

SOUTHEAST ASIAN EXPRESSIVE TRADITIONS: THEORIES, CONCEPTS, INNOVATIONS AND CONVERGENCES

Ramon P. Santos ¹

¹ Professor Emeritus at the College of Music of the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman

Corresponding author:

Ramon P. Santo
rpsantos@up.edu.ph

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Abstract

A discussion of the theoretical and conceptual constructs which would include the linguistic and aesthetic distinctions, as well as changes, innovations, and convergences in pedagogy and practice.

Asia is a region that is made up of societies which possess their uniqueness in terms of cultures, sense of spirituality, and philosophy. In the throes of the colonial era, Asia has become an even more vigorous and dynamic region in the world. Nation-states have emerged, as colonial powers began to relinquish their hold from their possessions. From a wider historical perspective, the waning of the colonial age which had brought European civilisation to bear on peoples outside its geographic boundaries is setting a new scenario where new roles and strengths are being assumed or exchanged in the larger sphere of engagement between the world's cultures as well as in local national arenas of cultural politics.

What makes the times now more challenging is the fact that while progress and modernity are upon us, we are at the same time faced with the challenges of reconstructing what may have been lost or what might

have been eroded through time of disuse, omission, or neglect, or what may have emerged through the long process of acculturation and assimilation. And even as we try to unravel this cultural dispersion and diaspora, dichotomies that emerged several decades ago are no longer clear-cut and ideologically untenable. Issues of cultural duality such as authenticity and change, acculturation and enculturation, preservation and modernization, indigenous and contemporary, classical and popular, the superordinate and subordinate cultures, emic–etic and insider–outsider, are becoming mere references to new structural profiles within the larger framework of cultural evolution. Thus, there is a need to know what symbols, meaning, form, and text are inherently Southeast Asian, their cultural values, and their relevance to contemporary life.

In the national agendas of Southeast Asian nations today, one can find ethnicity as a source of strength rather than weakness, in that pre-colonial ethnic traditions are repositories of insights, notions, and humanistic valuation of things. Part of this general consideration is the fact that it is also in ethnicity that spirituality is concretised not only in belief systems relative to the metaphysical world, but also in the application of such ideation and philosophical thought in dealing with the materiality of human existence. In the field of the traditional arts, such ethnicities have been redefined as styles, some delegated as “national” and others relegated as “regional” or “local”, and other categories based on modern academic hierarchical taxonomy. More specifically, ethnicity is even more dramatically manifested in the expressive traditions in which all of the above-mentioned notions of spirituality, philosophical constructs, sense of equilibrium, and aesthetic judgement are finely delineated in their exercise and practice.

In Southeast Asia, traditional expressive practices are a concrete manifestation of the dynamics of culture and the changes that occur in society from the point of view of history, politics, economy, and religion. Partly because of their highly functional role in the most important facets of community life, the various repertoires such as epics, ballads, lullabies, poetic discourses and debates, occupational songs, life cycle music-making, as well as all the ceremonies, theatres, and popular performances, all serve as mirrors to a deeper understanding of societies in terms of their biocultural evolution, social history, language, social organisation, healing practices, and even technological knowledge vis-à-vis their metaphysical and spiritual worldview.

In the context of the social functionality of these performances, the individuality of the performers becomes subsumed into the entire communal act. A concept of collectivity in both musical and other expressive traditions provides the focal reference in the realisation of these modes of production. But more than what is literally heard and seen in the course of these performative expressions, the ultimate message resides in the principle of balance between nature, man, the spiritual dimension, and the act of production.

Keywords: : Ethnomusicology, Gongs and bamboo traditions, Concepts of time in music, Sonic cosmology, Postcolonial cultural identity, Globalization and cultural transformation, Oral tradition and pedagogy.

