practical knowledge to the next generation. The myth was a source of the ancient Kadazan belief in *Kinoingan* (literally, "Supreme God"), his wife or *Suminundu* (the miraculous one) and their daughter *Poninzuvung/Izoton* as the spirits. Through this mythology, the Kadazan explained the origin of the cosmos, the heavens, their cosmology, and the belief system of their community. In the myth, *Poninzuvung* was sacrificed to be the source of food (rice plants). The primary food plant was rice, which grew from the flesh of *Poninzuvung*.

Therefore, her spirit was considered the rice spirit and known as the *bambaazon.* This myth about the supreme spirits significantly affected the Kadazan way of life, including their thinking and living. The community and its customary norms (adat) worked as a guard through four institutions, namely the Village Head (*Huguan Pogun*), the Village Council (*Sinompu'uvan Komohoingan*), religious advisers (*Sinompu'uvan Bobohizan*) and warriors (*Sinompu'uvan Pangazou*).

Actions in the real world affected the spiritual world. Therefore, the rice planting ritual provided food and enriched the spirits in the spiritual world. It also means that the relationship between the spirits and the *bambaazon* should always be good or cold *(osogit).* In the opposite case, the social and natural environment would become hot (*ahasu*) and very unpleasant. In the ritual of planting rice, respect is given to Poninzuvung and other spirits, particularly the house guardian spirit, the *miontong*. The outcome included protecting the community members from disasters and sickness and ensuring the abundance of rice plants. The *monogit* ritual thus traditionally took place during the rice planting season. If calamity affects the community, it would be done twice or thrice a year to ensure that the house guardian spirit *(miontong)* is at peace and will put things back as they were.

Ritual Music and Dance in the Monogit

Monogit, part of traditional rice farming of the Kadazan of Penampang, used to be held bi-annually. The process of performing the rituals started with a single household and continued from one household to another throughout the village; it also depended on the availability of the *bobohizan*. In the ritual performance, the sacrifice of the pigs at least two years old was mandatory. It is traditionally performed over four days and three nights. The beating of the drum *(gandang)* (Figure 2, left) leading the music played by the ensemble called *sompogogungan* (comprising six gongs) (Figure 2, right) and the *sumazau* dance are essential parts of the ceremony.

Figure 2. Drum@*gandang* in the *monogit* ritual (left) and the *sompogogungan* ensemble accompanying the whole process of *monogit* ritual (right). (Source: Hanafi Hussin)

In the ritual context, the gandang beating and the composite sound of the gongs in the *sompogogungan* are believed to connect man with the spiritual world.

The *gandang* beating is periodically done by a *bobohizan* at various stages in the ceremony while reciting an *inait*. The sound of the *gandang* and the *sompogogungan* is believed to assist the *bobohizan* in entering the spiritual world to meet, stir, and awaken the evil spirits to ask them to return the trapped human spirits.

The first *gandang* beating or *mamason* takes place around 7.00 p.m. This particular gong beating is done by the father of the conjugal family, who is organising the *monogit* and marks the beginning of the *kotudungan*, the first night. It awakens and invites the spirits in the upper world to join the event. Other rituals by the *bobohizan* with the drum include *matang* (awakening the spirits in the spiritual world and also the spirits of the ritual objects), *tumingak* (raising and empowering the spirits), and *savak* (calling back the spirits who left). While these sessions with the *gandang* take place, food offerings or *pamanta* are prepared, especially fermented rice (*tapai*). These are placed in the part of the ritual space, together with antique clothing for the *miontong*, including a traditional male headcloth, jacket and coin belt.

Communication and negotiation with the spirits then continue in the special trance session called *modsuut,* when each *bobohizan* is believed to enter different parts of the spiritual world. This takes place from 1.00 a.m. until up to 5.00 a.m. *Pamanta* preparation continues on the second day, called *mamasa'an* or "feeding the spirits." After a live, bound, the sacrificial pig is brought into the house and laid in the ritual space, more *gandang* beating and recitation of *inait* by *bobohizan*- called *mihung* (calling the spirits to come near) and *sumonson* (invitation to enjoy the prepared dish) takes place.

The *sumazau* music is collectively played using six hanging gongs in the *sompogogunan* ensemble, with the *gandang* drum. *Sompogogungan* playing the *sumazau* music accompanies the *monogit* ritual process, which bridges the human and the spiritual worlds. It is believed that the beating of the *gandang* and the sound of the *sompogogungan* play the role of connection with the spirit world. The *bobohizan* have a special power of connecting to the unseen world through the beat and rhythm of the music through their dancing. The recitation of *inait* to the spiritual world and the music and dance stir and awaken the evil spirits to return the trapped subsidiary human and rice spirits.

To connect the two worlds in traditional Kadazan ceremonies, ritual specialists or priestesses play the role of mediators. They recite sacred *inait* or long ritual poetry, perform rituals and offer blood sacrifices at different events to balance the seen and unseen worlds. Priestesses also attempt to connect the two worlds through dancing to the rhythm of gong ensemble music. In the ritual contexts, the spirits participate in the dance in two ways, either by possessing the priestesses or by symbolic representation. The importance of gong ensemble music as a bridge between the seen and unseen worlds is recognised in various other cultures, apart from the Penampang Kadazan (Pugh-Kitingan et al., 2011; Pugh-Kitingan, 2012, p. 2014).

The rhythm of the *sumazau* music is slow based on the beating of the six hanging gongs and single *gandang* drum in the *sompogogungan* ensemble. The *sumazau* dance movement follows the beat of this *sompogogungan.* The *sumazau* consists of two basic dance motifs. In the first motif, the dancer steps from side to side, shifting weight from one foot to the other while gently swinging the arms at the sides in time with the music. In the second motif, the dancer raises the heels slightly,

with arms raised. For men, the arms are stretched out at shoulder level, with hands moving up and down. The arms are also outstretched for women but at a lower level.

In the ritual *sumazau* dance movements vary due to its function in the ritual segments. *Sumazau* takes place on the second day of the *monogit* ritual, known as *sumazau magampa*, *mundang*, and *pasasazau do miontong*. In symbolic terms, these dances help to clean impurities and cure sicknesses. At the time of dance by the dancers, offerings (*pamanta*) of rice and rice wine are made to the spirits. The *pamanta* is offered in sequence and process. As mentioned above, the *bobohizan* specially perform the *sumazau*- each in a sequence. During *pasasazau do miontong* a *bobohizan* will become possessed by the *miontong*. *Sumazau* in the *monogit* is thus a means of communication and forming transactions with the spirit world on behalf of the family organising the ceremony. Through dance, the *bobohizan* directly interact with the spirit world and act out their transactions with the spirits.

Figure 3. Performing *sumazau* in *magampa* as part of the healing process in the *monogit.* (Source: Hanafi Hussin)

The *pamanta* offerings are also made following a process and sequences, while the *bobohizan* accompanied by the *sompogogungan* dance the *sumazau* uniquely, including dancing around a group of family members sitting under blankets who suffering from bad dreams, migraine and other minor illnesses (*magampa*) (Figure 3), dancing with palm fronts and swords during feast presentation for the spirits (*mundang*), inviting the *miontong* to dance and serving of the dishes (*sumasau*

miontong or *pasasazau do miontong*), sending back some of the spirits (*hoputan*), and grouping the spirits that are left (*monoinig*).

During the *pasasazau do miontong*, the *bobohizan* doing the *sumazau* is in a trance and possessed (*nosuang*) by the *miontong* when her body movements become unusually strong and full of energy. She will eat chicken, drink *tapai* and throw the fermented rice where the spirits are believed to line up in front of the sacrificial pig. At this time, all the good and evil spirits are believed to be invited by the *miontong* to partake of the food, which is the highlight of the ritual. This stage of the ritual dance is the peak and most significant point. Here, the beating of *gandang* (drum) from the *sompogogungan* and the *sumazau* dance has become essential tools in the *monogit*. The combination of both elements works in two ways: It is believed that the traditional Kadazan Penampang music and dance performance is also a healing ritual because it is believed to rid the house of evil spirits.

The third day is called *kinapangasan* (the climax of the series), which begins with another *modsuut* trance session, to meet with the spirits in the spiritual world in the early morning to send back the offerings and spirits and to bring home any last remaining stolen household spirits and rice spirits. No drumming, gong music or dancing is performed. Late in the morning, another pig is sacrificed. The whole *monogit* traditionally ends on the next day (the fourth day) in the fourth phase or *Pa'atod Hangod*, an appeal to the *dudui* or guardian spirits in the paddy field with offerings and requests to safeguard the rice field (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Rice farm (left) and performing the sacred *pa'atod hangod* sending an offering to the guardian spirits of the rice field (right) (Source: Hanafi Hussin, 2001)

Rituals of Sama-Bajau, Sabah, Borneo

The Sama-Bajau community's beliefs and traditions have shaped physical and cultural scapes (intangible) in Semporna, Sabah. The manifestation of traditional belief is a series of rituals performed quarterly, annually or any time of the year upon request by the ancestral practices, forming the sacred physical and intangible scape. The community's older generation mainly performs the ritual manifestations due to make-belief practices that harmonise and balance living in the physical and spiritual worlds. Meanwhile, the younger generations of Sama-Bajau continue to practice their ancestors' traditions as a heritage by learning traditional dance and music as a cultural activity, performed at community events such as weddings and cultural and arts programs such as official occasions and festivals. There are also members of the Sama-Bajau community practising their traditional art as a source of livelihood, especially in tourism. These phenomena created a dynamic cultural scape of the Sama-Bajau community in and outside the Bajau area. These physical and intangible cultural scapes show the secular scapes embedded with traditional values and functions as social obligation, entertainment, and identity maintenance and enhancement.

The Sama-Bajau which include Sama Dilaut or Bajau Laut of Semporna, Sabah perform various traditional healing ritual and scheduled rituals, including *mag-kelamat*, *magpa-igal Jin*, *magpaii-bahau*, etc. to honour the ancestors for newly harvested rice, *magduwata kabusungan* healing ceremonies, *mag-busung* rituals to ward off curses from the ancestors, *mag-kelamat* exorcisms or healing rituals for very serious illness, *mag-jikil* Islamic prayer ceremonies, and others. Depending on the context, some of these may be performed sequentially or as overlapping components in a single ritual event (Pugh-Kitingan, John Baptist, & Hussin, 2012, pp. 98-1002).

Figure 6. Magpaii-bahau of Bajau Laut, Kampung Bangau-Bangau, Semporna, Sabah (left) and Magduwata of Bajau Kubang, Kampung Kabimbangan, Bumbum Island, Semporna, Sabah (right). (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2004, 2005)

Figure 7. Healing process during *Magduwata* ritual of Bajau Kubang of Semporna, Sabah. (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2005.)

As the healing and scheduled rituals colour the sacred scapes, physical and intangible, many inherited sacred cultural activities are embedded in those rituals. The paraphernalia used in those rituals signified the rituals' manifestation and marked the Bajau sacred scapes being heard and seen. *Langkapan, kalangkang* and others marked the sacred physical scapes of the Bajau throughout the year. The Bajau Kubang community of Semporna performs a healing ritual like *magkelamat*, and an annual ritual like *magpaii-bahau* with a few different terms like *magkok-taun*, *magduwata*, etc., to hold the annual new rice offering ceremonies of *magpaii-bahau* (offering of newly harvested hill rice). Either return to Kabimbangan Island or Omadal Island annually, the Bajau community should perform this ritual without fail.

This event will add more variety to the Bajau landscape with ritual paraphernalia especially *langkapan*, *sambulayang*, *tipas-tipas*, etc. Fail to hold this new rice offering ceremony over two cycles is believed to contribute to the 'imbalance of spiritual energies' in the family's household who inherits the *langkapan*. To revive the relationship balance, the healing rituals of *magduwata* need to be performed along with *magpaii-bahau*. Therefore, *magduwata* healing ritual was conducted to placate the spirits of ancestors that were assumed to have caused illness to the household members, particularly the bearer of the *langkapan*.

Another sacred cultural scape from the ritual complexes of the Bajau community is the wearing of proper traditional cloth among the healers and the spirit

medium bearers in the ritual space and sometimes in the village. The healer *(mag-kalamat)* and the spirit bearer *(magduwata),* either a man or a woman, don the ancestral costume of black or yellow trousers *(saluar ruwata)* and black shirt *(badjud ruwata),* with a head cloth *(porong)* and sarong *(tadjing)* worn across the torso from the left shoulder. A woman spirit medium usually wears a yellow head cloth and a long yellow scarf over one shoulder. Holding a yellow cloth *(saputangan)* in the right hand and a frond of the areca palm *(bagaybay* or *bagaibai)* in the left, the dancer enters a state of conscious trance at the sound of the *tagunggu'* and begins dancing in time to the music, adding more scape to the village which will be discussed in the next topic.

Ritual Music and Dance of Sama-Bajau

The Bajau community share commonalities in the way dancers are performed based the different options of musical tunes during the ritual ceremony of the offering of newly harvested rice *(magpaii-bahau* or *magduwata*) and to please the ancestral spirits (*magpa-igal*) or offerings for sea-spirits. These sacred dances and music give more colour to sacred activities and communal gatherings, adding more sacred scapes to few determined geographical spaces. Ritual healing ceremonies are linked with specific dance performances (*magpa-igal*) and the playing of specific music tunes (*titik*) through the *kulintang* music that is usually called *tagunggu'* which is consisted of a set of graduated pot gongs, *tambul* (double-headed snare drum), and *tawag* (large hanging gong) or *agung* (two big hanging gongs). The tunes (*titik*) played during the ritual healing ceremonies are intended for the spirit bearer (*jin*) - the male spirit bearer (*jin lella*) or female spirit bearer (*jin denda*) represents the *jin.* The tunes (*titik*) may also signify the places where these events take place such as *titik lellang* for the *magduwata* ritual amongst Bajau Kubang in Semporna (East Malaysia) or *titik limbayan* for the *pagkanduli* ritual of the Sama-Dilaut in Sitangkai (the Southern Philippines). Likewise, the tunes have gender specific context; these are linked to the gender of the spirit-bearers, for instance, *titik limbayan* for female spirit-bearer (*jin denda*) and *titik lellang* for the male spirit bearer (*jin lella*). In other words, musical tunes of the *tagunggu'* or *kulintang* ensemble played during the ritual healing ceremonies are identified with the gender of the spirit (Jin), which has entered into the spirit bearers' bodie; hencee a male spirit bearing body may either become a male spirit (*jin lella*) or a female spirit (*jin denda*). As an extension to the markers of gendering bodies, dance or *igal* within the context of these rituals are also identified and named after the tunes, such as *igal lellang* and *igal limbayan* respectively (Nor & Hussin, 2012a, p. 104).

Magtagunggu' ritual music or music making is part and parcel of dance (*mag igal*). Therefore, the ritual musical collections of *magtagunggu'* subsume dances (*igal*) and musical pieces (*titik*) are generally performed for non-ritual activities and at the time of specific dance styles and ritual pieces.

The musical tunes of *titik lellang, titik tabawan* and *titik limbayan* are played with corresponding dancing styles known as *igal limbayan, igal lellang* and *igal tabawan* as observed in *magpai-bahau/magduwata* ritual of Bajau Kubang in Kampung Kabimbangan, Semporna, Sabah, 2005. In the case of Bajau Laut of

Bangau-Bangau, *Titik Tabawan* is always called *Titik Lubak-Lubak*, which is used in the *magpa-igal* ritual. Only *titik limbayan* and *titik lellang*, are played for the dances of *igal lellang and igal limbayan.* These music tunes are specific for the spirit mediums (*jins)*. The two music tunes are also for the ancestors and are called *titik duwata* (Nor & Hussin, 2011). Besides, additional tunes are played to invite ancestral spirits to the living world. These tunes are *titik tagna* (introductory piece), *titik jampi* or *titik jaupi* (incantations for the ancestors), and *titik lakkas-lakkas* (is similar to *titik tabawan* from Tabawan island and *titik lubak-lubak*-literally means to play fast and fast-played amongst the Tausug). In the *magpa-igal* ritual of Sama Dilaut in Bangau-Bangau of Semporna (Sabah, Malaysia), only three tunes (*titik*) are known. These tunes are the *titik jin, titik limbayan* for *jin denda* (female spirit bearer) and *titik lellang* for *jin lella* (male spirit bearer as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Tunes (titik) in the rituals of Magduwata, Magpa-igal and Pagkanduli (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2004, 2005)

Type of tune/*titik*	***Magduwata***	***Magpa-igal***
Tunes for Female Jin (Jin Denda)	Titik Limbayan	Titik Limbayan
Tunes for Male Jin (Jin Lella)		Titik Jin
	Titik Lellang As a final piece, *titik tabawan* is played to the accompaniment of *igal tabawan*. Both are often referred to as titik duwata by the community. Other *titik: titik tabawan, titik jampi* or *titik jaupi*, *titik lakkas-lakkas* (is similar to *titik tabawan* from Tabawan island and *titik lubak-lubak*	Titik Lellang *Titik lubak-lubak* marks the end of *magpa-igal* and is played for the leader of the male spirit bearer. *Titik limbayan*, *titik lellang* and *titik tabawan* are played as final pieces.

Sacred soundscapes and musicscape among the Bajau Laut community are more vibrant as the music making is frequently played in Semporna, Sabah, in the *magpa-igal* ritual. The *magpa-igal* ritual is performed quarterly by the family members. It is common in the rituals of *magpa-igal* that *titik limbayan* is played by the *tagunggu'/kulintang* ensemble in the beginning repertoire of female spirit bearers (*jin denda*) who perform the *igal limbayan* dance. The dance is followed by *titik jin* for the dance of *igal jin lella* (the male spirit bearers); after that, the tunes of *titik tabawan* and *titik lubak-lubak* are played for female spirit bearers who dance the *igal lellang* (Hussin & Santamaria, 2008). Therefore, tunes of the *tagunggu'/kulintangan* correspond to gender specific dances of the spirit bearers. The male tunes of *titik lellang* for male dancers (and spirit bearers) are linked to the thunderous gongs and

beating of the drums to facilitate and encourage trance dancing during the ritual peak performance. In a trance state, the spirit bearers (*jin*) dance energetically and constantly stamping their feet on the floor, which echoes the energetic movements of the male spirit in the body of the male spirit bearers (John Baptist & Regis, 2012).

Ritual dance as sacred soundscape and musicscape filled with a variety of gendered music or titik, most of them accompanied by the sacred dance mainly performed by the male and female jin bearer, which is mainly generally called *igal*, *igal jin denda* (dance of female *jin*) and *igal jin lella* (male jin dance) (see Table 2). Along with the tune of *titik limbayan*, the dance of the female spirit bearer is performed, and the dance is called as *igal limbayan*. In the slow and languid dance, the body cologne is sprinkled onto the female spirit bearer to induce her to come into the male dancer's body. A burst of quick body movements marks the unification of spirit guides into the body of the male spirit bearer. Likewise, processes are also witnessed in the dance performed by the male spirit bearer (*igal jin lella*) when *titik lellang* (for Bajau Laut in Bangau-Bangau, Semporna, Sabah) or *titik jin* (for Bajau Laut/Sama Dilaut of Sitangkai) are played during *magpa-igal* ritual dance.

Figure 8. Magpa-igal Jin of Bajau Laut of Bangau-Bangau, Semporna, Sabah by Jin Lella. (Photo: Judeth John Baptist, Sabah Museum.)

A similar thing happened to the sacred dancescape of Bajau Kubang. Those individuals having the strongest feelings of falling into a trance are encouraged to perform the role of dancing spirit bearer.

Table 2

Dance (igal) repertoire in the rituals of Magduwata and Magpa-igal (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2005, 2008)

	Magduwata	***Magpa-igal***
Dance for Female Jin (Jin Denda)	*Igal Limbayan*	*Igal Limbayan*
Dance for Male Jin (Jin Lella)	*Igal Jin*	*Igal Jin*
	Igal Tabawan – a finale dance piece of the magduwata ritual accompanied by *titik tabawan*.	*Igal Lellang*
	Titik Tabawan - played for everyone to dance, which includes all the spirit bearers, i.e., Jin Lella and Jin Denda as well as participants and observers of the *magduwata* ritual outsiders at the end of the ritual event.	*Titik Tabawan* was played in the middle of the ritual, enabling Jin Denda and Jin Lella to dance together at the same time.

Like humans, *jins are* gender specific. Therefore, possession by male or female *Jin is recognised through the playing of specific musical tunes (titik*). *Titik limbayan* is linked to possessing female jin, and Titik Lellang is linked to male jin. A spirit medium who dances the *igal-jin* holds a handkerchief (*jimpau*) in his or her right hand and areca palm fronds in his or her left hand. In a Malay myth, palm fronds from the areca plant are viewed as food for roaming spirits. The same processes may be followed among the Bajau Kubang. Once the *jin* falls into a trance, a family member places a handkerchief on his or her shoulder to confirm that the dance is performed in a trance. It is during the *igal-jin* dance that ritual healing takes place.

Dance and music (tunes) in the rituals have become necessary for the participants; these are found, virtuous and profound to the *magduwata* ritual. It is the peak of festive moments in the intense rites of the given ritual, cathartic and salutary, the former to ill health, while the latter to the spirits of the ancestors. All family members participate at the end of the trance-dancing (*igal-jin*) and ritual healing. They dance the *mag-igal* for the whole day until the sun sets. At this moment, the dance is turned into social-dancing, usually performed in a linear formation around the living quarters that was considered a sacred healing space (Nor & Hussin, 2012b, pp. 143-148).

Figure 9. Magtagunggu' (music)-left, *mag-igal* (dancing) right in the *magduwata* ritual of Bajau Kubang of Semporna, Sabah (Source: Hanafi Hussin, fieldwork, 2005)

Contemporary Performances of Kadazan and Sama-Bajau

Contemporary Performance of Kadazan

Rice planting activities no longer require blessings from any spirits, and once in a while, rice agriculture has experienced loss due to external factors such as climate change or the introduction of new rice varieties. Farmers no longer believe that the spirits look after the rice fields. Modern technology such as fertilisers and pesticides, has taken over rice cultivation. Science and technology have also changed how the rice fields are worked. The society no longer needs to work together in the traditional labour exchange *(mitatabang)* to prepare the rice fields, which modern and sophisticated machines have taken over. Innovations have also changed land use, and the Penampang Plains landscape is no longer agricultural. The landscape has become filled with infrastructures such as housing, schools, churches, and mosques. Farming areas are now economic and commercial centres. Most of the coastal plains of Penampang are not agricultural land any more; the area has become a commercial centre, and its people are not rice producers but consumers.

In social contexts, *sumazau* dancing is often performed by pairs of male and female dancers, who lead the way during the dance if other participants wish to perform in the dance. *Sumazau* dance works as a customary way of life or *adat*, which maintains various traditional aspects of life, including religion and language.

Sumazau dance and music are taught to school-aged girls and boys so that they continue with the tradition and pass it on to the next generation. In Kadazan villages, classes of Kadazan traditional dance are organised for children to prepare them for the contemporary annual harvest festival (Barlocco, 2010). The Kadazan of Penampang is proud of *sumazau* music and dance, for which they are renowned throughout Sabah. In olden times, *sumazau* was primarily used in religious rituals, which also included a triumphant return from head-hunting, but was also used in celebratory contexts such as weddings and *moginakan* family feasting where ordinary

people danced *sumazau* to the *sompogungan* music.

The *sumazau* classes for children are often held in the middle of villages at the community hall (Malay: *balai raya*), where senior local teachers voluntarily teach the students. The sessions are held regularly threee months before the annual festiva, almost every afternoon. The dance learning includes movements with stretched-out arms and the 'war cry' (*pangkis*) as a form of cueing, characteristics which make an important example of the formation of ethnicity's basic socialisation (Jenkins, 2008;). It is not only the learning of the dance but the learning of Kadazanness. Children acquire the social, cultural, religious, and political Kadazan habitus, which is inscribed into children's minds and bodies. Dance and music are the primary sources of socialisation, which are important for understanding the differences between us and others and also essential for providing a sense of self-identity (Bentley, 1987; Jenkins, 2008). This socialisation process gives them "a deep sense of belonging and oneness with those sharing similar early life experiences." In this case, the children learn physically, through their bodies, to be Kadazan by moving as Kadazan, by acquiring physical skills that make them able to court a suitable partner not only properly but also unequivocally express their Kadazan identity and distinguish them from outsiders" (Barlocco, 2010, p. 417).

In the contextual interaction between ensemble *sumazau* music and dance, three gazes are observed at different levels or by different spectators. At the practical and auditory level, the gong music is seen through the gaze of the musicians (experts in playing the gongs). The dance experts' gaze as they move according to the specific sounds of the gong beats. The gaze of both human and non-human audiences who comprehend the underlying social, cultural, and religious meanings expressed through the specific dancescapes (movements, steps, styles, angles) and musicscapes (high and low pitch of the music and slow and fast beats and rhythms). These meanings have been infused into the Kadazans' minds since childhood.

This interaction has been observed in many other cultures in Sabah. Among other Kadazan Dusun communities and other Dusunic ethnic groups, there are many varieties of gong sets, styles, music patterns, and dance performances. In many of these indigenous communities, large ensembles of hanging gongs produce a total composite texture of colotomic patterns within the gong music, which informs and enlightens the movements of the dancers at the time of dancing (Pugh-Kitingan, 2003, 2012, 2018). In other communities where the *kulintangan* is played together with hanging gongs, such as coastal communities and interior communities with river access to the coast, the melodic motifs of the *kulintangan* are of primary importance, with the hanging gongs playing a supporting role (Pugh-Kitingan & John Baptist, 2005). Dancers in these places tend to listen to the music of the *kulintangan,* but still move their feet according to the rhythm of the hanging gongs. At another level, dancing among indigenous societies in Sabah can reflect social relationships, especially gender balance and the principal role of women who, in the past, were the traditional ritual experts.

Moreover, it can also illustrate the egalitarian nature of social life, especially from a solidarity point of view. Traditional gong music and dance in both ritual and social contexts can reflect the idea of a stable and balanced universe (the physical environment and spiritual world) where humans live in proper relationships with each

other and per the traditional norms established by the Creator. The movement of dance, the visual manifestation of the gong ensemble music, indicates the balance and order between the unseen spiritual world and the seen world of human beings. In many communities, this aspect of dance as a reflection of social and spiritual balance continues into new contexts, including church celebrations (Pugh-Kitingan, 2012 and 2016).

Contemporary of the Sumazau Music and Dance

The contemporary Kadazan Dusun are somewhat different from their forefathers, who used to perform rituals along with dance and music to appease spirits. Today, the Kadazan Dusun worldview has adapted and changed given the modern world and its impact on their life routines (Hussin, 2007b). They no longer believe that the spirits care for rice fields because fertilisers and pesticides can perform these tasks for farmers still cultivating lands in Penampang (Hussin, 2008). New technology has changed the agricultural lifestyle to modern patterns of life. Today, most rice fields on the Penampang Plains have become idle lands or locations for housing estates.

Moreover, Penampang Kadazan, as part of the Kadazan Dusun ethnic majority, now shares their territory with various other ethnic groups. Changes in their worldview, lifestyle and practices also mean transformation in their economic, social, and political aspects, which have pressed them to search for their genuine identity, and they attempt to spark their spirit of indigenous nationalism. The Penampang Kadazan have adapted rice farming ritual elements through festivities or newly staged ritual events, particularly during the State-Level Harvest Festival or *Kaamatan*. For the coastal Kadazan, the former rice farming ritual is now a commoditised symbol of identity, which they perform onstage during the Harvest Festival, but in practice, they no longer practise rice cultivation (Hussin, 2008).

The *Kaamatan* has undergone many changes and developments from being a family and village level feast at the end of harvesting (as it still is in most interior Kadazan Dusun areas), to being an officially recognised Harvest Festival holiday for all indigenous Dusunic, Murutic and Paitanic rice-planting societies, as during the 1950s and for all of North Borneo from the 1960s under the British colonial government (before Malaysia's birth in 1963), to becoming a distinct statement of indigenous cultural identity as it is today. From the early years, the Harvest Festival included many elements that continue today, such as special church services, traditional sports, traditional music and dancing, traditional feasting, symbolic rituals and stage enactments of rice cultivation, and parades of best costumes that, since 1960, have developed into a cultural beauty pageant (formerly Miss Harvest Festival, today *Unduk Ngadau*). Today, the *Kaamatan* is celebrated at the family, village, district, state, and national levels for all Sabahans (Hussin 2008).

A pivotal development in the Harvest Festival as an expression of indigenous identity occurred in 1982, when Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Joseph Pairin Kitingan (then Datuk), President of the Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA, then KCA) and now the *Huguan Siou* a warrior for the rights of indigenous Sabahans, organised the true state level Harvest Festival in 1982 on grazing land in his village of Kg. Karanaan, Tambunan. This was in response to the official Harvest Festival

organised by the Berjaya State Government in Keningau, a few weeks beforehand, from which all indigenous people were barred, and native cultural elements were excluded.

In ensuing years at these celebrations, ideological and political differences were kept aside to promote unity. The *Kaamatan* played a central role in reinforcing the Dusunic identities. Including coastal Kadazan traditions at the State Level festival such as segments from the Penampang *magavau* ritual, *sompogogungan* music, *sumazau* dance, and others, led them to become icons of Penampang Kadazan identity. These segments together gave prominence outside of the *Kaamatan* to indigenous expression as a representation of Sabah indigenous identity and culture for the general public. Indirectly, the post-harvest *magavau* ritual and the Penampang *sumazau* music and dance for many years served as the dominant cultural identity and the *Kaamatan* festival at the State Level to promote and strengthen Kadazan identity. All these elements helped to unite different groups in Sabah. Therefore, in this context, the rice and its celebration as a festival was considered a powerful tool to unify the groups in Sabah (Hussin, 2008).

Figure 10. *Sumazau* dance of Penampang in the contemporary setting – as a stage performance and the backup dance for a popular song with *sumazau* beat (Source: Hanafi Hussin, 2023).

Heritagizing the Sumazau as Sabahan and Malaysian Heritage

Although the *sumazau* dance was a part of the *monogit* ritual, it is now choreographed for various events, including concerts for tourists, church services, staged festivals, and other gatherings. Therefore, *sumazau* has become a living Kadazan heritage. *Sumazau* music is no longer ritualistic but has become a part of popular music and is often used to accompany songs. Generally, *sumazau* is considered the state of Sabah's dance.

It continues to be performed during harvest festivals as a thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest and at wedding celebrations, as in traditional contexts. In contemporary times, *sumazau* music and dance have become an iconic scape of Sabahans and Malaysians. The *sumazau* musicscapes and dancescapes are often combined with other traditional and modern materials (tools and tunes), sung in songs, and performed in multiple ways. Today, markets are crowded with CDs of modern pop songs using the melodies and rhythms of *sumazau* beats, in which the listener can quickly identify the use of traditional gongs and modern electronic instruments. Simultaneously, the *sumazau* traditional dancescapes now also follow modern recorded music, where they follow gong-based ensemble music played on modern musical instruments. Various popular songs using modern *sumazau* music beats are available on CDs and online videos (Hussin, 2008).

The modernisation of *sumazau* music and dancescapes has also angered the older community members, who claimed that outsiders were now performing their traditional roles and practices, which are offensive to the community members. They also complained that the outsiders performed the *sumazau* dance distortedly because they did not use the required musical instruments and dancers (Tay, Hussin, Khaw, Mohd. Anis Md. Nor, & Bulan, 2010).

In order to preserve the cultural practices and costumes of the Penampang Kadazan community, the federal and state governments have declared the *sumazau* dance and its music, and the traditional costumes as a national heritage under the law (National Heritage Act, 2005, the Sabah Cultural Heritage (Conservation) Enactment, 1997, and the Copyright Act, 1987). The list of protected objects and practices includes ritual processes and tools, such as the *bobohizan's* ritual paraphernalia, offering dishes *(pamanta)* to serve food, traditional drinks, ornate clothing, musical instruments (gong and *gandang* ensemble) and the *sumazau* dance. These objects are classified as Kadazan's tangible cultural heritage, while *sompogogunan* music and the *sumazau* dance are classified as intangible cultural heritage reflecting the Penampang Kadazan's fundamental identity (Hussin, 2008).

Contemporary Performance of Bajau

Apart from its role as a manifestation of spirit possession, *igal* also occurs without trance as a form of celebration in other traditional contexts, which also enriches the soundscape, musicscape, dancescape and the physical and cultural landscapes of the Bajau in both countries. Important social gatherings, such as weddings and circumcision ceremonies *(berkhatan)* as well as the Maulud Nabi in remembrance of the birth of Islam's prophet Mohamed and any other significant Islamic events, are celebrated with *igal* accompanied by *tagunggu'* performances. These continue throughout the night in the house or on the jetty and can feature a solo dancer or a pair. Unlike ritual dance, where the spirit medium wears plain black trousers and tops, dancers in these celebrations wear bright, colourful costumes for special occasions.

A female dancer sometimes wears the narrow-sleeved blouse *badjud alal bimbang*, which features a butterfly-shaped collar decorated with *manik-manik* or strands of small beads, with the skirt called *hoos* or *siyal* and a sash or *sablay*. As in the bridal costume, she might also wear a *jabbang* (crown) headdress and curved brass

fingercaps or *salingkuku.* A male dancer may wear the narrow-legged *tinanjak* costume, in which the black top and trousers are decorated with *batawi* or gold buttons, *antuwilas* or gold lace, and *manik* beading. As in the ritual costume, the *porong* headcloth and *kandit* belt may be of matching textiles. *Igal* performed in non-ritual social gatherings in the village, demonstrating the virtuosity of the dancer and his or her slow, skilful interaction with the fast music of the *tagunggu'* ensemble. It also reflects the distinctive styles of the family groups involved. In this context, *Igal* is always spontaneous. The dancer is naturally drawn to the sound of the *tagunggu'* as it performs various pieces in its repertoire. The interaction and skilful concentration of dancers and musicians in this non-ritual setting are as intense as in the trance state of the ritual context (Pugh-Kitingan, John Baptist, & Hussin, 2012, pp. 87-97).

Figure 11. *Igal* dancers dance to the sound of the *tagunggu'* performing various repertoires. (Source: Hanafi Hussin, n.d.)

Due to the development of the tourism industry in Semporna, the State Government of Sabah has sponsored the annual *Regatta Lepa* since 1994. Such developments have changed the cultural landscape of the Bajau of Semporna and has brought changes to the traditional styles and contexts of *igal* performance. The boatsfor Bajau Laut wedding celebration are decorated, with large *sambulayang* jellyfish-shaped sails and *panji-panji* pennants. A *tagunggu'* ensemble plays inside each boat, and a lone *igal* dancer performs on the prow wearing a colourful decorated costume and headgear. Nowadays, this festival event also includes the *Ratu Igal* or "Dance Queen," a competition for young women who perform *igal*. Each dancer wears the ceremonial wedding costume, featuring the *badjud alal bimbang* blouse

with a beaded butterfly collar, silken *hoos* or *siyal* skirt, *jabbang* headdress, and *salingkuku* fingercaps. The girls try to outdo each other in costume and gaudy decorations. Clothing is often made from modern synthetic fabrics in garish colours and decorated with plastic sequins. This competition is a very popular highlight of the *Regatta Lepa* Festival. Entrants are awarded points for their costumes and dancing abilities, and the Queen is selected for her skill in performing *igal.* The contemporary cultural and political setting enables *igal* music and dance to be sustained and maintained among the current generation, young and old. It also shows the continuity of the musicscape and dancescape of Bajau as tools for enriching and enhancing the Bajau identity (Hussin, H., & John Baptist, J. (2019)).

Music and Dance and Continuity of Bajau Identity

Current development with improvements in sound and technology, the Bajau soundscape and musicscape have also ventured into techno sound, which the traditional sound and music transmit into the modern concept of performance, modern popular Bajau music and dance. These groups are often organised under various local cultural associations or sponsors, and dancers and musicians can be drawn from several places, not just one village, and occasionally from different dialect groups. Organising such a performance group necessitates conformity to standard requirements regarding costume, dance style and musical repertoire. The preservation and enculturation of family traditions are no longer a consideration in this context. Neither is the spontaneous demonstration of dancing skills. Rather, the emphasis is on fashion, choreographed conformity, and a desire to please the assumed whims of the audience, which increasingly includes foreign tourists.

The exchange of ritual space in the home or ceremonial space on the jetty for large stages supported by elaborate electrical lighting and sound systems has encouraged electrical band instruments to accompany so-called "traditional" dance. While the *tagunggu'* ensemble is still widely played in the villages, modern bands of electric keyboards, electrified guitars and western drum sets, and their diatonic band music proliferates in the staged concerts of the *Regatta* season in Semporna town (the electric keyboard or organ is also beginning to encroach into traditional wedding celebrations). There is also a marked tendency for the dancers to be mainly young women, while the musicians are nearly always men.

Sincere efforts by the state government to develop *igal* and *tagunggu'* as cultural icons of the Semporna Bajau for the tourism industry in the area have led to a distortion of tradition and the development of new regimented styles of dance, music, and costume. Nevertheless, *igal* continues to be a distinctive characteristic of Semporna Bajau culture.

Conclusion

The dancer performed unique dancescapes on the sound/musicscape during the ritual. The actors and audiences knew the specific context (Smith, 1994) in which the two scapes (music and dance) coherently interacted in the ritual performance. These worked together to guide the audience on managing the relationship with the

unseen/spiritual world and how to live life without sins, which often caused anger among spirits. Music from the drums and other instruments combined with sounds from footsteps (dancescapes) created melody and rhythm, representing (or symbolising) the unseen world. The melody and rhythm had to be followed by the physical worlds through specific body and foot movements to strengthen ties with the spiritual world.

The *sumazau* performances are performed by priestesses and dancers on different occasions. These scapes were meant to connect and balance the spiritual and physical worlds in traditional contexts. The soundscape and dancescape constituted the desired environment in which physical actors summoned spiritual entities, who were met, invited to eat fresh food, and were amused or overpowered in cases where some of these had become harmful to the community or its members. Music from the drum and gong ensemble combined with sounds from footsteps (dancescapes) to create melody and rhythms that represented (or symbolised) the unseen world. These melodic and rhythmic structures had to be performed in the physical world through specific body and foot movements to strengthen ties with the spiritual world.