Introduction

Theoretical and Conceptual Constructs

How then can we distinguish the theoretical properties, aesthetic and philosophical attributes of traditional expressive practices of the peoples of Southeast Asia from those of other cultures and societies in the world? Looking deeper into the plethora of performance-related activities in Southeast Asia, one finds an extensive and expansive field of elements that constitute the character and ethos of these practices, ranging from their materiality to their deeper conceptual and philosophical constructs.

The MATERIALITY OF GONGS AND BAMBOO

Aside from the forms of expression themselves, more fundamental characteristics may be cited in relation to the nature and character of these traditional practices. One of them is the materiality in the use of gongs and bamboo as a means of articulating and communicating messages not only among humans, but also with the natural and metaphysical environment.

In Southeast Asia, gongs and bamboo represent the main materials in the expressive traditions of societies and peoples. One of the earliest specimens of a metal instrument is the bronze drum-gong, which must have proliferated during

the Đông Sơn period in Vietnam and the Dian culture in Yunnan. Today, samples of the bronze drum have been found in practically all the lands in Southeast Asia and China except the Philippines and Borneo. Many of the gong and bamboo instruments bear similarities, but the instrumental groupings, the musics, and the performance practice vary from culture to culture depending on the historical circumstances surrounding each and every ethnolinguistic group.



Figure 1. Gong tradition in the Cordillera of northern Luzon, Philippines

The gongs predominate in these musical traditions just like the gongs-in-a-row which are represented by the Philippine kulintang, the guling tangan from Brunei Darussalam, the khong wong of the pihpat ensemble as well as the khong rang (gongs in a row) in Thailand, the bonang from the Javanese gamelan, the cíwaiñ (a circle of twenty-one gongs) and the maùñsaiñ (a rack consisting of nineteen small graduated gongs) from Myanmar.

On the other hand, there are also many bamboo instruments that are played all over Southeast Asia. Among the flutes are the khloy, an end-blown duck flute from Cambodia, the khloi, a vertical block flute from Thailand and a fipple flute from Laos, the sáo – a horizontal bamboo flute and the tiêu – a vertical end blown notch flute from Vietnam, the julü, a flute of the Lisu, the beluwat, the flute of the Karo Batak, the suling, an end-blown flute from Java, Bali, and Borneo where it has other names such as seruling, kesuling, and ensuling, and the pennig'n yog'n, a transverse flute from the Semang Temiar. The nose flute from

the Philippines, which is called kaleleng or tongali, also exists among the Senoi Temiars of Malaysia and is called salet. There are also reed pipes like pey pork, a side-blown pipe from Cambodia, the pi chum, a bamboo pipe with metal free reed from northern Thailand, and the raj nplaim, a free reed pipe of the Hmong that is used for courtship. There are also jews harp, as the ncas of the Hmong people in Thailand, the rangoyd of the Lanoh in Malaysia, the juring rangguin of the Senoi Temiar, the kubing from the Philippines, and the tong of Borneo.



Figure 2. Molam in Isan, Thailand.

Finally, there is the mouth organ, which are primary instruments in both northeast Thailand and Laos. The khaen (Thailand) or the khene (Laos) is a free-reed mouth organ with four standard sizes of six, fourteen, sixteen and eighteen bamboo pipes. It can be played solo, but it also has the primary function of accompanying the singing of lam or molam. Other types of mouth organ are the supotan, sumbling or tabarau of Borneo with its six to eight single-reed bamboo pipes, and the fulu of the Lisu tribe in Thailand.

In the musical cultures of Southeast Asia, gongs and bamboo remain predominant in the instruments that have been existing for thousands of years. They mirror the entire life of the peoples that inhabit this part of the world and are used for different purposes within a life of spirituality, a life of subsistence, and a life of communing with the natural environment.



Figure 3. The kwintangan kayu

One example of a unique practice is one that is still found among the Yakan of Basilan. The main instrument is the kwintangan kayu, a set of log beams attached to a bamboo pole and hung to a tree branch facing the fields. The kwintangan kayu is only played as soon as the seeds are sown in the fields, and then it is played with bamboo sticks by one or two persons, sometimes alternating, for days and nights until the seedlings sprout into plants. It is when they stop playing.