As for the Bajaus, beyond this traditional role of *igal*-dancescape and *igal*-musicscape, Sama-Bajau's ritual performance is subject to influence as Appadurai (1990) envisaged that nothing is permanent to remain the same state but changing of modern fluids which have influenced the communities, and in somehow changed their traditional dance and music scapes through the introduction of modern tools and instruments through many events and festivals. Though the genuinity of the dance and musicscape of the communities have reduced, these scapes are still cherished as the community's identity on both sides of borders and a great source of balancing the power between the two worlds.

The *sumazau* dance and music of Penampang and *igal* music and dance are accepted and recognised, not only as communal dancing and music of the Kadazan and Sama-Bajau community but also performed within the state level like the harvest festival of Kadazan and Dusunic group called *Kaamatan* and Regatta Lepa among Sama-Bajau community and other various state gatherings. The musical influence of the *sumazau* of Penampang and *igal* of Semporna have also affected the development of popular Kadazandusun and Sama-Bajau music and songs. Many popular songs composed by Kadazan Dusun and Sama-Bajau composers and musicians follow the beat and rhythm of the Sumazau Penampang and *igal* of Semporna. Expressing their identity through music and dance is flexible and can be changed spontaneously according to place, situation, and context. Although the showcasing of the community's identity may change dynamically, it is clear that the culture of the Kadazan community on the Penampang Plains and Sama-Bajau of Semporna, Sabah, has directly played an essential role in making the Kadazan Dusun and Sama-Bajau of Sabah as a community known and respected not only at the state and national levels but also internationally as well. Therefore, *sumazau* and *igal* in the context of Malaysia are crucial tools for the nation-building processes.

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Biography

Hanafi Hussin is a Professor in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. He received his PhD in Performing Arts Studies. His main research focus is Southeast Asian anthropology, particularly on ritual and performing arts. He actively researches and publishes on the rituals and identity of the Kadazandusun Penampang, the Lotud Dusun community of Tuaran Sabah, the maritime Bajau and Bajau Laut/Sama Dilaut of the east coast of Borneo, and the Southern Philippines. He is the Dean of the Faculty of Creative Arts at Universiti Malaya and a former Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Currently, he also serves as the Head of the Maritime Community, Law, Policy and Governance Unit at the Institute of Ocean and Earth Sciences (IOES), the Head of the Universiti Malaya Cultural and Heritage Research Centre (UMCHRC), and the Head of the Universiti Malaya Migration Research Centre (UMMRC) at the University of Malaya. He also serves as the Malaysian Intangible Cultural Heritage Reference Expert for the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (IGC ICH) for the 2022-2026 session. He can be reached at hanafih@um.edu.my.

Embodying What?: Displays of American Filipino In-between-ness

Desiree A. Quintero
Leeward Community College, University of Hawai'i
e-mail: desireeq@hawaii.edu

Abstract

In the United States, Filipinos are the second largest Asian group and the second largest immigrant group in the country. Given the history of anti-Filipino sentiment in the U.S. made evident in the Watsonville Riots, along with the passing of legislation such as the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 and anti-miscegenation laws, Americans of Filipino ancestry have had to contend with various levels of shame as "Filipino," derived from the legacies of colonialism and a history of racism. Simultaneously, the migration from the Philippine motherland and the subsequent language loss by later generations due to assimilation to American society has left Americans of Filipino ancestry feeling a sense of being "not Filipino enough." This has often left a sense of disconnectedness and longing for affirmation as both American and longing to be a "decolonised" Filipino. Navigating this in-between space, displays of identity and of Filipino-ness in America through performative displays and in performances as "Filipino" can be laced with pride and at times, imagination. Attempts to be "transnational" instead of "diasporic" have entered into the performances of "Filipino" that constantly seeks permission and affirmation of "culture bearers" in the Philippines, reiterating the unique positionality of Filipinos in America as being in a place that is both privileged yet marginal. However, particular performances honour the Filipino struggles as Americans and give visibility to their histories. This paper explores the work by New York's Slant Performance Group's song "Dime a Dance" and "Ullalim-Sugilanon" by The Autonomous Region and Kultura Kapwa in San Francisco and looks at how these works fulfil and embody empowered American Filipino narratives.

Keywords: American Filipino, decolonize, diaspora, Filipino-ness, in-between-ness

Introduction

I remember growing up and being asked the question: Where are you from? I would say my hometown, which would sometimes be met with puzzled looks. I knew what they were really asking: What was my ethnicity? The underlying sentiment being that although born and raised in the U.S., I am still looked at as a foreigner. Seeing Filipinos as perpetual foreigners is a type of micro-aggression that people still encounter with the unsaid intent behind such statements being, "Go back to where you came from." Other types of microaggressions encountered by Asian Americans in the U.S. include the sentiment that "all Asians look alike," dismissing differences

between Asian groupings, the perception that Asians cannot speak English and the exoticization of Filipino women coupled with the historical emasculation of Filipino men, all of which have contributed to the stigma of being Filipino in America. On the other hand, I also recall visiting the Philippines and being approached by people speaking in Tagalog. After responding in English, I would get a measured look from head to toe, "oh… Fil-Am." Loss of the mother tongue is common among second, third and later, generations of Filipinos in America as many elders see Philippine languages as a barrier to full assimilation as "American." It is also reflective of American colonial rule where English became a part of the education and political systems. In America, parents consciously stop speaking their native Philippine language to their children so that their children can grow up as American (translate "white American") as they can be. Growing up as not quite belonging as American and looked at as not fully "Filipino" by those in the motherland demonstrates the unique position that those of Filipino descent have in America.

Often Americans of Filipino ancestry are in a state of in-between-ness: not quite Filipino, as Filipinos in the Philippines will look at American of Filipino ancestry as Americanized due to the lack of Philippine language fluency and knowledge of traditions; and not quite American, as Filipinos in America historically and still face racism and discrimination as a minority group in the U.S. The seeming in-between-ness of Filipinos in America, where performative displays that assert their identities come out of a history of racism, distance from their motherland, and attempts at re-connecting with Filipino-ness is consciously constructed and sometimes imagined. This essay explores how displays of identity and performances as "Filipino" serve as a way for Filipino Americans to negotiate their in-between-ness, whether through attempts to "decolonise" that simultaneously imagines and/or fulfilling and embodying empowered American Filipino narratives. Out of this space of in-between-ness, markers that affirm identities become powerful tools of marking oneself as "Filipino" (Trimillos, 2020). Displays that are "Filipino" and performances of music and dance are tools for Filipino Americans to re-site (Min-ha, 2011) their "Filipino-ness" as a performative act. On the other hand, telling American Filipino stories gives a different kind of visibility that honours their experience, including their struggles, of being Filipino in America.

Migration of Filipinos to the U.S.: Historical Context

After 333 years of Spanish colonial rule, American colonisation of the Philippine archipelago sparked different waves of migration of Filipinos to the U.S. since Filipinos were viewed as colonial subjects. In 1898, five years after the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and its monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani, in 1893 by American businessmen and U.S. marines, the U.S. annexed Hawai'i, the same year the U.S. was granted possession of the Philippines by the Spanish through the Treaty of Paris. Hawai'i, valued for its strategic location in the Pacific for both economic and military reasons, eventually became economically dependent on the U.S. after the establishment of sugar and pineapple plantations on the islands by white American businessmen. In 1906, the first 15 migrant labourers called *sakadas* travelled to the

U.S. territory of Hawai‘i to work the sugar plantations. For the next forty years until 1946, after WWII and when the U.S. granted independence to the Philippines, over 100,000 *sakadas* migrated to the U.S. to work the Hawai‘i plantations. Therefore, the economic control of the U.S. over the Hawaiian Islands, which was not yet a state, was directly related to the migration of Filipinos, beginning the history of Filipino communities in Hawai‘i. With the ease of migration of Filipinos to the U.S. as colonial subjects, migrant labourers started journeying to Alaska, Seattle, and California for opportunities, thus establishing communities on the west coast of the U.S.

In order to understand the struggles of many Filipino Americans and their supporters to make definitive the place of Filipinos in history and in American society, we have to understand the environment in which many Filipinos came to America. The migration of Filipino labourers to the U.S. helped establish Filipino communities. American colonial interests viewed the Philippines as strategic in its proximity to the Asian markets, valued for its mineral rich lands and as a source of cheap labour. However, America, coming out of a history of ousting its colonial rulers, had to justify its imperialism. This included various propaganda campaigns and calls for America to take up the "white man's burden" (1899) from Kipling's famous poem of civilising their "little brown brothers" through the suppression of Philippine armed resistance and the eventual colonisation of their lands.

American Imperialism and the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair

The rhetoric behind American imperialism, which believed in the racial superiority of white Americans over their "little brown brothers," was driven by a moral obligation to bring civilization to their colonised lands. To justify this, scientific racism looked at phenotype as evidence of the white racial superiority over people of colour. This led to a sort of categorisation of societies in the Philippines by anthropologists, from the most primitive to the most civilised. This was best illustrated in the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, where over 1,000 Filipinos of different ethnolinguistic groups from various parts of the archipelago were brought to live on the Philippine reservation to be part of live exhibitions. The Philippine Reservation was part of the American propaganda movement to justify their imperialism to colonise the Philippine archipelago in order to "save" and civilise Filipinos. The fair itself was a way for America to present itself internationally as a growing nation with power. The anthropological exhibits, also referred to human zoos, reflected the science of the time, the Darwin theory of evolution, where groups of people were placed within an evolutionary hierarchy. According to this racist hierarchy, Filipino ethnolinguistic groups were placed within an evolutionary scale: the most "primitive" of the Filipino groups displayed were the Igorots, highland people from the Cordillera Mountains in Northern Luzon; then the "Moros" or Muslim Filipinos from Western Mindanao; and then the most civilised were the Christianized Visayans.

The Filipino Reservation on the grounds of the St. Louis World's Fair and specifically the Igorot Village, was the most popular exhibit in the fair (The Asian American Education Project, n.d.). It was also the most exploitative for those who

lived in the village. The residents of the village were forced to butcher a dog and perform their gong music and dance every day, even though these events were traditionally performed primarily for special or ritual occasions back in their villages in the Philippine highlands. Dog eating and performances of their music and dance were meant to show the savagery of the Igorots as Filipinos to the Americans. Igorots were forced to butcher up to 20 dogs per week, which left a lasting stereotype of the Filipino dog eater that still exists to this day. The performativity of the "Filipino savage" advanced American imperialist agendas, shaped American perceptions of Filipinos while "setting the (contextual) stage" for Filipino migrants to arrive in the country two years later.

The exhibition of Igorots at the St. Louis World's Fair and their obvious exploitation at the fair by organisers was an extremely dehumanising process that attempted to support the idea of white superiority over all races. Pensionados, Filipino scholars who were studying at American universities at the time, opposed the depiction of all Filipinos as uncivilised, where "aboriginal savages" were a class in itself and Christianised Filipinos were "the real Filipinos, who politically and socially represent the Philippines Islands" (R. Acosta, quoted in The Pensionados and the Image of the Filipino 'Primitive,' n.d.). Some of the languaging equated Igorots and their culture as the "lowest grade of Filipino culture" by Filipinos themselves. This messaging is demonstrative of colonial mentality, mimicking and reiterating the racial hierarchy emphasised by Americans. This also reveals an amount of shame around cultural practices, such as wearing a loincloth that Igorots traditionally wear and playing gongs and dancing.

Homi Bhabha's (1984) notion of mimicry explains how the members of a colonised society imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonisers. If we take this idea of the mimicry of colonised peoples of their colonial oppressors, the categorisations of "Filipinos" that were prevalent in American propaganda are also seen in Filipino cultural performances even today. The sort of hierarchy of placing Filipinos on an evolutionary timeline is echoed in the chronology in an evening of Philippine folk dance packaged as "Suites," where indigenous music and dance (which also includes Igorot) would be performed first (Igorot or Mountain Suite), followed by traditions from Muslim groups in the southern Philippines (Muslim Suite), followed by Spanish-influenced dances (Maria Clara Suite) and ending with dances from the country-side (Rural Suite). These formulaic "Suites" were popularised by Bayanihan National Folk Dance Company and are still perpetuated in performances in the diaspora. However, Bhaba's mimicry also reveals that the colonised are not fully their colonisers, leaving space to subvert and resist hegemonic cultural, social and political systems. It is this space where many Americans of Filipino ancestry have started to question and actively dismantle Filipino place and representation in American society, at times leading towards atavistic longing for "pre-colonial" traditions.

Filipino Migration: Anti-Filipino and Anti-Miscegenation

With the first *sakadas*—Filipino migrant labourers who landed in Hawaii in 1906 to work the plantations—subsequent migrations of Filipino labourers continued, thus making Hawaii a source of labour for California's agri-business. In the 1920s, there was an unprecedented amount of Filipino migration to the US, increasing 900%, the majority of which lived in California. From 1923 to 1929, 4,000 Filipino labourers entered the U.S. each year, with the majority migrating to Stockton and Los Angeles as fruit and lettuce pickers. By 1930 there were about 45,000 Filipinos in the U.S., the majority of whom were farm labourers, with only 1 in 14 being female (Arguelles, 2017). Filipinos represented 42% of all non-European labour working on California farms being paid low wages. The "third wave" of Asian migration or "Filipino invasion" instilled fear that Filipinos would create serious social and economic problems and take jobs from white Americans. This is also the time of the Great Depression in the US, starting in 1929. As a result, numerous anti-Filipino sentiments, violence, and riots occurred from 1929 to1930, fuelled by racial stereotyping of Filipinos as prone to crime, instead of looking at the reality of these Filipinos who lived in depressed economic situations, had low social status, and faced general inequality. As stated by Judge D.W. Rohrback of Monterey of the Filipino, "The worst part of his being here is his mixing with young white girls from thirteen to seventeen. He gives them silk underwear and makes them pregnant and crowds whites out of jobs in the bargain" (White Mobs Attack Filipino Farmworkers in Watsonville, California, n.d.). This reflects the perception that Filipino men were sexually promiscuous and deviants.

Filipinos in California were the third group of Asians to migrate, after the Chinese and Japanese. Filipinos tended to be young men, with minimal education, and filled the low-paying manual labour jobs. In 1934, the Tydings McDuffie Act was passed, which changed the status of Filipinos from nationals as colonial subjects to "aliens," which meant there was a quota of 50 Filipino immigrants per year. The Tydings McDuffie Act that specifically targeted Filipinos was the first anti-Filipino legislation to pass in the U.S. Prior to 1946, Filipinos who had already migrated to the U.S. were not allowed to be naturalised as US citizens and therefore unable to own land. When the Philippines became an independent nation in 1946, the Luce-Celler Bill was passed, which allowed for the naturalisation of Filipinos who immigrated to the US prior to March 1934.

These migrant labourers, known as *manongs* (Ilocano for "older brother"), is a term of endearment and respect for an older male. After a long day of working in the fields, mostly in California, Filipino migrant workers would retire to taxi dance halls, where mostly white women worked as dance partners for hire. Filipinos and other immigrant workers dressed up and bought their tickets for 10 cents each, and like a taxi ride, a manong could dance with a girl of his choosing. At this time anti-miscegenation laws were in place that prevented marriage between the "races." Since many of these Filipino labourers were young, unmarried, and unable to bring family from the Philippines over, they sought some form of companionship, even if it was temporary and paid for. These manongs laboured in the fields for up to ten hours a day at only a few cents an hour. However, they were transformed into handsome well-

dressed young men, sporting sharp suits, and were known for their incredible dancing. The manongs at taxi dance halls contradicted the image of the poor, dirty labourer, which was resented by their white blue-collar counterparts. This atmosphere laid the foundation for anti-Filipino violence that spread along the coast of California.

The first anti-Filipino incident occurred in 1926 between Filipino and white farm labourers in Stockton. Social tensions with white labourers, press and media that were laden with racial stereotypes, as well as various politicians putting forward anti-Filipino legislation to curb migration, created anti-Filipino sentiments that escalated in the riots starting in 1929, first in Exeter in San Joaquin Valley. Anti-Filipino sentiment was spreading, and in December 1929 Judge Rohrback proposed a resolution that stated that Filipinos were a health and social menace in California to curb the migration of Filipino farm labourers. Rohrback further made statements against Filipino farm labour and the social relationships between the races, condemning taxi dance halls (Rose, 2021). On January 11, 1930, a new taxi dance hall catering to Filipinos opened in Palm Beach, not far from Watsonville. The anti-Filipino sentiment on the political and social levels culminated in the Watsonville riots of 1930. On January 19, 1930, a mob of 500 local blue-collared white men marched to the Palm Beach dance hall, searching for, and attacking Filipino farm workers. On January 22, a young Filipino named Fermin Tobera, was killed when a mob shot into the dwellings of Filipino farmworkers' homes. The violence spread to other areas of California, creating more havoc and fear among Filipinos. To add to the anti-Filipino sentiment, in 1933 California passed a law that prohibited the marriage between Filipinos and white women (White mobs attack Filipino farmworkers in Watsonville, California, n.d.).

This history of representation of Filipinos from the 1904 World's Fair to the anti-Filipino violence and laws that are directly linked to U.S. colonial rule over the Philippines have left lasting legacies on Filipinos in America and the need by many to counter images of Filipinos prevalent in U.S. history. The representation of "Filipino" reveals how Filipino/Filipino American identity can be rooted in historical events and how Americans of Filipino ancestry can create work to dismantle these negative stereotypes that were also perpetuated by other Filipinos themselves. It is also evident that the historical events that shaped the experience of Filipinos in the U.S. veered in quite a different trajectory than that of Filipinos in the motherland, positing differing cultural experiences and drives towards empowerment as "Filipino" in the U.S. Bayan as cultural imaginary (Peterson, 2016) indicative in performances that display "Filipino-ness" as a reiteration of national belonging to the Philippines as "Filipino" becoming differently meaninged in the diaspora, particularly in the U.S. where experiences are both American and as Filipino.

Decoloniality as Resistance to Assimilation

The discrimination the Filipino diaspora faced and still experience in America has placed them in a unique position in between a dominant American culture (which itself is not a monolith, dependent on place, e.g., Hawai'i, West Coast, East Coast, Mid-West, etc.) and Filipino cultures depending upon the family and community that

surrounds them. Growing up in a predominantly Filipino community in California is different from growing up in Hawaii, or even perhaps the Southern United States. The shame of one's Filipino-ness is intimately connected to colonial mentality, one of colonialism's legacies: where one has internalised their inferiority while upholding western, often American culture, as superior, thus rejecting anything Filipino. This is exemplified in the deprecating term "coconut" referring to people as brown on the outside, and white on the inside. Colonial mentality manifests in different ways, from the use of skin whitening products where dark skin is undesirable and *pangit* (or ugly), to intra-ethnic or intra-group discrimination such as the bullying instigated by Filipino Americans of Filipino immigrants who are perceived to be not fully assimilated into American society being called FOBs (fresh off the boat) and deriding their accents. Colonial mentality thus operates within Filipino communities and becomes a tool of assimilation, further distancing Filipino Americans from their ethnic identity, and simultaneously producing low self-esteem and shame. Studies on internalized oppression and its connections to mental health (David, 2008; Decena, 2014; Collado, 2022) have made findings that Filipino Americans, and specifically females, or Filipinas, have the highest rates of suicide ideation than any other minority group in America, directly connecting colonial mentality with shame and perhaps the distancing from what marks one as Filipino such as cultural practices and language.