In analyzing this practice, the use of the musical element is merely a small part of the whole spiritual and physical phenomenon in that the sound is used solely to give energy to the seeds as well as a form of prayer to the gods who provide life to the plants, devoid of any human communication or the presence of a human audience.

These instruments and practices then express a cosmology of beliefs, which sustain the existence and the dynamism of everyday life in the villages as well as in the aristocratic courts in Southeast Asia.

CONCEPT OF TIME

In the field of sound-related expressive practices, a concept of time is conveyed and experienced in different structural properties, in the quality and quantity of sound and sound events, and most importantly in the relationships

that govern the interaction and organization of these musical units. Concepts of unmeasured time, quantified time, linear and non-linear time (Kramer), cyclic time, spatial and durational time, are levels of perceived temporalities representing various philosophies and views of either physical and metaphysical realities. In musical discourse, time is reflected in the almost infinite variety of elements such as timbre, duration of sounds, rhythms, pulses, and concepts of organizational hierarchies and non-hierarchies.

In his extensive studies of village musics in Southeast Asia, the eminent composer-ethnomusicologist José Maceda formulated some very interesting theories in the field of temporal cognition and expression. From his classic article on “A Concept of Time in a Music of Southeast Asia” (1986), Maceda focused on the phenomenon of drone and melody and its different manifestations in the musics of Southeast Asia as representing a concept of infinity, timelessness and equilibrium, whereby man and nature are hardly separated by temporal, physical and spatial boundaries. While it does not necessarily negate the existence of causal logic, its main source of aesthetic realization is in the qualities of sound, colors, decays, repetition, unmeasured time (absence of strong and weak beats), the absence of prescribed introduction and ending, and its interdependence with other expressive elements such as bodily movements and the environment.

In classical East Asian music, a very different concept of time may be experienced. Asian composers Isang Yun from Korea and the Chinese-American Chou Wen Chung, developed their compositional ethos and from the concept of a “single tone” phenomenon in Asian classical court and temple music traditions. The “single tone” music represents a different category of temporality in that while one entire musical piece may consist of a series of “single tone” elements, each “tone” is a piece by itself representing its own temporal space in a larger temporal environment, like a single Chinese character within a field of characters in the art of calligraphy.

While East Asian aesthetics centers on individualism and highly subjective representation, the classical traditions that flourished in the courts of Southeast Asia reflect a different conceptual framework. In Javanese Gamelan music, a concept of time is more elaborately expressed by the various families of instruments, each

having a characteristic timbre and resonance. On the basis of these sound events, each instrumental group serves a specific musical as well as temporal function in the so-called “colotomic” structure of the music. In this tonal-temporal “hierarchy”, the clear and brilliant sarons play the balungan or the nuclear theme; the long vibrating genders and the supple tones of the bonang play the ornaments; the flat sound of the ketuk divides the kenongan into smaller periods, the larger kenong marks the medium-sized phrases, and the big gong ageng underlines the largest division or the gongan. Thus, Javanese gamelan compositions or gending are realized through the relationship of the different temporal spaces created or filled in by the natural tonal durations of each instrumental type or grouping.

Thus, time is an inseparable characteristic of Asian artistic expression that sets it apart from the aesthetic framework of other artistic traditions, most especially the European expressive repertoires. To be viewed as the prime factors in contributing to holism in Asian art forms, it not only indicates aesthetic identity, but also reflects social and spiritual philosophies that shape, guide, and govern Asian life and culture.