The shame of Filipino culture and attempts by Filipinos to assimilate to the dominant American culture has resulted in native language loss of 1.5 generation (1.5G) Filipinos and later generations. It is common for immigrant parents to consciously not speak to their children in their native language as it is seen as a barrier to their American education; children also do not want to speak a Philippine mother tongue because it is seen as foreign and not "American" (Espiritu & Wolf, 2001; Guevarra, 2016; Osalbo, 2011).

However, efforts by Americans of Filipino ancestry to re-establish a connection with a Filipino heritage through cultural traditions perceived as "Filipino" has led to looking towards a re-centering of their Filipino-ness, marking oneself as Filipino (Trimillos, 2022). The drive towards the ideas of decolonisation, "the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches," is a way for Filipino Americans to define and shape what comprises "Filipino"—therefore what they claim ownership over as "Filipino" despite one's Filipino ancestry that might be non-indigenous. "Decolonisation involves valuing and revitalising Indigenous knowledge and approaches and weeding out settler biases or assumptions that have impacted Indigenous ways of being" (Decolonisation and Indigenization, n.d.). For Filipinos in America, this is manifested in the search for language, traditions, the "ancestral" and "culture bearers" that can fill that void of believed cultural and personal loss. The imagined "pre-colonial" "indigeneity" becomes a source of empowerment and retrieval from centuries of perceived loss through colonisation and subsequent shame coming from colonial mentality. For Filipino Americans, decoloniality is resistance to assimilation and a history of discrimination through an assertion of "Filipino" in America.

Re-siting of Filipino-ness Through Performance

> I suggest the "kulintang movement" is part of an ongoing process of decolonisation both in the Philippines and in the diaspora. (Trimillos, 2020, p. xvi)

> What is imagined by Filipino Americans is an "ancient" and pre-colonial heritage in crafting a vision of something distinct from and in opposition to cultural legacies of colonisation and not fixed to any religiosity. This vision provides balm to a felt marginalisation and rootlessness in Euro-American society, and empowers individuals to move forward with a sense of one's own history and connectivity to an ancestral homeland. (Quintero, 2011, p. 114)

Finding connections with Filipino performing arts traditions is a way to claim "Filipino" identity within American culture. Using indigenous performance traditions such as *kulintang* music and dance, Filipino Americans through performances of Filipino cultural traditions, particularly dance and music, engage in the process of "re-siting" Filipino-ness (Minh-ha, 2011). They are actively reconstructing, reassessing, and reconsidering what it means to be Filipino in America by redrawing the metaphoric boundaries of Filipino-ness, from the motherland to America. Given the sense of loss of culture, language in America, seeking out displays of "pre-colonial" "Filipino," the quest for authenticity shifts the gaze towards indigenous Philippine groups. The draw towards kulintang performing arts, found in western Mindanao amongst Islamized ethnolinguistic groups, is multi-layered: it comes from ethnolinguistic groups that have historically resisted Spanish colonisation; they are non-Hispanized cultural traditions; and it is perceived to be "ancient" and "pre-colonial" (Quintero, 2011). The act of performing kulintang music and dance from the southern Philippines that comes from ethnolinguistic groups such as the Maguindanao, Maranao and Sama, among Filipino Americans serves as a tangible expression of this re-siting the boundaries of Filipino identity. This form of "re-siting," the act as performative "Filipino" through performances, renegotiates what has become popular and normative displays through Maria Clara dances and the *tinikling* bamboo dance, and connection to traditional practices perceived to be older than Spanish contact in the archipelago. The popularity of kulintang music and dance are empowering as they satisfy atavistic agendas that yearn for something "authentically ancient Filipino."

The depictions of Islamized cultures of the Philippines depend on the group, an artist's purposes, and level of commitment to research and accuracy. Going back to the motherland to seek out knowledge and traditions from indigenous groups is now a common phenomenon practised among Filipino Americans. A project called "Tribal Tour" through the group KulArts and so-called cultural "immersions" by arts groups such as Parangal, both based in California, seek to connect Filipino Americans with "culture bearers" of particular indigenous peoples in the Philippines. A shift occurs perhaps from being "diasporic," leaving the motherland, to longing to be transnational, where going back and forth to the Philippines means being able to sustain a connection to the motherland and people. This puts Filipino Americans in a unique place where transnationalism becomes a privileged place with monetary support needed and the possession of a blue U.S. passport. Simultaneously, the need

to constantly return to the Philippines driven by the sense of loss and need comes from a place of marginality within the U.S.

One of the ways in which this in-between-ness is manifested is in the use and performance in native textiles. As Filipino Americans don "cultural" indigenous attire, they do not replicate that indigeneity that endows the textile donned and created by indigenous hands. Instead, meanings of "indigeneity" for Filipino Americans are utilised in the in-between space of privilege and marginality, re-purposing the textile to be symbolic of their supposed cultural pre-coloniality. Filipino Americans re-site traditional textiles, transporting them from their Filipino origins and placing them into new contexts within American performances. This shift towards reconnecting with the Philippines reflects a reflexive response in the ongoing process of identity formation and affirmation as Filipino within the backdrop of American society. Some Filipino Americans move beyond symbolic representations, shifting away from a generalised nationalised costume and instead focus on a more nuanced understanding of indigenous Philippine groups through their distinctive kulintang and textile traditions. While the influence of Bayanihan National Folk Dance Company remains palpable and is frequently referenced by Filipino American groups, there is a noticeable shift as Filipino Americans engage in dialogues with specific indigenous ethnolinguistic groups, challenge and redefine the boundaries of Philippine music and dance as it is practised in America. The pursuit of "inspired" dances from ethnolinguistic groups signals an attempt to grasp, however superficial or deep, the ethos of indigenous ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines. For Filipino Americans, the act of costuming as "indigenous" and playing kulintang music and dance becomes a means to re-site Filipino-ness, challenging and expanding the boundaries of what constitutes Filipino identity. This process of re-siting draws new borders of meaning and engaging in a continuous dialogue with an imagined "pre-colonial ancestor," American audiences, Filipinos in America, and those within the Philippine nation-state.

Re-siting Filipinos in America: American Filipino Narratives and Belonging

The combinative identity of "Filipino American" as one's identification is first with one's "motherland" and the secondary identity of American culture. This suggests that one should be familiar with and more rooted to "Filipino." However, fore fronting the rootedness Filipinos have in American history, through labour movements (Sugar Strikes in Hawai'i, the Delano Grape Strike) and the economy (labour for sugar and pineapple plantations, canneries in Alaska, grape and lettuce pickers on farms in the west coast), Filipino American history is American history. The moniker *American Filipino* understands that Filipinos have been enculturated in American society, born and raised, and that their "American-ness" also rightfully places them as part of the tapestry of American history and contemporary life. It flips the framework of the perpetual foreigner and questions perhaps what one's culture is and where it is: in America one is Filipino, in the Philippines one is American. One embodies both as an American Filipino.

Fore fronting American Filipino narratives in performance acts as a way to

tether them to place, land, and a nation called America creating a different sense of belonging rooted in American history and honouring American Filipino experiences. Performances that are specifically American Filipino assert a unique, yet rooted, American identity that perhaps does not reference the rhetoric of assimilation as it claims the in-between space as a place of power and possible empowerment. Referencing both American and Filipino culture in performances gives visibility to their history and belonging in America. Two examples are New York's Slant Performance Group's song "Dime a Dance" and San Francisco's The Autonomous Region and Kultura Kapwa's "Ullalim-Sugilanon." These two performances use the American musical traditions of blues and jazz in order to tell American Filipino stories.

The Slant Performance Group (also known as Slant) is a three-man Asian American group founded by Rick Ebihara, Wayland Quintero and Perry Yung in New York City. Slant is known for their theatrical satire tackling issues around racial and sexual stereotypes, often using humour in their repertoire. The song "Dime a Dance" combines harmonica, guitar, and vocals to tell the story of Timoteo, a Filipino farm worker in Watsonville, California. A labourer earning just a dollar a day working in the fields, Timoteo spends his money at the taxi dance hall paying a dime a dance (10 cents a dance) to be with his "MaryAnn" (a white woman). The song talks about Timoteo, dance halls, and references Watsonville (where the song is set), alluding to the riots in 1930 where mobs of white men targeted Filipino farm labourers, while also referencing the anti-miscegenation laws that made it illegal for Filipino men to marry white women in California.

Dime a dance
With his best dress pants
His dark skin against her white
Dime a dance
A strange romance
But it's all so strong
While they play their song
Why does something so wrong
Feel so right

I arrived in California in 1923
Just like all the others looking for opportunity
Law said I had to leave my sweetheart in Manila
Well the only chance for romance here is dance hall vanilla

Dime a dance
Dime a dance
She said she'd marry you if she had a chance
But here in Watsonville that ain't gonna be
You and her ain't making no babies

-Slant Performance Group, "Dime a Dance"

The song is set within a larger theatrical piece with scene vignettes that centre around Asian American issues. Singing about the exploitation of Filipino workers (earning one dollar a day), the racism they encountered and laws that targeted them, Slant's "Dime a Dance" gives visibility to what many migrant labourers encountered in the first half of the 1900s in the United States. The lyrics, "The only chance for romance here is dance hall vanilla" that continues on to "She said she'd marry you if she had the chance… You and her ain't making no babies," sadly and humorously reveals what the reality was for many of the manongs. Many of them lived into their later years single and unmarried and have been called "the lost generation" because these men did not have families and children of their own. "Dime a dance" also contextualises this American Filipino experience within a larger Asian American narrative.

The Autonomous Region is a jazz ensemble in San Francisco that performs jazz standards and new compositions with kulintang instruments, while Kultura Kapwa is a non-jazz ensemble that presents music, dances and attire from the southern Philippines. Collaboratively working together, they presented "Ulliam-Sugilanon" an American epic poem which premiered in 2021. The performance piece combined rhythms and instrumentation from the southern Philippines, the northern Philippine Cordillera region and jazz with storytelling, narrating one's family's "American Filipino experience in San Francisco from 1904 through 1942. Crafted according to the poetic structure of the Philippine Kalinga Epic Poem "di Ullalim," the poem is accompanied by original jazz compositions inspired by Kalinga rhythmic motifs and melodies" ("Ulliam-Sugilanon," 2021). The piece incorporates jazz, *gangsa* (handheld flat gongs), kulintang and other traditional instruments, keeping the "essence" of traditional music while simultaneously making it "American Filipino" through storytelling using verse, song, and dance. Caroline Cabading, the lead vocalist, sings a combination of Kalinga and English, weaving in and out of jazz and Kalinga rhythms, a sort of manifestation of the American Filipino experience of referencing here—the history of American Filipinos in the U.S.—and there—the musical traditions from the Philippines. Through this music is manifested American Filipino in-between-ness. "Ulliam-Sugilanon" is an American, a Filipino and an immigrant story that demonstrates a culmination of identities that asserts itself as belonging within history as an American story. Although the piece focuses on the journey of one family, it situates their story within what would become San Francisco's first Filipino community: "Bamboo community, steady and strong, all together is how we belong" (Ulliam-Sugilanon, 2021).

Where many Filipino Americans continue to search and yearn for the "pre-colonial ancestor" by using indigenous Philippine traditions in and from the motherland as a way of decolonising and seeking to empower their marginality, works that incorporate various Filipino and American histories and traditions create space in America as Filipino and as American. The Slant Performance Group's song "Dime a Dance" and "Ullalim-Sugilanon" by The Autonomous Region and Kultura Kapwa in San Francisco fulfil and embody American Filipino narratives by giving visibility to their histories and struggles in the U.S. These works speak of "place" and belongingness as both American and Filipino, empowering the in-between-ness of American Filipinos.

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Biography

Desiree A. Quintero is currently a lecturer in Filipino Studies at Leeward Community College, University of Hawai‘i on O‘ahu. She works with student populations and communities that seek representation and visibility in their education. Her research focus has been on Sulu dance practices, their transmission and pedagogy in Sabah and southern Philippines, extending to other areas including Manila and the U.S. She earned her PhD in Ethnochoreology at the University of Malaya and subsequently conducted research as an Asian Cultural Council fellow.

Tradition and Transformation: Harmonizing Heritage and Modernity for the Sustainability of the Malaysian Traditional Performing Arts through the Popular Culture

Zaharul Lailiddin Saidon
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
e-mail: zaharul@fmsp.upsi.edu.my

Abstract

In a society marked by rapid technological advancement and globalisation, the preservation and innovation of traditional performing arts present a distinctive challenge that requires a delicate balance between protecting heritage and embracing modernity. This paper explores the complex interplay between tradition and transformation within the context of Malaysia's traditional performing arts, focusing on the challenges posed by the age gap, cultural imperialism, and the evolving landscape of entertainment and popular culture. The pivotal role of Malaysia as a case study is examined, considering its unique multicultural heritage. The paper contends that popular culture can serve as a transformative force rather than a threat to traditional arts. It introduces the late Pak Ngah as a case study, emphasizing his innovative approach in fusing traditional and modern elements to create "Traditional Pop." Pak Ngah's success stories and initiatives illustrate the potential of popular culture in preserving and promoting traditional arts. Pak Ngah's model of Traditional Pop Innovation & Preservation is presented, encompassing elements of Malay-ness, Malaysian-ness, hybridity, and audience engagement. The model outlined the importance of artists possessing "twenty-first century skills." In conclusion, the insights derived from Pak Ngah's pioneering work offer a framework for the preservation and revitalization of traditional performing arts in Malaysia and beyond. By embracing the dynamism of popular culture and cultivating a harmonious coexistence between heritage and modernity, traditional performing arts can not only survive but thrive in the face of contemporary challenges.

Keywords: cultural preservation, Malaysia's cultural heritage, tradition and modernity, traditional performing arts, traditional pop

Introduction

In an age of rapid globalisation and technological advances, the practice of traditional performing arts is an issue of cultural preservation as well as adaptability. The performing arts, being a dynamic and ever-changing medium of artistic expression, have frequently experienced a clash between traditionalism and modernism. Within this particular framework, heritage is understood to pertain to the safeguarding and conservation of performing arts traditions (UNESCO, 2003). Conversely, modernity is frequently perceived as a negative influence that poses a danger to these traditional

practices (Thani, 2021). A divergence of viewpoints appeared to exist between the traditionalists and transformists (Galland & Lemel, 2008). According to traditionalists, cultural heritage must be kept in its most authentic form and within its original context; any changes from this are regarded as a corruption of the tradition (Lim & Mohd Fadzil Abdul Rahman, 2011; Yin et al., 2012). On the contrary, transformists maintain that changes are unavoidable and consider the innovation and freedom of expression in traditional performing arts to be indispensable for accommodating the preferences and way of life of modern society (Olalere, 2019).

The transition from the traditional village community setting, where the performing arts were normally performed as a popular culture in the past, to the concert halls and now to internet video streaming live-to-digital theatre or gadgets at the comfort of one's bedroom is laden with issues that need to be examined (Ruastiti et al., 2021). Sustaining our distinct cultural identities and the ways in which we have traditionally expressed ourselves becomes progressively more challenging as our way of life undergoes transformation especially during and after the Pandemic Covid 19. As a consequence of the pandemic, a shift towards digital audio-visual experiences has occurred (Webb & Layton, 2022). The accessibility of online videos through social media like YouTube and Instagram has enabled the transmission of performances and content from many parts of the world to new audiences. In the future, the boundaries between the real world and virtual worlds continue to blur, and through advancement in artificial intelligence, we are now engaging with technology like virtual reality (VR) and Immersive Reality, creating a different new experience for enjoying the performing arts (Kaushik, 2020). How do we address the concern of many academics and artists that there is a chance that our traditional performing arts will become something that is only shelved in the library or dusty archives? (Kamarulzaman Mohamed Karim, 2016; Lim & Mohd Fadzil Abdul Rahman, 2011)

Malaysia, a country known for its unique heritage, is a living example of the interaction between tradition and transformation. Similar to many other nations grappling with the effects of globalisation, Malaysia provides an intriguing lens through which to examine this intersection of heritage and modernity in the performing arts. Naohiko Umewaka, a master of the Japan's Noh theatre who once travelled to Malaysia to conduct master classes at universities in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Tanjung Malim, viewed Malaysia as one of the most complex countries he has ever visited (Ferrarese, 2017). "There's spirituality, religion, economic and historical heritage, and so much more, all intertwined. It's historical and modern at the same time." (Ferrarese, 2017). Malaysia's traditional performing arts, deeply rooted in the country's multi-ethnic and lengthy history of interactions with external influences, are a monument to the rich and diverse cultural heritage that makes up this beautiful nation. These cultural traditions, from the melodious Asli songs to the intricate footwork of Mak Yong dance to the intriguing shadow puppetry of Wayang Kulit, provide a glimpse into Malaysia spirit and soul. Besides being a source of cultural pride, they provide a profound connection to the past, serving as a bridge to the ancestors and the stories and values they wanted to share (Hardwick & Fara Dayana Mohd Jufry, 2022). As Charoenrat and Charassri (2017) puts it, they provide insight into the rituals, myths, and everyday life of the people who shaped this nation.

Nonetheless, Malaysia is not alone in its quest to strike a balance between tradition and innovation in the performing arts. Many countries around the world are coping with comparable issues. How can our performing art forms not just survive but thrive, retaining their essence, even as they adapt to changing times in the face of adversity?

The Challenges Faced by Malaysian Traditional Performing Arts

The age gap is one of the most critical concerns. The attraction of more modern forms and media of entertainment younger Malaysians can put traditional performing arts at danger of going out of style. Many parties, including academics and art activists, have been concerned about this issue for more than 40 years. Mohamed Ghouse Nasaruddin (1979), Ang and Yeoh (2002), Lim and Mohd Fadhil Abdul Rahman (2011), Syed Mahadzir Syed Ibrahim (2014), Wan Jamarul Imran and Wan Abdullah Thani (2021) to name a few, claimed that Malaysians view local performance arts as outmoded because they are cut off from their cultural history and ignorant of the significance of traditional performing arts. According to these academics, the traditional performing arts are seriously threatened by this shift in preferences, which is made worse by the impact of western pop culture.

Numerous academics have engaged in thorough discourse on this matter, employing the frameworks of cultural imperialism theory and hegemony theory. A study conducted by Ang and Yeoh (2002) found that young Malaysians not only love western popular music but also dislike and are ignorant of traditional music from Malaysia. Nettl (1995) claims that "the most significant phenomenon in the global history of music has been the intensive imposition of western music and musical thought upon the rest of the world." In the case of Malaysia, the profound influence of Malaysia's performing arts heritage can be attributed to the protracted British colonial rule that characterised the nation (Zaharul Lailiddin Saidon & Shahanum Mohd Shah, 2013).

Nonetheless, in the past two decades, a greater number of young Malaysians have become increasingly captivated by the Korean Popular Culture (Nur Ayuni Mohd Jenol & Nur Hafeeza Ahmad Pazil, 2022). Not only in Malaysia, with K-pop artists like BTS, Blackpink, Twice and Seventeen drawing in millions of fans worldwide. The exponential increase in the worldwide appeal of Korean popular culture products, sometimes referred to as the "Hallyu wave," is undeniably a captivating phenomenon on a global scale (Ganghariya & Kanozia, 2020). According to Syed Mahadzir Syed Ibrahim (2014), the Malaysian traditional performing arts are adversely affected by the prevailing trend in contemporary popular culture, which is primarily because of the constraints imposed by their regional context and the extremely limited medium through which they can be performed.

Concerned about the potential impact of contemporary popular culture on the future of the traditional performing arts as the intangible cultural heritage, numerous parties have up until the present time, reacted and undertaken a variety of initiatives and projects. These actions and initiatives were manifested in a variety of ways and forms. Certain initiatives seem to be germinating some sign of success, but others are comparatively less fruitful and have, in fact, impeded efforts to sustain the popularity

and appreciation for local performing arts traditions. Lim and Mohd Fadhil Abdul Rahman (2011) praised the organisation of concerts, workshops, appreciation classes, and seminars, but question the extent to which these initiatives contribute to enhance the younger generation's appreciation towards the indigenous performing arts. For example, the traditional Malay performances of Mak Yong, Wayang Kulit and Main Puteri were prohibited in the PAS-dominated state of Kelantan in 1995, allegedly due to the implementation of the National Culture Policy (NCP) in 1971.

NCP is guided by three fundamental principles: (a) The National Culture of Malaysia must be based on the cultures of the people indigenous (Malay) to the region; (b) Elements from other cultures which are suitable and reasonable may be incorporated into the National Culture; and (c) Islam will be an important element in the National Culture. Zawawi Ibrahim (2016) argues that the NCP has given rise to contrasting interpretations of traditional Malay culture, with the more conservative PAS (opposition political party) interpretation of what constituted 'legitimate' Islamic cultural practice had rendered some traditional Malay popular cultural forms non-Islamic. As a result, the Ulik Mayang, an additional traditional art form, encountered criticism about its legitimacy as an Islamic cultural practise in Terengganu, a mostly Malay state, in the period following the 1999 General Election, when the PAS party was in power.

A further noteworthy issue that arises when contemplating the survival of traditional performing arts heritage pertains to the notion of "authenticity." In today's climate of instant gratification, mass production of information and entertainment, traditional performing arts run the risk of losing the profundity and spirit that set them apart from other performance forms. It is indeed critical that we investigate and develop more effective methods in order to preserve the integrity of these artistic practises and prevent their dilution due to their adaptation to the current environment. However, it is evident that the extreme views and actions pursued by specific factions in the past to preserve the integrity of indigenous traditional performing arts led to this tradition becoming dormant, unresponsive to modern developments and devoid of admiration. In their discussion regarding the sustainability of indigenous music in Sarawak, Lim and Mohd Fadhil Abdul Rahman (2011) reach the conclusion that the endeavours to popularise traditional performing arts were not very successful due to concerns surrounding authenticity. Similar issue was discussed by Yin, Mohd Nasir Hashim and Chiat (2012), in the context of the Malay Asli tradition. They view the argument on authenticity as problematic because it is denying the fact that transformation of the Malay Asli music has already taken place over many generations in the past.

Despite these challenges I wish to highlight my confidence in the transforming potential of popular culture, which is the driving force behind the majority of the contemporary entertainment happening around the world. Popular culture is both dynamic and influential that can serve as a bridge between the tradition and the modernity. We may find the solutions to the pressing issues faced by the traditional performing arts as discussed earlier by exploring the contemporary Popular Culture as a platform to promote the Malaysian traditional performing arts especially among the younger generation.

The wave of popular culture brought by the era of globalization through

technological and communication advancement should no longer be viewed as an adversary of the destroyer of culture but on the contrary as an opportunity for a broad global market without borders (Zaharul Lailiddin Saidon, 2014). To maintain the viability of traditional performing arts, we must regard these art forms as commodities with significant commercial value while also emphasising the significance of conserving their distinguishing essence and spirit (Olalere, 2019).

Success Stories and Innovative Initiatives of the Late Pak Ngah

As we explore the transformative potential of popular culture in preserving and promoting Malaysian Traditional Performing Arts, we can find inspiration in the remarkable career of the late Pak Ngah, whose real name was Suhaimi Mohd Zain. Pak Ngah (26 September 1958 – 25 September 2018) was a Malay traditional musician, songwriter, and producer. Pak Ngah's life and work serve as an exemplary illustration of how one can successfully blend traditional music elements with modern music in the popular music industry. Pak Ngah, a master of traditional Malay and popular music, embarked on a journey that transcended generational and genre boundaries (Shafa'atussara Silahudin, 2008). With a deep-rooted passion for Malay traditional music, dance and theatre, he became a true pioneer in harmonizing tradition and modernity through the concept of music composition that he coined as the Traditional Pop. His contribution to Malaysian music is a testament to the power of creativity and innovation in preserving our cultural heritage in the contemporary world.

Sadly, only a negligible number of scholarly studies have been conducted into the life and works of Pak Ngah. It is unsurprising according to Raja Iskandar Raja Halid (2019) that the biographical works on traditional or modern Malaysian artists remain sparse. Raja proposed for more biographical studies on notable figures including innovators of a certain tradition and key individuals who hold significant roles within a musical culture. Given the limited literatures on Pak Ngah, my writing here are mostly based on my own observations and personal communications with Pak Ngah on multiple occasions over twenty five-year period, as well as information obtained from the internet and discographies of his works.

One of Pak Ngah's notable achievements was his instrumental role in reviving and popularizing the Malay *Gendang* (Malay drums) especially the *kompang*. The *kompang* are larger tambourine-like Malay hand drums traditionally used in Islamic rituals and cultural celebrations. It was, for the most part, confined to these specific contexts. However, Pak Ngah recognized the potential of the Malay percussion instrument including *kompang, rebana, gendang Melayu* and other local instruments and their unique sounds to be promoted and appreciated through the popular music. In his groundbreaking work like *Ala Dondang* (1997) by Noraniza Idris and *Cindai* (1997) by Siti Nurhaliza, Pak Ngah integrated the rebana and kompang into a contemporary music genre, infusing Malay traditional rhythms and melodies into the pop songs.

In most of the albums under his production, by Pak Ngah creatively fused the rhythms of Malay dance like the Inang, Zapin and Joget with the western pop beats,

the Malay melismatic style of singing with the western harmonies, and the Malay music instruments with western and other world music instruments including the Indian tabla and Arabic darbuka in his music arrangements. The result was a mesmerizing fusion of old and new, where the soul of traditional Malay music found a place in the modern music landscape.

Pak Ngah innovative approach brought the Malay melodies, Asli style of singing and Malay music instruments to the forefront, not only in Malaysia but also on the international stage particularly in the South East Asia region, captivating audiences and introducing them to the rich heritage of Malaysia. TV3 (a major Malaysian television channel) once classified this innovative style to composition that arose in the 1990s by blending traditional and contemporary music elements as 'Rhythm of Malaysia,' 'Ethnic pop,' and 'Creative Ethnic,' although Pak Ngah preferred the term 'Traditional pop' (Kamarulzaman Mohamed Karim, 2016).

Cindai (1997) was the first Rhythms of Malaysia song to win the Best Song of the Year Award at the 1998 *Juara Lagu* (Song Competition) Finals, while *Ala Dondang* (1997) won the Best Ethnic Pop Album at the Malaysian Music Industry Award 1999 (AIM '99). Pak Ngah created his own history when he emerged as the first composer and lyricist to qualify in the Rhythms of Malaysia category when three of his songs—*Hati Kama (*1999), *Samrah Mentari* (1998) and *Dondang Dendang* (1998) were contested through the 1999 *Anugerah Juara lagu* (Song Champion Award) which qualified him to win that category. According to Pak Ngah, the medium to fast tempo memorable melodies, structured in refrain-chorus strophic style were composed to appeal the old and young people since they used traditional music, while remaining upbeat (Tan, 2005). During live performances of the finals, according to Tan, the audience was immersed in aural and visual spectacle, particularly, in which an enormous stage is filled with a vast ensemble of western and local instruments, a large number of backing dancers dressed in colourful and ornate traditional Malay costumes, and spectacular lighting effects using latest technology. This dynamic and inventive performance serves as evidence of Pak Ngah's skill in integrating traditional components with contemporary inspirations, resulting in an enthralling encounter that appeals to captivate both local and international audiences.

Each album produced by Pak Ngah has its own uniqueness which demonstrate his exploration and experimenting with new musical ideas and concepts. Through the *Bekaba* (1999) album for instance, Pak Ngah and Siti Noraniza Idris (the Malaysia queen of traditional pop) recorded the pop traditional Malay songs with lively musical arrangement. The Arabic influences in the Malay culture were highlighted in the album particularly in *Si Nara* (1999), *Tinting* (1999) and *Ya Salam* (2000) *which* requires Noraniza to delve deeper into several variations of Zapin dance rhythms.

Meanwhile in the album named *Masyur*, Pak Ngah experimented with the elements from *Dikir Barat* in the song *Dikir Puteri* (1998). Dikir Barat is a traditional music from the state of Kelantan, northeast of Peninsular Malaysia. Pak Ngah was also involved in the production of the song *Iboq* (2000), which creativity blended modern western music with the music of the Semai people, who lives in the jungle of Pahang, a state in the east coast of the Peninsular Malaysia. The recording of the song involved the musicians from a tribe of Semai from the jungle in Pahang. *Cintong*, an

authentic music instrument made from bamboo were used by the musicians in the recording.

In 1995, Pak Ngah established his own production company in Setapak, Kuala Lumpur, with the aim of facilitating and developing his artistic pursuits. This marked his entry into the music business industry. Collaboration with D'Academy Asia and Indosiar, an Indonesian television station, to produce a reality programme that search for talent for dangdut singers throughout Asia was one of the numerous accomplishments of the Pak Ngah production. Pak Ngah was designated as a regular judge for this particular programme. D'Academy premiered in a number of Asian countries. In addition to attaining the best ratings and shares, the programme received the award for the Best Talent Search & Reality Show category at Panasonic Gobel Awards 2016.

Pak Ngah's fame went beyond his musical innovations. He was also a cultural ambassador and educator who worked relentlessly to share his knowledge and passion with the next generation. His dedication to passing along traditional arts to future generations insured the survival of these creative forms. As he believed that education had a critical part in ensuring the future of Malaysian Traditional Performing Arts, Pak Ngah offered classes and workshops on traditional music and dance for children, teenagers and young adults. Pak Ngah developed close relationships with academics and students at higher education institutions. He was always willing to lend his assistance and support to research work and programmes aimed at incorporating traditional arts into the curriculums of schools and institutions of higher learning, ensuring that young Malaysians are exposed to the beauty and relevance of these art forms from an early age. Pak Ngah was always eager to accommodate requests to provide lectures, presentations, workshops, and clinics to university students. Pak Ngah's legacy continue to inspire a new generation of musicians, ensuring traditional elements' continued relevance in modern music.

Insights Drawn from Pak Ngah's Remarkable Work

In addition to leaving behind a vast body of traditional pop music repertoire, Pak Ngah also served as a role model for the modernisation and preservation of Malaysia's traditional performing arts heritage. Figure 1, which depicts his framework for popularising traditional music, can be a useful point of reference. I dubbed this "Pak Ngah's Model of Traditional Pop Innovation & Preservation" which comprised of four primary features or components: (a) Malaysian-ness; (b) hybridity; (c) Malay-ness; and (d) audience engagement.

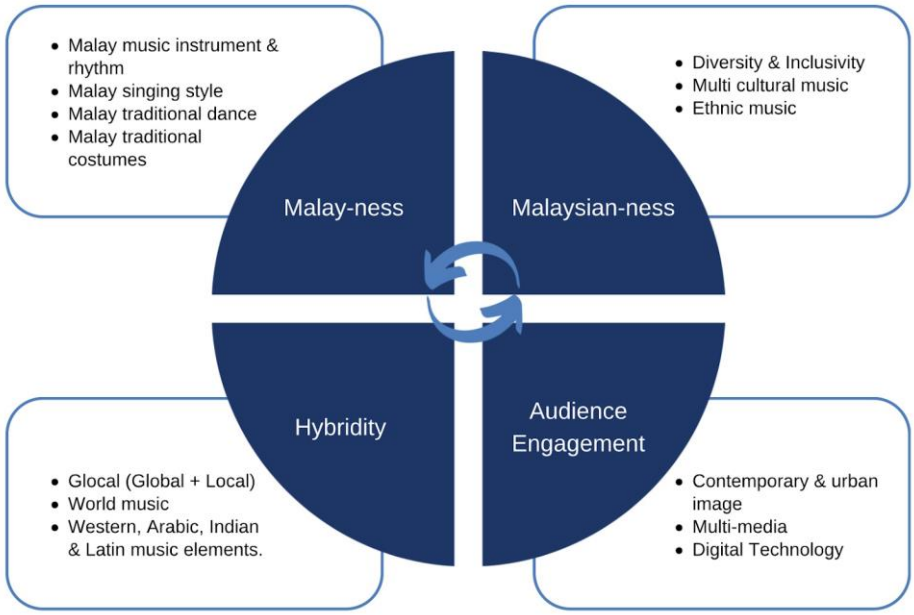

Figure 1. Pak Ngah's model of traditional pop innovation & Preservation

Malay-ness

Notwithstanding the hybridity and multicultural nature of Pak Ngah's body of work, the essence of "Malay-ness" (Melayu-ness) is effectively conveyed in his creative works. Pak Ngah has incorporated the Malay musical attributes as delineated by Weintraub (2010: 59-60). These attributes consist of "pantun poem structure, conventional melodic formulae, ornamentation style, and extra words and phrases (such as "oh, my darling" and "tuan")." Furthermore, Pak Ngah's popular music showcased the prowess of Malay musicians and singers. This is as Benjamin (2019) defines it:

> Skilful Melayu musician move from one note to another by a devious, melismatically decorated route. In Malay these decorations are variously referred to by such terms as nada-nada hiasan 'decorated notes,' grénék 'quavering,' patah lagu 'song-fracturing' or cengkok Melayu 'Malay (-style) twisting. (p.100)

Additionally, the Malay heritage is demonstrated by means of the application of Malay traditional rhythms and instruments. Moreover, the exquisite choreography of the Malay traditional dance, executed in traditional attire, serves to accentuate the authentic Malay spirit.

The element of Malay-ness in the traditional pop form is of considerable strategic significance for several reasons. To begin with, Malay identity is essential

for mitigating some of the concerns around authenticity. Modernizing traditional art forms through modification or change does not undermine their essence, spirit, or value, so long as the Malay sensibilities are appropriately taken into account. While the traditional pop incorporates modern elements, it never compromises the authenticity of traditional performing arts forms. It provides a framework for preserving these art forms while allowing them to evolve and adapt to modern style and taste. Consequently, this could potentially garner the support and endorsement of the traditionalists who maintained the perspective that popular music endangered the sustainability of traditional performing arts. The third justification is to garner backing from significant individuals and political authority, given that the Malay agenda aligns with the national policy of safeguarding the rights and interests of the Malay people. Lastly, the Malay identity aligns with the tenets of the National Cultural Policy (NCP), which stipulates that the national culture ought to be based from the Malay culture as main race in the country.

Malaysian-ness

Additionally, the creative works of Pak Ngah are distinguished by their pronounced "Malaysian-ness." Pak Ngah seeks to make traditional performing arts accessible and appealing to all Malaysians, regardless of their cultural background. His works portray the healthy coexistence of the multi-ethnic groups in an inclusive manner. This presents the concept of "Muhibbah," which signifies harmony and goodwill, is the fundamental characteristic of being Malaysian.

According to Adil Johan (2020), Muhibbah signifies the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic and religious communities, promoting understanding and respect among Malaysians of various backgrounds; each ethnic group contributes to the collective identity, fostering a sense of unity in diversity. This concept of unity in diversity is evidently expressed in Pak Ngah's composition "Jalur Gemilang" (Stripes of Glory), a song officially launched to commemorate the national flag, in anticipation of the 46th Independence Day and made its way to becoming one of the most memorable songs. Jalur Gemilang's lyrics describes about the national flag and explain what it stands for: the national identity and unity of its people.

Attributes

Pak Ngah's works exhibit the characteristic of "hybridity" as an additional essential attribute. His musical arrangements are a fusion of local and global influences, such as those of Indian, Chinese, and Latin American, apart from western styles. Similar to the concept of K-Pop, the blending of Eastern and Western styles produces a unique sound and visual experience that attracted local and international audiences (Ganghariya & Kanozia, 2020).

Scholars who are interested in cultural transformations within the framework of globalisation consider the notion of hybridization to be theoretically relevant. This is due to the fact that it provides a structure for examining and comprehending the effects of many cultures (Wagner, 2012). Hybridization, as stated by Shim (2006), results in the maintenance of regional identities within the global context.

Audience Engagement

Pak Ngah's artistic endeavours prioritise audience engagement, with a specific emphasis on involving the younger demographic, which could possess limited knowledge of traditional art genres. Through the utilisation of aurally and visually engaging performances that were also relatable, Pak Ngah sought to foster an understanding and admiration for these traditional customs among different generations. In addition to musical fusion, Pak Ngah's Tradition Pop performance is renowned for its visually captivating performances, vivid costumes, and elaborate makeup, all of which strongly appeal to the contemporary audience. Multimedia elements, including animations, digital effects, and video projections, are frequently included in order to augment the visual and narrative components of the performances. By harmoniously integrating contemporary technologies with traditional elements, a heightened level of visual immersion is achieved.

Pak Ngah's success in popularising Malaysian traditional performing arts certainly cannot be attributed just to his expertise in the performing arts. He is an artist who possess the 'twenty-first century skills.' These abilities extend beyond his artistic skills and encompass a range of capabilities that enable any artists to achieve success and stay relevance in the face of challenges and competitiveness of the contemporary living. This may encompass a range of skills, including but not limited to the one I observed in Pak Ngah: (a) adaptability, (b) innovative, (c) entrepreneurship, (c) technological proficient, (d) cross-cultural competence, and (e) communication. I added these supporting attributes to complete Pak Ngah's model as shown in Figure 2:

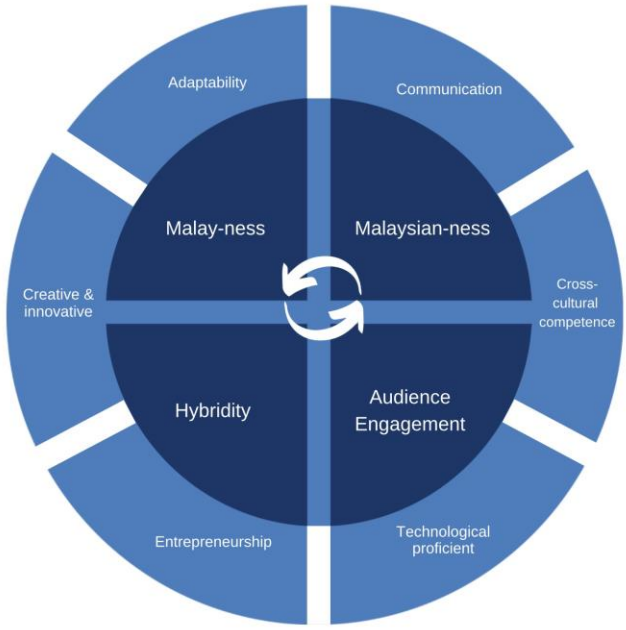

Figure 2. Pak Ngah's traditional pop innovation & preservation model

Adaptability and Innovative

Staying relevant demands a readiness to adapt, adjust and innovate. Artists should not be confined to rigid or fix boundaries but should evolve to reflect the ever-changing dynamics of the modern world. It is imperative for practitioners to experiment with new elements, techniques, form, and contexts in order to maintain their creative work remain fresh and appealing to contemporary audiences while upholding the essence of their traditions. Regarding "adaptability to current interest," Suet (2018) argues that for cultural traditions to be sustainable, they must be functional, pertinent to people's lives today, and capitalise on what the community is now interested in. Additionally, she proposed a strategy that combines creativity with tradition in an effort to rekindle interest towards indigenous music.