THE COMMUNITY ASPECT

One particular aspect of Asian culture which has provided distinction is the sense and essence of community, which means an aggrupation of people bound by a common end, whether it is occupational, religious or social. In many performative events marking important occasions in the life of a community, the form and process of performances bear significance to both the material and non-material aspects of human existence. Highly distinct from European and the American characteristic of individualism and personal initiatives in the process of creating products, the sense of community permeates in all modes of doing in which sharing and cooperation is practiced whether it be in the matter of occupation, worship, communication, entertainment. There is always the dynamics of sharing and collective involvement in rites of passage, in initiations, weddings, death, and also in feasts and other forms of celebration. Other types of musical performances in relation to man’s physical subsistence represent a bridge between the metaphysical world and the material elements that sustain human life.

Our common activities, in a way, define our commonalities wherein each and every individual is involved and shares in the objective and aim of any activity. This concept of community is best manifested in our expressive cultures in both traditional practices as well as new creative expressions. Music, arts and culture are in great part, main instruments in our daily lives that are not only symbols but in reality, the ways by which we express our existence and our humanity. It is through the arts and culture that we can reaffirm our distinctiveness and reassert the uniqueness and character of the quality and value of life in the region. While the dynamic changes have been incorporated into the different cultural practices in each and every country, we can regard these as welcome additions to the plethora of forms and modes of expression in the entirety of Southeast Asia. However, there are still fundamental materials, syntax, methodologies, and ways of communication, performance and expression that are uniquely Southeast Asian, which we need to re-establish and revitalize in the midst of current cultural diaspora and globalization. What we have to do to cultivate our expressive traditions together, and to codify them according to new taxonomies that may not necessarily conform to western classifications. At the same time, we will be able to know the commonalities that exist across the cultures of Southeast Asia. And one common property in all these myriads of expressive forms is the element of community and communal modes of performances.

CONCEPT OF INTEGRATION

One of the most significant characteristics of Asian expressive traditions is the concept of integration. In these integrative forms, different artistic categories are merged in different ways of expressing a variety of meanings, concepts and philosophical constructs. This integration varies in scope, in terms of participation of the different elements that produce a unified whole, with its own aesthetic and hermeneutic focus. Such collaboration can involve sound, poetry, movement and dance, theatre, styles, as well as the community, time, nature, and the environment. Reflecting on the expressive traditions of Asia that are characterized by the concept of integration, collaboration, and cross-cultural cooperation among and between artistic disciplines, we find alternative directions in the creative field and

the performative media. It is no longer confined to standards set by the western artistic tradition, with regards to both vocal and instrumental inventories and repertoires, to the western concept of dance, to poetic discourse, and others, but going beyond what is usual and customary, and trying other combinations of the different elements, including the use of space and the metaphysical environment. An example from our traditional practices here in the Philippines is the babawkan of the Manobo from Mindanao island. In this form of expression, there are two performers: a man and a woman. The man plays the kudlong, or the two-stringed lute, and the woman plays the sauroy, or the polychordal bamboo zither. While strumming these instruments, the couple also dances in different choreographic movements. At intervals, the woman also sings, usually a ballad or simply a story. The combination of these actions cannot be characterized as “music”, since there is also the element of dance. Basically, it is a form of story telling, but expressed in sonic as well as kinetic performance.

Among the lowland Christians, the idea of ritual is very much alive as embodied in the paraliturgical practices that have emerged in the fusion between traditional worship and Christian tenets. One of these rites is the Tagalog subli from Batangas which is a para-liturgical rite in honor of the Holy Cross, or the image of the Infant Jesus. It is performed by men and women who first chant a religious hymn and then go into executing movements that show contrasting characters, to the accompaniment of drums and castanets. The men go into crooked, non-balletic, and unsynchronized movements, while the women, in uniform sedate fashion, move in little steps around the area. In this particular tradition, we see an integration of prayer, singing, bodily movement, and instrumental playing in a unique expression of piety and belief, which is intended not for human consumption, but for spiritual communication.

In related instances, the expressive art forms from the Indian civilization serve as the basis for ideas and theories that apply not only to music and dance, but also to architecture, psychology, and astronomy. It is common knowledge that the hundreds of ragas in Indian music each have a prescribed pitch set and their relationship based on mathematical ratios in relation to psychological conditions, and vice versa.

At the same time, the system of dividing time into beat cycles called “tala” is a way of expressing the aesthetic and emotional conditions over a specific time period. Thus, experiencing Indian classical music creates an atmosphere of convergence, in which both the emotional, psychological, and aesthetical states of both musician and listener are in harmony with time and place.

While Indian music can be in itself a self-contained form, it can also serve as a major element in a larger linguistic and expressive framework such as Bharata Muni’s *Natya Sastra*, which may be described as a total expressive act combining music, dance, and stagecraft, as well as providing the “key to the understanding of Indian arts, music and sculpture”. (Kak, 2003) As language, the *Natya Sastra*, may be paralleled to Euclid’s language of mathematics, and to Panini’s language of universal grammar. (Kak, 2003)

Under these circumstances, expressive forms such as music, dance, and even the plastic arts are not only the embodiment in both intangible and tangible forms, of man’s intellectual and physical attributes, but also of the universe, both material and metaphysical, that he is intended to synergize with. Even as we reflect on the concept of the seven arts that we inherited from western civilization, such distinction did not exist in ancient times, especially between poetry, oratory and musical discourse, or between composition, performance, theater, and visual design.

THE LINGUISTIC CHARACTER OF ASIAN SONIC TRADITIONS

Language is a form of communication that can be articulated in so many different ways. However, its fundamental purpose is to transmit messages, whether in the form of a spiritual representation, a metaphorical symbol, an allegory, or a concrete intended meaning or intentionality. Its main carrier of course is the human voice, with the assistance of gestural or even facial expressions. And in this sense, music, whose main element is sound becomes a principal player in the transmission process of meaning. In this sense, language is very much part of musical discourse in that it follows the age-old belief that much instrumental music is not merely an imitation, but rather a reproduction of the human voice. In Indian music, for example, the various timbres and colours of such instruments as the sarod, the violin, the sitar, and the veena are all facsimiles of the Indian

vocal quality, inflections, and contours, even as the tabla duplicates the mnemonic sounds of human speech.. In Indonesia, the rebab is also an imitation of the human voice, as the kraljapi of Thailand and the erhu of China.

In his essay on music and language, however, Theodor Adorno asserted that “the language of music is quite different from the language of intentionality” and that “it aspires to be a language without intention”. He further asserts that with “absolute intentionality, it would cease to be music and would effect a false transformation into language”. In the course of this discussion, the specificities of language and the ambiguity and absence of intentionality in music constitute what could be defined as the difference between the two in terms of the notions of structure, form, and meaning. While Adorno’s premises may well fit music and language as practiced in western civilization, one could take issue on the tangentiality of these notions when looking at the forms of human communication that come from other cultures and traditions, such as Asian sonic expressions.

With some fundamental aspects of communication, the nature, character, and effectiveness of traditional musics as non-verbal communication medium, becomes even more effective with its more attractive means of employing different materials, like gongs, or strings, or skins, as well as the various modal schemes in tonal production which in itself already produces meaning in terms of context and emotional and affective framework. (Gongs are supposed to be used for communication with the spirits, while bamboo and strings are used to communicate with fellow human beings.) Thus, the expressive traditions that are usually deemed by the west as “improvisatory” are actually forms of discursive communication, using tones as accents, and motifs are the equivalent of words, which when strung together, create quasi sentences that are artistically articulated and conveyed.

Innovations in Practice and Pedagogy

MODERNISM IN PRACTICE

Today, Asia has come abreast with modernity and has established societies that are progressive, developmental, and pragmatic in their outlook. While modern institutions in Asia have somewhat deferred to the western notion of the arts, the folk practices in such areas as dance, puppetry, folk theatres, rituals, and instrument making (all connected to musical performance) are part of the larger folk cultures in Asian expressive traditions. In the realm of the performing arts in folk communities, the issue of change is one dimension that the modern world has to contend with. The present forms of cultural practices are the result of the dynamics of culture change – changes in material and the physical environment, religion, ideological perspectives and social mores, mostly often brought about by external forces.