Entrepreneurship

It is imperative for artists to have an entrepreneurship mindset that is congruent with the prevailing currents in popular culture. Furthermore, apart from refining their artistic prowess, they must also grasp the intricacies of efficiently endorsing themselves on platforms associated with popular culture. In order to achieve financial sustainability and maintain relevance in the popular culture industry, it is critical to possess the necessary abilities to seek sponsorships or funding opportunities and effectively manage the intricate commercial environment involved.

Pollard & Wilson (2014) argues that in order to adequately prepare graduates for the demanding nature of the industry, creative and performing arts higher education curricula must incorporate an entrepreneurial mindset. Additionally, he delineated five components of an entrepreneurial mindset: "(a) the capacity to think creatively, strategically, analytically and reflectively, (b) confidence in one's abilities, (c) the ability to collaborate, (d) well-developed communication skills, and (e) an understanding of the current artistic context" (p. 3).

Technological Proficiency

In the modern digital age, technological innovations have a profound effect on how the world interacts with and consumes art (Kaushik, 2020). In order to attract new audiences, performing artists must be able to opt for the use of technological innovations and actively include younger generations (Ruastiti et al., 2021). This involves making use of digital content online streaming platforms, and social media to distribute information regarding their performances, make connections with peers around the world, and cooperate with individuals in the field of popular culture (Webb & Layton, 2022).

The notable achievements of Korean popular culture in leveraging technological advancements serve as a valuable case study. A significant contributor to the dissemination of Korean popular culture across the world is the enhanced internet access and the various social media platforms. Ahn & Kim (2013) summarizes the social media strategy of Korean entertainment agencies which include aligning strategic business model with social media; maximizing various

social media channels; engaging customers with on-and offline promotions; and stimulating audience with exclusive contents. By focusing on the business potential of social media, K-pop entertainment industry utilizes various social media channels to promote music videos and to communicate with global audience.

Central to the success of K-pop is the dedicated fandom culture that has emerged. This sense of community amplifies the impact of K-pop, turning it into a social and cultural phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of traditional music fandom. A case study conducted in Malaysia by Nur Ayuni Mohd Jenol & Nur Hafeeza Ahmad Pazil (2022), discovered that K-pop fans actively create and produce their content from the social media. An exemplary instance of how fandoms have established an online presence and optimised technological utilisation is the ARMY fanbase of BTS, which was established on July 9, 2013 subsequent to the group's debut on June 13, 2013 (Tina & Utami, 2020). As of May 23, 2021, BTS official account has 41.9 million followers on Instagram; BTS's parent company Hybe Labels has 5.63 subscribers on YouTube; BTS Twitter handle @BTS_twt has 35.6 million followers; and BTS official Facebook page has over 18 million followers.

Cross-Cultural Competence & Communication

It is crucial that practitioners of traditional performing arts maintain an open mind regarding the prospect of partnerships and combining elements of various cultures, given the worldwide influence of popular culture. Bennett (2009) defines cross-cultural as "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 95). Meanwhile, Paracka and Pynn (2017) contend that intercultural competence transcends a mere dichotomy of similarities and differences in order to establish profound and significant connections; thus, those aspiring to enter the professional, local, and global music communities should strive to achieve this objective.

Cross-cultural competence includes effective communication skills, which are essential for traditional performing artists to have success in promoting their art form. It is their responsibility to weave narratives that engross the audience and communicate the cultural importance of their undertakings, both in person and through the digital media (Ruastiti et al., 2021). Furthermore, they must have the ability to function as educators and advocates, cooperating with academic institutions and incorporating their body of work into curricular to ensure the continued existence of their artistic field.

Conclusion

The harmonization of heritage and modernity is not a paradox; it is imperative for the sustainability of Malaysian Traditional Performing Arts. Our traditions are our roots, and our ability to adapt and transform them into something that resonates with the current and future generations is our strength. As we navigate this path, we need to bear in mind that the preservation of our cultural heritage does imply a state of stagnation, but rather one of progression and evolution. It entails searching innovative ways to embrace and transform the past tradition as our heritage. The success story

exemplified by Pak Ngah demonstrates that the harmonization of heritage and modernity is not just a theoretical concept; it is a practical and achievable goal.

While preserving the definition of art as the aesthetic manifestation of a country's cultural heritage remains relevant, a more comprehensive outlook must be adopted by incorporating a commercial definition that can industrialise the traditional Malay performing arts, especially as a means to penetrate the global market. Creative individuals within the performing arts must strive to provide innovative and original products that merge traditional features with modern elements. Performing arts work must align with contemporary preferences, especially those of the younger demographic, who perceive them as new, unique, urban, and remain relevant with the attributes of popular culture.

The barriers that may have hindered the development of the traditional performing arts to libraries or dusty archives can be surmounted by capitalising on the transforming capacity of popular culture. Our capacity to infuse them with renewed vitality ensures that they will remain pertinent and important for forthcoming generations. The utilisation of popular culture enables us to reinterpret, remix, and recreate our traditional performing arts. This facilitates the accessibility of these artistic expressions to individuals from various demographic backgrounds, in Malaysia and those from around the globe, urban and rural.

One of the most impressive abilities of popular culture is its capacity to make traditional forms of the performing arts appealing to a larger audience. The capacity of popular culture to act as a medium through which people of different generations can communicate is the source of the transformative potential of popular culture. It is possible for older people to impart their wisdom and enthusiasm to younger generations in a way that is not only interesting but also pertinent through the medium of popular music. By promoting a sense of shared cultural history, this generational bridge helps to ensure that traditional performing arts will continue to exist in the future.

During this process of development, we are not looking to water down our heritage; rather, we are looking for creative ways to honour it and incorporate it into the modern landscape. It is about incorporating our past performing arts traditions into the fabric of our modern daily lives, making it possible for them to coexist and thrive alongside the most recent trends in the arts and entertainment. As a result of the appreciation of our traditional arts as a component of popular culture, they become a source of national pride, and their continued existence is ensured.

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Biography

Zaharul Lailiddin Saidon is a music education professor at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), Tanjong Malim, Malaysia, where he teaches courses in music education, research, and marching band techniques. Zaharul was the dean of the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts at the University from 2012 to 2019. He received his undergraduate degree in music from Southern Illinois University, USA, and his master’s degree in education from the University of Houston, Texas, USA. Zaharul has 40 years of experience in the field of education as a school teacher and lecturer at teachers’ colleges and universities. He actively provides consultation services both at home and abroad, serves as the lead researcher and a member of several research projects, presents papers at local and international conferences, and is involved in the publication of learning and teaching materials, as well as the production of creative works. Zaharul is one of the founding members of the Malaysian Association for Music Education (M.A.M.E.) and the Malaysia Band Association. Throughout his career as an educator, Zaharul has received several awards and recognition at both the national and international levels.

Ronggeng Singapura: Early Stages of Dance Revivalism and Activism

Noramin Farid
University of the Arts Singapore
e-mail: soultari.amin@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is an autoethnographic and action research documentation of an initiative by a newly formed collective 'Arki-Gen' that is made up of artists, researchers, and educators. Their project, *Ronggeng Revival: Ground Sensing Phase 1*, aims to revive the social practice of a music/dance form through conducting research, documenting and formulating a training curriculum. Through the focus group discussions with four selected segments of the arts community, Ronggeng still bears the taboo and stereotypes of social histories. As an initial phase, this project is part of a larger expectation to create a community of Ronggeng activism and the eventual integration of Ronggeng to be an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). This paper supports the need to recognise the social aspects of Ronggeng as a choreomusicological practice, and as part of a Nusantara revival movement.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, Malay dance, revival, Singapore, social dance

Introduction

Dance revivalism is hard work! This is especially when the practice that you would like to revive is seen as a controversial one by your own community of practice. The apprehension for Ronggeng as a social dance practice is one that is entangled in the sociohistorical and contemporary politics of religion, nationalisation and ethnic minoritisation. This paper is an autoethnographic and action research of a collective that I co-founded, Arki-Gen and it offers a preliminary analysis of what I refer to as "Ronggeng revival" in the nation-state of Singapore. I offer my perspectives as a dance activist leading and coordinating these efforts with my colleagues of our collective, Arki-Gen and also as a dance practitioner-scholar whose emic-etic positionality provides perspectives that could help understand the circumstances on the ground and the larger socio-politics that are at play.

Revival of Ronggeng as a social dance practice is neither a new initiative nor an isolated activism. Groups of Malay communities in the Nusantara have been initiating their own Ronggeng activities promoting the practice that are not only art dances but social dances too. The former refers to the dances that have undergone a process of adaptation for the stage, usually proscenium for the direct purposes of addressing and engaging an audienceship, the latter refers to dances that involve two

participants in direct engagement and communication with one another in an event setting where there might be spectators observing them—however in this case, audiences/spectators become secondary as oppose to the former where the dance caters to the audiences.

Before going into an active discussion of contemporary revival efforts, I will first offer a historical background on Ronggeng in the Nusantara to provide some helpful context. Ronggeng as a social dance form was a common activity amongst Malay-speaking communities in the region. It is difficult to pinpoint Ronggeng's specific historical origin, especially if we consider the historical and cultural confluences of a maritime region that has shared languages and cultures. In addition, the Ronggeng practice was also introduced to many communities within the archipelagic region by itinerant entertainment troupes that saw entourages of musicians and dancers, travelling from one island to the next, at times even staying on for a few months.

Upon an evaluation of the limited scholarship on Ronggeng that is available within the field of performing arts and Malay studies, I have triangulated my sources with colonial ordinances, historical newspapers, and oral history recordings. From the survey of research and archival materials, it can be derived that Ronggeng is indeed a social dance activity that may/may not involve men dancing with hired female dancers and usually accompanied by a music ensemble. There is also a tendency to differentiate village Ronggeng to the Joget Moden/Joget Moderen, the latter was co-opted into urban entertainment parks that became popular amongst urban dwellers in colonial port cities in peninsular Malaysia and Singapore (Md Nor, 1993). The latter became a craze amongst male youths who would flock to the dancehalls of these urban entertainment parks to buy bundles of tickets which were used to "purchase" the time of attractive female taxi-dancers who would dance with them till the end of a triumvirate of music/dance genres of songs. This form became quite the fad and dance manuals were created to teach would-be dancers how to dance. This was possibly the much-needed initial guidance for young men who did not want to embarrass themselves when they engage the services of a professional taxi-dancing woman!

The nature in which the female performers are hired for their time to entertain young men gradually became a subject of moral degradation. The social impression that their profession as "taxi-dancers" who were merely employed for the enjoyment of men saw these women in unfavourable light and associated them with other immoral acts such as prostitution. Such impressions are not only unique within the Malay community. The castigation towards the profession of Asian female entertainers and artists is a long-lasting one with historically complex entanglements of Victorian colonial morality, permeating religious, national, and elitist patriarchies where men were eager to control the bodies of women from their perceived immorality.

The term "Ronggeng'' is a shared term within the Nusantara and could refer to other social dance forms that have similar functions (partner social dance) but different dance techniques. The Ronggeng that we are referring to in the revival here, termed as "Ronggeng Melayu," is distinguished by the triunity of the music genres of *Asli*, *Inang* and *Joget* that are played by the music ensemble, specific dance techniques and the fashion wear that is associated with the form. The incorporation

of "Melayu" is also a way to distinguish the differences between other adjacent forms such as the Sundanese Jaipongan, Gandrung of Banyuwangi and Lengger from Banyumas.

Ethnochoreologist, Andriy Nahachewsky proposes the term "revival" to "broadly to describe any dancing activity in which the participants actively invoke past performances of the dance" (2008). I would add that a revival of a certain practice assumes that a practice or a form is no longer in function by a community but has now, in the contemporary moment, found a renewed sense of purpose and relevance by its community of practitioners. The Ronggeng is unique in its circumstance because after its perceived demise which I pinpoint to the closure of entertainment parks in Singapore, the art dance form which is a sanitised and staged version of the Ronggeng continues to be practised today. The Ronggeng art dance adheres to similar conventions of Malay social dancing that observes no contact partnering between sexes, the aesthetics, and techniques of the three Malay music/dance genres of Asli, Inang and Joget inherent within Ronggeng.

Arki-Gen

Arki-Gen was initiated in 2021 by 6 founding members: Muhammad Norisham Osman, Muhammad Aryandi Ahmad, Seri Rahayu Anuar, Lenny Karmila Mohamed Kamal, Lyn Hanis Rezuan and myself, Muhammad Noramin Bin Mohamed Farid. The formation of Arki-Gen during the tumultuous years of the COVID-19 pandemic came as a response from a collective of practitioners of Malay performing arts who were interested in filling a gap within the ecosystem. This collective is made up of millennial instructors of dance and music in public schools and professional practitioners within the scene. As practitioner-observers of a small ecosystem of about 5 generations who are currently actively practising and promoting Malay dance in Singapore, the collective acknowledges that there is a lack of discourse of Malay dance and this is evident due to the lack of scholarship and opportunities to discuss critically about dance.

Knowledge and practice transmission of Malay dance has consistently been from teacher (Guru) to student and within specific groups that are founded by a certain personality. These personalities could have originated from one group and upon their departure started their own groups. Gurus may choose to adopt methodologies from their former groups or create an adapted curriculum incorporating their own style. Though there is recognition of what sociologist Howard Becker deems as an "art world" where there are shared practices due to artistic genealogies and collaborations, organisational styles can sometimes create silos. Hence the push for discourse comes as an intention to break boundaries and promote better understanding of music-dance relationship and a deeper awareness of sociocultural contexts.

As a collective that acknowledges the trends of Ronggeng revivals that have happened in the past decade in neighbouring countries of cultural affinity, Malaysia and Indonesia, Arki-Gen took the opportunity to initiate the project, The Ronggeng Revival Project. This project gained financial support from National Arts Council's Self-Employed Persons Grant (SEPG) which allowed the collective to pursue their initiative for a duration of 6 months from October 2021 to March 2022. Arki-Gen

recognised that a revival endeavour is a long-term one and must involve the concerted efforts of various stakeholders. Thus, for the awarded grant quantum, the project's initial plans which was referred to as "Phase 1," focuses on a few aspects such as historical research, an evaluation of Ronggeng practice and consolidating the perspectives of various stakeholders via focus group discussions.

Formally titled, *Ronggeng Revival: Ground Sensing Phase 1*, the project's objectives are threefold: (a) Revive a social dance/event known as Ronggeng that used to be popular arts and entertainment pre-1970s; (b) Revitalise and Reinstate the integral bond between music and dance in the practice of performing arts that is often sidelined; and (c) Innovate new models of performance presentation and collaborative working among artists, scholars and activists. There are a few aspects that Arki-Gen's objectives are trying to work towards and it is focused on community building, education, and collective activism. These are factors that require time and scaffolding to achieve them.

Multi-Pronged Approach

The project consists of three components: Research, Documentation & Training.

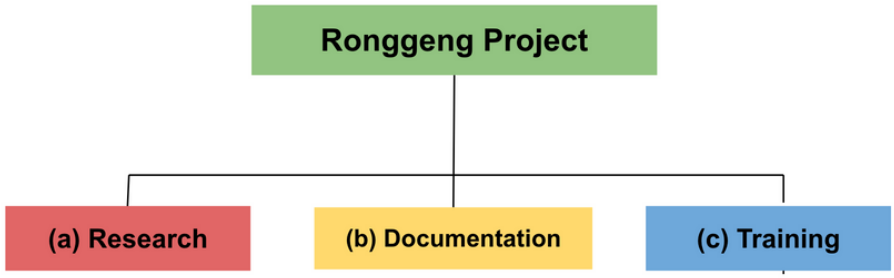

Figure 1. Three components of the project.

We see these three components as an all-encompassing approach because it brings together historical contexts, contemporary endeavours, and the application of revival, we are initiating and activating the necessary processes to make the revival activity a nuanced and achievable experience.

Research. The research component involves the process of searching, unpacking, and discerning the activities of Ronggeng in its heyday. The materials found and used were visual ephemera, oral history recordings, films, and academic books on the subjects.

It must be understood that Ronggeng as a village social dance activity underwent a transformation as a result of colonial capitalism in the form of urban entertainment parks. The urban entertainment park phenomenon did not occur in a vacuum. It became an exotic attraction, organised by colonial governments where colonies were being presented to the citizens of colonial powers. These events known as colonial exhibitions or sometimes masked under a "friendlier" moniker "world fairs" offered exoticism-at-its-best in colonial centres or for travelling colonial

citizens into its colonies.

Through these fairs which became entertainment parks accommodated Ronggeng as a popular activity of the Malays and provided access for it to be enjoyed by people of all walks of life were showcased and experienced by visiting patrons. This is evidenced by newspaper articles that would describe the invitation of a few dance stars that would definitely attract many to come. A key event in the Malay Archipelago that saw the curation of the multitude of people living in British colonies within maritime Southeast Asia was the Malaya-Borneo Exhibition of 1922.

Laurence Guillemard who was the Governor of the Straits Settlements, noted in the souvenir guide that the exhibition brought "together, for the first time in history, representatives of all classes from the two important Malayan countries under British influence [Malaya and Borneo] … by interchange of ideas and discussion of matters of interest to each, considerable mutual benefit might be derived by all, and a revival of local trade possibly stimulated" (*Guide to Malaya Borneo Exhibition* 5).

The presentation of Ronggeng to colonial eyes also meant to serve the practice within methods and presentations that they can understand. Hence, the Joget Moden/Moderen taxi dance model of ticketing hired female entertainers took on a transactional dancer-patron engagement. This is of course different from village practices of communal dancing and if there were any transactions involved it was indirect between accompanying matrons or the heads of Ronggeng troupes. Information regarding village Ronggeng is scarce, but a lot could be imagined and discerned from close readings of visual ephemera and oral history recordings of former Ronggeng girls.

Aside from historical practices of Ronggeng, another focus of the research was to also to consider the choreomusicological dimensions of Ronggeng as a music-dance practice. The concentration on the moving body takes precedence in a lot of the resources that were found. This is understandable as the transition from village to urban centres meant that when Ronggeng became a hired transactional activity, the mastery of dancing skills became important for any participant of Ronggeng in the joget halls. Pedagogical materials regarding Ronggeng were made available to the public. Upon introspection of these guide books, we noticed that it was catered for a male readership as the photos presented were of Ronggeng girls to offer a sense of familiarisation for the would-be male patron who would need to be knowledgeable enough to engage a Ronggeng dancer. There was neither any mention of the music genres nor guidance about listening to music.

We felt research on choreomusicology was important as it will offer in-depth insights on the symbiotic relationship of dance and music. This is especially necessary because the nature of Malay performing arts was not distinguished into music, dance, and theatre. The division into categories has done a huge disservice to the practice of Malay performing arts, specifically into dance and music for the case of Ronggeng, as it does not recognise the relationship, interdependence, and co-production of both practices. This choreomusicological turn in the performing arts of Southeast Asia has found renewed momentum with the publication of *Sounding the Dance, Moving the Music*, co-edited by Mohd Anis Md Nor and Kendra Stepputat. This would require more attention due to the current interest and development of scholarship on the subject matter.

Documentation. The documentation component of the project entails the recording and evaluation of the ground sensing endeavours consisting of focus group discussions and the production of pedagogical training materials to teach Ronggeng. Viewpoints from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are important because the participants who are involved in FGDs are from dance, music, and cultural sectors with a range of expertise in education, performance, journalism, cultural and heritage management. In addition, to consider Ronggeng as a prospective Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) requires longitudinal planning and community building. Hence, a preliminary introduction to subsequent phases will help to scaffold and provide an understanding of the direction of this endeavour. An evaluation of the FGDs will be provided in the subsequent section.

Training. The training component is a practice-based research initiative with members of Arki-Gen to formulate a curriculum for the teaching of Ronggeng. Our collective expertise as educators in the fields of music and dance helped us to produce reference materials that will be helpful when we create a "train-the-trainers'' programme in due time. The findings from the research and documentation activities supplemented the brainstorming that was needed for this project. We were very motivated by the activism of Nusantara Performing Arts Research Centre (NUSPARC) under the leadership of Mohd Anis Md Nor, who were able to create learning materials for Ronggeng to be taught to students in primary and secondary schools as well as professional dancers in State cultural groups under the National Department of Culture and Arts (Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara [JKKN]).

Aside from the creation of pedagogical structures, we are also committed to study and include into the curriculum about the different ways to teach, especially when there are new methods of teaching students of different abilities and competencies. We feel that the arts offer a space for inclusiveness and creativity. Ronggeng's inherent symbiosis of music-dance and the emphasis on the interdependence will be helpful as fundamental learning about Malay performing arts.

Focus Group Discussion: Identifying Stakeholders

In any initiatives involving the community, there must be acknowledgement that thinking of the community as a monolith is counterproductive and not helpful when thinking of the deliverables required to move forward. Hence it is crucial that we had to first discern several collectives of stakeholders within the community, whose perspectives are important in our ground sensing effort. As insiders within our small yet interconnected art world, we were able to identify four groups of stakeholders who were seen as crucial in bringing the conversation forward. We first had to consider, (a) their influence within the community of practice, (b) the level of expertise and connections that will be helpful for us, and (c) the potentiality of individuals who will benefit and adopt the proposed revival activities.

The four groups we identified were,

(a) Malay dance veteran generation

These are elderly practitioners with influence and/or leaders of their own Malay dance group. Some of them are Gurus of the subsequent generation (group b) that are actively teaching, performing, and creating Malay dance performances.

(b) Current Malay dance practitioners

These are practitioners who are millennials to early Gen Z dance members who are actively contributing to the scene as school instructors, choreographers, and performers. They may also be leaders of groups that they have set up.

(c) Traditional Malay musicians

An intergenerational group of musicians who are involved in the scene as composers and are involved as musicians in productions organised by Malay dance organisations.

(d) Adjacent arts and cultural practitioners

A diverse group of invited adjacent arts and cultural practitioners consisting of Malay cultural scholars, educators, journalists, producers, and artists from the field of visual arts and theatre.

Focus Group Discussion: Facilitation Process

Every Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were facilitated by my Arki-Gen peers and I. The invited participants were grouped and attended the FGD on different evenings. All FGDs followed the same structure. Participants took their seats at the different clusters of tables and chairs. This will also become the groups that they will be engaging in discussions with for the breakout sessions.

Participants were first introduced to the project, objectives and milestones of the current phase and the intended direction of the subsequent phases. We felt this was necessary to help our participants understand our intentions and also our way of softening the tension we were expecting due to the sensitive and taboo topic.

Later, Arki-Gen members became the facilitators for the ensuing breakout sessions wherein participants were seated in groups and provided writing materials such as post its and mahjong paper for them to write their notes or keywords which will act as points of discussion. Facilitators are not only tasked to manage the discussions but also to record important micro-macro perspectives that will be relevant for our findings.

The questions included:

a) In your perspective and lived experience, what is Ronggeng?
b) What do you think is the perception of the community about Ronggeng?
c) In your perspective, how important is it to recognise Ronggeng as an Intangible Cultural Heritage?

Discussions

Collectively there seems to be an acknowledgement that Ronggeng is a subgenre belonging to Joget and not something that or should stand on its own. The stories regarding Ronggeng and what it was to them back in their youthful days, seemed to revolve around the night clubs and times of endless partying. There is also a fixation to reference the term to taxi girls that graced the dancing halls at various "Ronggeng Clubs." Concerns were raised on the discussions of Ronggeng and how it was being used as an exploitation of the Malay culture during the colonial period. In regards to this, the veterans were also troubled that if Ronggeng was to be reintroduced to the current community, how will the stigma be addressed.

They agreed that if it were to be reintroduced, it should be packaged with a new or rather "sanitized" label. However, others have also spoken about Ronggeng's colourful history, and its erasure will be disregarding the struggles of cultural agents of the past who have contributed to the idea of what Malay Culture was back then. This of course includes the working women known as the "*perempuan joget*" and arts enthusiasts who went to the clubs.

However, there were also stories that brought them to reminisce about times that Ronggeng was a highlight at Malay weddings from the 50s to the 90s. There are also recollections of the music during the 70s through to the 80s. There were also mentions of Siput Sarawak, an iconic figure that represented the term for their generation.

In this discussion, most have agreed that Ronggeng is a community and social event that brings people together. There is acknowledgement that those who practiced Ronggeng are trained artists, regardless of the place in which their art is practiced. Ronggeng was recognized as an opportunity for people to be exposed to and appreciate live traditional Malay music. The term also brought them to remember a care-free environment of the kampung days where the Malay communities welcomed or accepted the cultural aspects of Ronggeng.

The musicians of the current industry talked about the original ensemble of traditional Malay music instruments, which includes the rebana, rebab and accordion. They also expressed that the Ronggeng music particularly, is made to be appreciated live. Without it, the dance aspect would be plain or simply boring. Collectively, they also believed that dance and music in general should always exist together when it comes to a performative setting.

There are also concerns that Ronggeng would always come with negative connotations and be deemed as a practice that rarely brings any form of benefit to the community in general. Ronggeng as a dance genre, has been viewed as a social dance which holds a lot of promiscuous contexts. Questions that were raised from this

discussion revolves around the education to the younger generation regarding the context of what Ronggeng is, with the hopes that this would encourage an interest among the community on the diversities of art practices in Ronggeng itself.

Conversations with the current practitioners brought about questions on how the reimplementation of Ronggeng into the scene could further elevate the current progress and development of Singapore Traditional Malay dance form. However, they collectively agreed that there is much sensitivity to be taken into consideration towards the approach of executing Ronggeng to the community. Tracing back the history of Ronggeng in the early 50s when it was largely active in the Ronggeng halls, it was regarded that the Ronggeng girls were exploited working women and this led to the negative stigma surrounding the Ronggeng culture.

Some suggestions are leaning more towards recognition rather than revival, due the existence of the form since the early 50s. The effort of reviving Ronggeng does not revolve only within the dance community but having the right media platforms to expose the Ronggeng culture to the mass public. This has been proven during the early 80s, when SBC broadcasted the TV program called 'Kelab Dondang Sayang' and was well received during that time.

The thoughts were shared by participants of how Ronggeng could be reintegrated into the current traditional Malay arts and if discarding certain aspects of its history would mean to degrade the originality of the form. Some questions included the relevance of Ronggeng and how it could apply to current practices were also raised. They collectively agreed that proper considerations should be taken when it comes to redeveloping the form.

Since Ronggeng is considered as a taboo to the majority in the Malay traditional arts, the reasons surrounding why it was should be accessible to the community. The history of Ronggeng at this point has been attached to a negative stigma and stereotypes due to the lack of knowledge that has not been accessible to the people. The information that passes to the current community is based on hearsays from their elders and their negative experiences. Though it is only natural for such instances to occur since those involved in the ecosystem of the Ronggeng culture at that time were mainly people from the lower income communities.

The group believes that the Ronggeng culture should be made accessible and inclusive of both the pros and cons. This would provide an opportunity for the people to understand the functionality of what the culture could bring and hopefully to incite raving discussions amongst the community in general. Other conversations revolving around Ronggeng reminded them of jovial celebrations in the Malay community. It is an event that brings people together, mostly through the nature of how Ronggeng is formatted.

Ronggeng Practice as Choreomusicological Research

The dance and music coordinators led workshops to experiment and discuss about the various components of Ronggeng, in particular to elucidate about the choreomusicological function and interdependence of Ronggeng's music and dance. We acknowledge that these practices as research endeavours are only preliminary but

it has given us an entry point to think deeply about our related practices. Here are some notes from both the facilitators regarding the workshops:

Dance Notes

Joget's double-step which is a shuffling motion of the feet in double time is a necessary technique that requires attention and awareness of the body. It involves the quick shifting of weight from one foot to the other and, depending on the technique of double-step, will also affect the quality of the main body. For example, one such technique is a double step that is initiated with the front of feet and toes: this would produce a springy motion.

We felt the "kick" technique gives the closest choreomusicological related movement wherein the kick in the joget technique coincides in relation to the base gendang (drum) before the gong. This makes dancers more aware of their movement and understand the fast tempo joget music better. At the same time, dancers will not take for granted the specific instruments that are necessary in the joget, such as the gong, drum and a melodic instrument which can be the accordion, flute, or violin.

There needs to be better communication with musicians and also the awareness of different versions of songs which can be shorter or longer. Dancers who are focused on melody could be at a disadvantage and if there is better listening and understanding of the drum's percussive pattern, dancers are able to determine if a music is ending on time or is the version with the longer coda.

Understands the importance of observing gender mannerisms when dancing with a partner of the opposite sex. The gendered movement of the ronggeng repertoire serves the purpose of the Ronggeng and also provides further insights on maintaining healthy boundaries between dancers since the convention of Malay dance does not allow contact between sexes.

We recognise that this is a new endeavour and it does feel that Phase 1 will be something Arki-Gen will continue to work on because in the six months since we started work, we realised that there are other things we would like to do. One of our subsequent endeavours is to continue discussions with our community of practice. Some prominent individuals who were not able to attend the focus group discussions have expressed interest to support our project. We would like to do another cycle of focus group discussions to gather their thoughts—probably a survey to active practitioners as well.

Also at the same time, we have noticed that our discussions have been focused on immediate thoughts about Ronggeng as social practice: the bulk of our conversation by our practitioners were still focused on the social stigma of the 1970s that continue to affect the thoughts and decisions of our veteran practitioners. However, we see this as a concern of only a group of elderly practitioners as the younger ones are keen to explore the possibilities that the revival of Ronggeng can bring to them and the community in due time.

The musicians are more receptive to the Revival process partly because they see the value of Ronggeng as a cultural practice that may benefit them: the promotion of Ronggeng could also mean opportunities for frequent hiring of their services. Some strategies formulated during the discussions for the revival process to

be a meaningful one includes:

a) Further education of Ronggeng and its evolving practice today
b) Acknowledging Ronggeng's historical past and finding ways to understand its Art
c) To introduce Ronggeng gradually in social events, as using Live traditional music as an example, this entertainment component has become a key feature of Malay weddings today
d) To work together with Mediacorp and adjacent media presses to raise awareness of Ronggeng's value
e) To work with educational officers in schools to promote education and practice of Ronggeng

Conclusion

Dance revivals require the effort of not a few passionate individuals but many stakeholders within the ecosystem. In this phase of the Ronggeng Revival Project, some members of the community, especially ones from an older generation, were apprehensive of the intentions by a young collective to resuscitate a form that is considered controversial due to persistent stereotypes that plagues the collective memory of a community. True to the belief that Malay social dance may provide an educative function for a minority indigenous community's heritage and history, Ronggeng is proposed as a contemporary solution.

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Biography

Dr. Noramin Farid is a choreographer, arts educator, and maritime Southeast Asian performing arts researcher. A recipient of the 2017 Singapore Youth Award and the 2018 India-ASEAN Youth Awards, Amin is the curator of an online portal, ARKITARI, which documents maritime Southeast Asian dances. He is also the current president of a dance organisation, DIAN Dancers, and the founding member of Arki-Gen, a group focused on promoting discourse and research about Southeast Asian performing arts. He holds a PhD in Theatre, Drama and Dance Studies from Royal Holloway, University of London, UK. Amin currently teaches Southeast Asian Performing Arts & Cultures at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), Lasalle College of the Arts, and Singapore Raffles Music College (SRMC).

Soundscapes in Selected Tang Poetries (*shi* 詩) and Song Lyrics (*ci* 詞)

Lanlan Kuang
University of Central Florida
e-mail: lanlan.kuang@fulbrightmail.org

Abstract

Since the emergence of the term "soundscape" in the late 1960s and early 1970s, ethnomusicologists have drawn inspirations from cultural anthropology and approached music beyond its sound environment as a product of various human activities. Sinologists and scholars of classical Chinese music have suggested a way to read poetry and song lyrics as not just performances, as they were originally intended, but as textual performances and cultural phenomena. This study introduces the practices of textual production and the cultivation of artistic tastes through selected Tang (618–906) poetry and Song (960-1126) lyric (*ci* 詞). The author argues in her forthcoming monograph with Indiana University Press, *Dunhuang Expressive Arts and China's New Cosmopolitan Heritage* (2024) that these classic literary productions are indispensable for understanding the construction of China's Northland frontier culture and the Southland urban/metropolitan culture that continue to shape the country's music and performing arts culture.

Keywords: ethnomusicology, Song Dynasty lyric (*ci* 詞), soundscape, Tang Dynasty

Introduction

The foundational roots of soundscape studies can be traced back to architecture and urban design in the late 1960s, before Canadian composer and sound ecologist Raymond Murray Schafer began conducting comprehensive studies of sound environments in the early 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Schafer revolutionized the perception of sound environments by approaching an auditory landscape as both a subject of research, focusing on how people perceive it, and a form of artistic expression. Schafer defines a soundscape as an auditory environment that emphasizes individual or societal perception and understanding. Soundscape research from this period elevated the ordinary sounds of everyday life into a realm worthy of study and artistic exploration.

In 2001, ethnomusicologist Kay Kaufman Shelemay incorporated the term "soundscape" into the title of her book, drawing inspiration from cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. Appadurai (1996) and Shelemay (2006) have identified multiple *scapes*, including ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, finanscapes, and soundscapes. Appadurai's framework of "global cultural

flows" contributes five dimensions that construct what he terms "imagined worlds." These dimensions are not just diverse influences shaping contemporary reality but fundamental elements that constitute historically constructed ideas within different societies and cultures worldwide. They contribute to the construction of these "imagined worlds" and represent the perspectives and ideas of various groups and individuals across the globe (1996, p. 33). Shelemay, on the other hand, aligned more with the three-part analytical model proposed by ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam in 1964 and approached music beyond its sound environment as a product of various human activities.

In the cross-disciplinary field of ethnomusicology and sinology, scholars of classical Chinese music have suggested a way to read poetries and song lyrics as not just performances, as they were originally intended, but as textual performances and cultural phenomena. For instance, Bell Yung (1987) highlighted the emphasis which Chinese literati musician/scholar musicians place on the literary content of a *qin* musical composition. Joseph Lam (2017) used the sounds, sights, and smells in historical texts to introduce the categories of sound culture, musical world, and soundscape and to guide us think about the experience of sound in the Southern Song. In (*Un*)*consciousness? Music in the Daoist context of nonbeing* (2019), I also pointed out that Chinese scholar musicians use linguistic terms that suggest spatial concepts in the visual dimension to describe aural/sonic events. Detailed conceptualized qualities of sound have existed in the history of qin music since the sixth dynasty, when Qu Zhan 麴瞻 specified the perceived quality of different tones in *Qin sheng lü tu* 琴声律图.

Building on existing scholarship on soundscape and my own research publications, this study introduces the practices of textual production and the cultivation of literary and musical tastes through selected Tang (618–906 CE) poetry and Song (960-1126) lyric (*ci* 詞). Specifically, I argue in my forthcoming monograph with Indiana University Press, *Dunhuang Expressive Arts and China's New Cosmopolitan Heritage* (2024) that classical literary productions such as Tang dynasty frontier poetries and Song dynasty song lyrics are indispensable for understanding the construction of China's Northland frontier culture and the Southland metropolitan culture that continue to shape the country's performing arts culture. In the following sections, I examine intertextually through an ethnopoetic lens the performative processes of selected literary samples and propose to read them as not just performances, as they were originally intended, but also as textual performances and cultural phenomena. (Yung, 1987; Owen, 2019; Lam, 2017) The case studies present in this study offer an outlook to the historically and discursively formed frontier and metropolitan cultures of China's Tang dynasty and Song dynasty—literary topography created and constituted of time, space, cultural agents, and signs and metaphors.

China's Tang Dynasty

The Tang dynasty was arguably the pinnacle of imperial Chinese culture. It was one of the most cosmopolitan ages in Chinese history. Elements of various foreign cultures had been transmitted into the Central Plains along the north-western borderlands for thousands of years, but the Tang dynasty was particularly powerful and prosperous, and the infusions of various cultures and arts at that time were distilled into a rich and diverse cultural content.

Under the leadership of Emperor Taizong Li Shimin (r. 627–50), China subdued its nomadic neighbours from the north and northwest, securing peace and safety on overland trade routes reaching as far as Syria and Rome. The reunification of China initiates a period of prosperity, trade relations, and far-reaching influence. Marked by strong and benevolent rule, successful diplomatic relationships, economic expansion, and a cultural efflorescence of cosmopolitan style, the Tang empire expanded far beyond the Central Plain.

Chang'an, today's Xi'an in China's northwest Shanxi Province was a large-scale metropolis during the Tang Dynasty. It became the capital city and attracted merchants, clerics, and envoys from India, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Korea, and Japan. Foreign tongues were a common part of daily life. Foreign influences on social customs, fashion, and costume were prominent. Musicians, dancers, and other entertainers from the Western Regions (present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) were invited to perform for the enjoyment of the princes and courtiers. Chang'an was at the time one of the largest and richest cities in the world.

Scholar officials, also known as the *literatis*, formed the new elites by taking the civil service exanimation. This new social elite gradually replaced the old aristocracy, and the recruitment of gentlemen from the south contributed to the cultural amalgamation that had already begun in the 6th century. Most importantly, the Tang scholar-officials produced some of the finest literature in Chinese history. Written Chinese, partly because of its geographical spread, served as a prestigious, cosmopolitan script across medieval Asia, and music and other expressive arts from Central Asia entered China, heavily favoured at the Tang court and popular in broader urban settings.

Tang Dynasty Poetry

The Tang dynasty was an era of rapid transformation in Chinese poetry. This period not only established the model of regulated verse, but also saw innovations in poetry that would greatly influence later times. The Tang dynasty was a golden age of music and dance, which were present at court and in the homes of officials, in drinking establishments, and in temples and religious festivals. Several Tang emperors' enjoyment of music led them to promote and engage in music—which in turn elevated the musicality of Tang poetic content.

The *New Book of Tang* notably describes Emperor Xuanzong as a music enthusiast who took part in performing:

> 玄宗既知律，又酷爱法曲，选坐部伎子弟三百教於梨园，声有误者，帝必觉而正之。
>
> Xuanzong knew music well and especially enjoyed *faqu*. He even selected three hundred musicians from the "string division" to be trained in Liyuan. Whenever a musician made a mistake in a performance, the emperor would always correct the error. (Translated by Kuang)

Music and dance thus occupied an indispensable position in the life of Tang court royalty (Kishibe, 1940; Schafer, 1985). Cui Lingqi's (fl. 713–765) *Record of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts* (*Jiaofangji* 教坊記) is one of many historical records of Tang musical cosmopolitanism in an urban setting. It is a collection of documentation on musicians and their careers and contains some of the music and tunes found in the Dunhuang region. The well-known line "Emperor Xuanzong loved music and loved new music" (玄宗爱樂爱新樂) validify the historical knowledge that forms of music and dance, as well as the social audience in the changes of the Tang dynasty, were thus intricately turned into art forms that carried the country's history.