The secularization of the social environment has been one of the principal reasons for the change in moral values and ethos, as well as the separation of artistic practices from everyday life of the different communities in the region. Such changes are easily traceable to the advent and influence of western culture on the local way of life, the secularization of expressive cultures, the notion of public entertainment, concerts, sense of individualism, modern technology and its application in the arts, the commercialization of the arts in the context of popular culture.

The commodification of traditional expressions has become an imperative in the modernizing landscape all over Southeast Asia. The traditional art forms function in several ways, contributing to the material development of a country mainly through the general purview of tourism and globalization. As the prime emblem of cultural uniqueness and exoticism, traditional art forms have become a productive source in attracting the west to come and contribute to the economic growth of different nation-states. Thus, the people themselves have discovered one way to modernize some of these art forms is to reformat some of those traditions into performable pieces on stage for public consumption. Mainstreaming of discrete practices from various social environments in order to construct symbols

of national identity are forms of ramification and adaptation to new societal needs.

Some of these examples are the Malaysian bangsawan theater which had its roots in Indian stage performances, the Indonesian keroncong that started with Portuguese sailors and the dangdut which is derived from Hindustani, Malay, and Arabic musics, and the folk dances of the Philippines, combining indigenous and Spanish dance traditions into uniquely localized folk expressions.

COMMERCIALIZATION/GLOBALIZATION

What is highly significant in this entire global apparatus is that the rules of engagement are set by global political and economic forces in imposed or willing partnership with the nation-states that after centuries of acculturation, have set their national polity agenda on culture according to western aesthetics and artistic values vis a vis western economic standards and global market demands.

The tourism industry has further wrought its negative effects in the emendation of the character and essentialities of traditional cultures; e.g. rituals, theaters, epics, festivals, etc. in the process of catering to the taste and “artistic orientation” of modern audiences. Such audiences have imposed their own aesthetic will and demands on these forms and on the artists whose material remuneration is dependent on the pleasure of foreign audiences.

The dynamics of globalization draws its essence from the materiality of human production, creating new valuations of both the tangible and intangible modalities and mechanisms of music and other expressive practices. The commercialization of traditional music and the arts has become an imperative in the modernizing landscape all over the world. As the prime emblem of cultural uniqueness and exoticism, traditional art forms have become a productive source in attracting western markets to come and contribute to the economic growth of different nation-states. Hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, and other public venues including temples and even old palace grounds, are now exhibiting traditional performing arts as an alternative experiential commodity to foreign visitors.

As the traditional artists have joined the ranks of the professional community, the art forms themselves have undergone drastic changes in their aesthetic and intrinsic functional value. In today’s musical discourse, the issues of political capital,

power brokering and negotiation are topics often taken up in the academia and socio-cultural activist dialectics, all in reference to traditional musical productions vis-à-vis physical and material survival or the marginalization of culture bearers. The proliferation of Music Business programs in leading universities in Thailand, for example, results from new government directives specifying that each program in higher education must justify itself by ensuring that the graduates will earn a living from these specializations.

On the other side of the spectrum is also an interesting interplay between the dominant sectors that make up the mainstream society of each nation-state, and the indigenous cultures. The indigenous cultures remain as a natural resource from which global and national forces draw materials for production and representation. In this interesting scenario, the state distinguishes between classical practices and localized traditions, creating national emblems out of the classical practices while local cultures are relegated to folk performances or to academic studies in the field of anthropology or ethnomusicology. This may be seen in such countries as Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. Under such conditions, the indigenous cultures find themselves politically and economically hemmed in, even as they search for their rightful place, as socially unique and distinct entities within a national society and a global network of other peoples and nations.

With the knowledge that power resides in the mainstream global culture, indigenous cultures face the dilemma of either adopting its methods of thinking and existence, and appropriating one of its most potent, if not the most potent, sources of power – the economic market; or remain socially and culturally marginalized, if not isolated.