Tang Frontier Poetry (Biansai Shi 邊塞詩)

Frontier poetry (*biansai shi* 邊塞詩) came into being as a genre in Chinese literary history in the Southern Dynasties. It contributed to the poetic imagination and cultural constructs associated with fixed characteristics or gender stereotypes: tough, austere, masculine (the North), versus soft, sensuous, and feminine (the South). Frontier poetry reached its heyday in the Sui and Tang dynasties, owing to constant warfare at the north-western borders. The characteristics and stereotypes of the genre became firmly established, and they continue to influence the literary construction of Chinese frontier imagery.

The north-western frontier was a popular theme in poetry of the High Tang period (c. 713–766). "Life on the frontier," which includes vivid narratives describing departure for the frontier, the difficulties of life in the deserts, and scenes of battle became a particularly important theme during the Tang. Dynasties in north-western China since the Han established a military defensive zone, the so-called border fortified zones (*sai* 塞 and *bianting* 邊庭), between the hinterlands of the Central Plains and the northern nomadic nations. Poems with titles such as "At the Frontier" ("*Saishang qu*" 塞上曲) would use the immense territories of lands bordering the Great Wall as their setting. Present-day Gansu, Ningxia, and Qingdao regions in the northwest, Xiao Pass in the northern Central Plains, and Dazhen Pass in the west are the inner borderlands of this zone. The external north–south and south–northwest boundaries were composed of concentric circles of defensive zones, forming a tiered regional structure, with Hexi and Longyou in a surrounding defensive formation for the Central Plains region.

Under the administration of Emperor Wu of the Han (Han Wudi, r. 140–87 BCE), at the end of the Western Han, Dunhuang Prefecture had a mostly Han population of more than 38,000. Immigrants and resident troops from the Central Plains brought Han culture, which flourished and established a solid foundation in Dunhuang, becoming dominant from then on. By the time of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties, the Dunhuang region for a time saw intermarriages between Xiongnu and Han and a rise in the popularity of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism.

The arts became integrated according to imperial state policies aimed at governing the ethnic populations of the Han, Sui, and Tang dynasties. Emperor Wu was the first ruler to bring the Music Bureau (*yuefu* 樂府) to full development. The Music Bureau collected poems and folksongs and provided music for court ceremonies and state sacrifices. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, urban civilizations centring on the metropoles of Chang'an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽 produced profound effects throughout the empire.

In 711, the Tang court established the Tang dynasty's first military commissioner of Hexi. The Western Regions became a border city hub, which melded different cultural systems, including Han of the Central Plains, Greek, Indian, Central Asian, and West Asian, before transmitting them to other border cities.

Interactions between the Central Plains and the Western Regions during the Tang dynasty have received the most attention from scholars, largely because of Chinese–Western exchanges taking place there. Tang dynasty frontier poems made up a significant part—one to two thousand tests—of *Complete Tang Poems* (*Quan tangshi* 全唐詩), an early eighteenth-century compilation.

Frontier poems existed in a narrow sense and in a broad sense. Narrowly defined, they refer primarily to areas along the Great Wall and in fortified borderlands in the Hexi 河西 and Longyou 隴右 region in modern Qinghai and Gansu Province; their authors had personally experienced frontier living. Broadly defined, Tang frontier poetry arose at the end of the Sui dynasty and the beginning of the Tang dynasty, peaked during the Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras, and continued to be disseminated during the middle and late Tang. Therefore, the frontier should have the prescriptiveness of history, but this was established only through practice, without precluding similar poetry from other dynasties. The topical content of frontier poetry as a genre was prescribed—it must relate to frontier living—but many poems expressed emotions, described objects and natural scenery, embodied correspondence between friends, and depicted spousal love without directly invoking war or the preparations for war, which influenced the shape of the Chinese empire and the lives of its people during the Tang dynasty. Because of this, the multi-ethnic performing arts depicted in frontier poems were more variable, featuring a kind of openness and sense of possibility. Even more broadly speaking, frontier poetry emphasised expressions of various subjects relating to the frontier, with the premise and background of frontier defence (Kuang, 2024).

North-western China, where Dunhuang is located, was a basis for Tang dynasty frontier poems. Tang poets Wang Wei, Zhang Yue, Li Bai, Du Fu, Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, and Liu Yuxi all wrote poems depicting the Western Regions, plus the music and dance of Chang'an. These literary works allow us not only to comprehend

the beauty of dance from hundreds or a thousand years ago, but also to choreograph dramas of Dunhuang performing arts: they contain descriptions of ancient music and dance, particularly the content and form of music and dance during the Han and Tang dynasties. These ancient poems, especially those depicting multinational music and dance performances of the Western Regions, provide the best materials for our present-day deconstruction, imagining, and reconstruction of cosmopolitan musical arts. As the overall research standards for dance arts have increased, the most profound effects of poetry on dance and the intrinsic relationship between dance and poetry have received greater levels of attention.

Music and Performing Arts in Tang Frontier Poetries

Wang Wei, composed a quatrain for his friend Mr. Yuan, second in his generation of his branch of the Yuan family, seeing him off on a journey to the remote northwestern frontier territory of Anxi, the "Western Region."

> By the walls of Wei City the rain at dawn dampens the light dust,
> All green around the guest lodge, the colours of willows revive.
> I urge you now to finish just one more cup of wine:
> Once you go west through Yang Pass there will be no more old friends.

As noted by Owen (2019), this poem, *Sending off Mr. Yuan to Anxi*, would become one of the most famous poems in Chinese literary history. Yang Pass, which is one of the most well-known historical landmarks along China's historic Silk Road, would also make its way into the musical composition.

We know that Wang Wei's poem had become a repeated song by the end of the eighth century and sang generally at parting banquets. Instead of pointing to the specific geographic location which it was named, "Yang Pass" became a metaphor in the song suggesting any remote destination for which the person was leaving. Interestingly, *Sending off Mr. Yuan to Anxi*, the poem's original title was lost as the song lyrics became generic. The new title, *The Song of Yang Pass* (*Yangguan qu*) delivers a musical or rather, performative suggestiveness, which is at the core of Chinese aesthetics.

What about music without words? "Yang Pass" also became one of the most popular Chinese 7-string *qin* compositions dated to the Tang dynasty. *Yangguan Sandie* ['The three strains of Yangguan' or 'Yang Pass with Three Repeats'] adopted the suggestive title as well as the sad sentiment of the original poem. The entire song is repeated three times with expansion in the last to emphasise the sorrow of separation, with a pattern of A (abc), Al (albc), A2 (albcd), coda. For the bridge linking each section, some *qin* players would slow down and add gliding tones to bring out the deep feeling of sorrow. The sombre tune and the obscure tone emitted the sadness of the farewell scene in the original poem.

In "Some features Chinese qin music," Yoko Mitani compared six versions of the first section of the *qin* piece, 'Yangguan sandie". It was believed that all six probably stem from the tradition of *Qinxue rumen* (1864). According to Bell Yung, different versions of the *qin* notation of this piece survives in thirty-three noted

exemplars s spanning several centuries, the earliest one from 1491, the latest from 1922. While Mitani believed the six versions are essentially coincident in melodic contour though different in metrical structure and rhythmic detail, Yung highlighted instead the "the ideology and performance practice of the *guqin* tradition.":

> Perhaps the most important factor here is the close and exclusive association between the instrument (and its music) and the literati of China, an association that dates back to the time of Confucius, who is said to have studied the instrument and enjoyed it. Among the many ramifications of this association is the emphasis which the musician/scholar places on the literary content of a composition. As Robert van Gulik writes, "special care is given [in the handbooks] to describing the mood the composer was in when he created his music, and what thought he wished to express in his composition. It is the highest aim of the player in his execution of the tune to reproduce faithfully the mood of the composer." (Gulik 1969, p. 88; quoted in Yung 1987, p. 84)

This is preciously the reason that the soundscape of Chinese music must be addressed beyond the sonic dimension and music technicality. In the case of the *qin* music, as Yung pointed out, the "mood" of a composition is prescribed:

> […] by its programmatic title and, in most zither handbooks, also by a literary preface to the notation. The primary aim of a performance is to evoke that prescribed mood; the musical sound itself is but a vehicle by which to arrive at that aim. The musician/scholar acknowledges that there is more than one way of performing a composition, so long as the prescribed mood is evoked. The emphasis on the literary content of the music rather than the musical sound itself is closely related to the nature and the function of the notation used by *guqin* performers. It is well-known that the notation, peculiar to this instrument, is a tablature which defines the string to be plucked, the position along the string to be stopped, and the manner in which the strings are to be stopped and plucked.1 It provides, however, only rather vague suggestion on the metrical, rhythmic, and phrasal aspects of the music. (Yung, 1987, p. 84)

Narratives of Tang Dynasty *Hu* Dances (胡舞)

Hu xuan dance was extremely well-received at court during the Tang dynasty. The *hu xuan*, because Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang greatly favoured it, became especially popular at court. People of Chang'an learned it, and it remained popular for half a century.

Tang poet Bai Juyi points out in *Hu Xuan Lady* that the female artists performing *hu xuan* were from Kangju 康居, also known as Kangguo 康國, present-day Samarkand. The Qing dynasty scholar Wei Yuanda 魏遠達 (1794–1857) investigated the evidence in *A Military History of the Qing Dynasty*《聖武記》: "The Middle zhuz of the Kazakh *jüz* or hordes is nomadic in pursuit of water and grass and lived in Kangju since the ancient times" (1984). Thus, the *hu xuan* dance in Tang poetry perhaps referred to the dances of the ancient Kazakhs. Because this kind of dance, introduced by the so-called Hu people, had strong and forceful tempos, with galloping and joyous movements involving spins and steps, it was known as *hu xuan*. The Tang dynasty *Comprehensive Statutes* (*Tongdian* 《通典》) by Du You 杜佑 (735–812)

states: "The dance involves spinning quickly like the wind; thus, it was commonly known as *hu xuan*."

Bai Juyi, in his famous poem *The Nomad Whirling Dancer: Against Adopting Foreign Customs at the End of the Tianbao Reign, the Northwestern Kingdom of Kangju Sent the Dancer as a Tribute* (《胡旋女-戒近习也 (天宝末，康居国献之)》), wrote of the *hu xuan* dancer:

> 胡旋女，胡旋女。心應弦，手應鼓。弦鼓一聲雙袖舉，回雪飄颻轉蓬舞。
> 左旋右轉不知疲，千匝萬周無已時。人間物類無可比，奔車輪緩旋風遲。
> 曲終再拜謝天子，天子為之微啟齒。胡旋女，出康居，徒勞東來萬裡餘。
> 中原自有胡旋者，鬥妙爭能爾不如。天寶季年時欲變，臣妾人人學圜轉。
> 中有太真外祿山，二人最道能胡旋。梨花園中冊作妃，金雞障下養為兒。
> 祿山胡旋迷君眼，兵過**黃**河疑未反。貴妃胡旋惑君心，死棄馬嵬念更深。
> 從茲地軸天維轉，五十年來製不禁。胡旋女，莫空舞，數唱此歌悟明主。

From Bai Juyi's poetry, we learn that the dancers performed *hu xuan* 胡旋, the nomadic style of whirling dance from Kangju 康居, based on a short note on the dancer's origin, which states that at the end of the Tianbao reign, the northwestern kingdom of Kangju sent the dancer as a tribute.

The poems of Wang Wei, Bai Juyi, and other Tang scholar-officials, such as Yuan Zhen (779–831) demonstrate ways of using poetry to express emotions and of using music and dance scenery to construct historical landscapes.

The Song Dynasty Song lyric (*ci* 詞)

China in the 1000s was recognized by Marco Polo (1254-1324) as one the most advanced societies in the world as he travelled from Venice through Asia.

Having re-established a central government after the Tang's collapse and the unrest of the Five Dynasties (907–960), the Northern Song court places high emphasis on civil administration over military efficiency, leading to one of the most humane, cultured, and intellectual societies in Chinese history. Highly cultivated in the arts and humanities, Chinese society under the Song dynasty (960–1126) was an era with impressive commercial and technological vibrancy "governed by poets," as Julie Landau put it.

In 1126, the court moved to the region south of the Yangtze River and Hangzhou was established as the capital of the Southern Song dynasty (1126–1279). The Southland, or the region south of the Yangtze River refers generally and geographically as *Jiangnan* 江南 was at the very centre of all the cultural creativities. Disproportionately important in Chinese cultural history, this region, *Jiangnan, is highly* romanticized in Chinese literary and historical texts as a place of desire, which has attracted nomads from beyond the northwestern borderland for centuries. As a conventional figure for pleasant scenery and drunken festivities in China's Tang dynasty poetry and Song dynasty lyric (*ci* 詞), Jiangnan is the "routinized, commonplace figure of desire, long-since stripped of its original rhetorical significance" (Owen 2015). The concept of "the Southland is best" became a

simplified rhetorical statement.

In comparison to the Tang frontier poetries that highlights the Northland and conjures the idea of majestic wildness and tough muscularity through images of boundless deserts, the Song dynasty lyrics invokes the Chinese aesthetic notions of subtle elegance, attention to details, and feminine beauty, reminiscent of *Jiangnan*, the place name for the Southland through imagery of bridged canal towns and soft spring willows as a spatial metaphor.

The emergence and early development of Song dynasty lyrics can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty's songbooks and lyricists, particularly from the early eleventh century until its end. *ci* lyric gradually thrived from the mid-Tang Dynasty. Initially, the prevalent form was the "short lyrics" (*xiaoling* 小令), commonly used at gatherings of officials. However, Song dynasty lyricists like Liu Yong, known for his frequent presence in the Entertainment Quarter, crafted song lyrics encompassing themes of love, travel, and adeptly handled the more complex "long lyrics" (*manci* 慢詞).

Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), alongside a younger generation of lyricists born between 1045 and 1056, played significant roles in the genre's evolution during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. This period marked the maturation of the genre and its recognition as literature to be both sung and read. Su Shi revolutionised lyric writing by introducing unconventional topics beyond the genre's traditional scope. He experimented with diverse styles and made lyrics more biographical by adding subtitles, prefaces, and specific internal references. His lyrics often delved into personal themes, such as dreaming of his deceased wife, topics not typically performed at social gatherings. Unlike the act of singing, Su Shi referred to the performance of lyric texts as "reciting" (*yin* 吟), employing a verb associated with classical poetry.

Shuidiao getou 水調歌頭 ("Song for the River Tune")

The moon—how old is it?
I hold the cup and ask the clear blue sky
But I don't know, in palaces up there
When is tonight?
If only I. could ride the wind and see—
But no, jade towers
So high up, might be too cold
For dancing with my shadow—
How could *there*, be like *here*?

Turning in the red chamber
Beneath the carved window
The brightness baffles sleep
But why complain?
The moon is always full at parting
A man knows grief and joy, separation, and reunion
The moon, clouds, and fair skies, waxing and waning—
An old story, this struggle for perfection!

Here is to long life
This loveliness we share even a thousand miles apart!

Song lyric, as a poetic form, involved writing or "filling in" (*tianci*) words or lyrics to pre-existing popular tunes, some of which originated as early as the 8th century. In the Northern Song period, this genre was predominantly focused on providing entertainment and leisure. Musical entertainers performed these lyrics in various settings, ranging from official banquets to the song houses found in urban entertainment districts. The genre served as a common form of entertainment across different social gatherings during that time.

The tune *Shuidiao getou* 水調歌頭 (Song for the River Tune) is probably one of Su Shi's most well-known lyrics. Su Zhe's visit to his brother in Xuzhou after seven years of separation coincided with the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival in 1077. The night before his departure, he composed a farewell poem using the tune "River Music" (水調歌頭), echoing a similar song his brother Su Shi had written for him the previous year on the same festival. Su Zhe's poem focused on the sadness of leaving and depicted the lonely boat he would board the following night, emphasising the distant separation the brothers would experience.

Upon reading Su Zhe's poignant farewell, Su Shi responded with his own song lyric. His poem took a different tone, centring on the theme of retiring from government service to return to their hometown. It concluded with vivid images of the brothers reunited and joyously spending time together back in Meishan.

Song dynasty lyrics emphasised the emotional resonance of images, akin to the sense of emptiness observed in Song landscape painting. This emptiness was perceived as a desired conscious state, fostering the ability to freely engage in artistic creations. In an era where personal sentiments were often kept private, scholar-officials like Su Shi freely shared his feelings in his compositions in the song lyric. The parallels between Song lyrics and landscape painting highlight the value placed on emotional associations and the freedom of artistic expression during that era.

Conclusion

Ethnomusicologists, espousing a discipline whose conceptual focus tends to emphasise both society and the individual, and both synchronicity and diachronicity, have attempted to outline models that take account of the historical and individual dimensions of music. As early as 1940, Charles Seeger was addressing the idea of music as historical evidence as early as 1940. By the late 1960s, Adrienne L. Kaeppler was tracing the history of Tongan dance genres, and by 1971, Jacob Wainwright Love was researching the history of children's songs in Samoa. In 1980, Kay Shelemay was pointing out that "an ethnomusicological study of a living music culture provides a multi-faceted and unique database, which in its totality may well illuminate important aspects of a culture's history" (1980, p. 235). The study of any artistic tradition inevitably implicates historical processes. These are not always the focus of research, but they often come into play in studies of specific genres.

As I argued in my forthcoming monograph with Indiana University Press,

Dunhuang Expressive Arts and China's New Cosmopolitan Heritage (2024), Tang poetry and Song lyric are indispensable for understanding the construction of China's Northland frontier culture and the Southland metropolitan culture that continue to shape the country's music and performing arts culture. Even today, the Tang poetry and Song lyric (ci 詞) is remembered and recreated for capturing the human sentiments, reflecting on home and distant loved ones. The Tang and Song scholars' poetic prowess continues to resonate, showcasing their ability to craft verse that was deeply affecting and emotionally resonant, creating a historic soundscape that became the foundation of China's expressive arts.

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Biography

Dr. Lanlan Kuang is an Associate Professor at the University of Central Florida's Philosophy Department. Specializing in Asian humanities, aesthetics, and heritage studies, her research focuses on China's media and cultural policies and their impacts on the country's socioeconomic developments. She is the Chair of the Florida Folklife Council for the Florida Department of State; a Visiting Research Fellow at the world-renowned Dunhuang Academy; and a Center for Ethnic and Folk Literature and Arts Distinguished Fellow appointed by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism for her contributions to safeguarding folk arts and heritage culture. Dr. Kuang holds a Ph.D. in Folklore and Ethnomusicology from Indiana University, Bloomington and was on a Fulbright in China in 2008-2009. Kuang's new monograph on heritage management and Silk Road expressive arts is scheduled to be released by Indiana University Press in 2024.

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Faculty of Music and Performing Arts
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
35900 Tanjong Malim
Perak, Malaysia
Email: impac@fmsp.upsi.edu.my
Telephone: +605 – 450 6702
Fax: +605 – 458 3602

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