In a field visit in Yunnan province in Southwest China in May 1998, the local hosts presented one of the most popular music-dance genres among the Yi people, called Yan Wuo Wu or the tobacco box dance, so identified because of the small round wooden boxes that the dancers hold and snap the inside with their fingers in order to mark time. The Yan Wuo Wu is said to have more than 100 different patterns, depicting various aspects of the rural life of the village folks of the Yi nationality (ethnic community) residing in the Baxing township of Shi Ping county.

Thus, the dance patterns were known as “Shi-Ping pickled vegetables”, “Stepping on sogu” or “the monkey and the corn”. These dances are accompanied by the music of the sixiang xin, a four-string moon-shaped lute, or sometimes by the singing of the dancers themselves.

Another version of the tobacco box dance was later observed in a program prepared by the Cultural Center of the Shi Ping County Seat. This time, the performance was done by dance students from the Nationalities Institute in Kunming and the resident company of the Center. The choreography was done by Ms. Pang Su Jian, who had previously studied ballet in a formal dance school. The entire performance has been processed to conform to the requisites of theater entertainment, complete with identical silk costumes, theatrical lighting, synthesized music, and using the tobacco boxes more as props rather than as essential percussion instruments.

A different response to mainstreaming of cultural practices may be observed in some cultural communities in Southern Philippines. Among the upland peoples of eastern Mindanao island, family groups have been instituting their own small-scale cultural enterprises with the intention of sharing the opportunities in cultural industries that had been either monopolized by Christian lowlanders or directed by government bureaucrats.

In the district of Calinan in the fast developing city of Davao, two cousin chieftains of Bagobo-Diangan ancestral descent, Malandoy Munoy and Maximo Gabao, organized their families into a performing cultural group. The principal musical repertoire of the Bagobo-Diangan consists of music on the knobbed hanging gongs called tagunguan. Although the old tradition of its playing exclusively for religious rituals is no longer widely practiced, Munoy and Gabao were able to retain its technical aspects of performance as well as a few ancient pieces that they had learned from their elders. Today, Munoy and Gabao have evolved their own repertoires that include folk tunes and even modern pop songs. They have taught their siblings some of the playing techniques and the dances that are integral to the performance practice, and have virtually organized them into a troupe that could instantly perform for visitors, academic researchers, and tourism establishments.

In the foregoing examples, the stage and the public presence have become principal tools in validating the role and relevance of ethnicity in mainstream society. While these manifestations of cultural appropriation emit disturbing signals relative to the issue of aesthetic integrity, they could also reinforce the perception of indigenous communities on the importance of preserving and protecting the continuity of their ethnically distinct practices as a bargaining chip in the competitive world of cultural productions.

In the same manner that cultural industries may be viewed as a threat in imposing its parameters in the processing and packaging of cultural productions, the educational arena could offer a more flexible and pragmatic forum for negotiation in which both the indigenous and modern methodologies of pedagogy can be accorded equal significance. In the last twenty years, the concept of mentorship by master artists in oral traditions has been tried with great success in some formal teaching environments. Today, a more creative approach has been started with the establishment of “schools for living traditions” in selected villages in the Philippines. Although conceived within the framework of governmental patronage, it has encouraged some village artists to put up their own schools that would cater to a modern clientele of both natives and non-natives.

Today, cultural evolution is premised on the engagement between global and national entities, and the economically-deprived indigenous communities, with the latter recreating and reproducing their cultures to gain a share of the revenues in the cultural market, and hopefully regaining some leverage for negotiation and competition. It will be a long-drawn struggle and probably futile battle for some indigenous communities, unless the national polity intervenes in their behalf, and utilizes whatever bargaining position it may hold to confront other stakeholders in the global arena, to empower the indigenous peoples to participate in formulating the parameters and rules of cultural engagement.

COMPOSITION

Music composition and its essential socio-aesthetic attributes of individuality, expressive or artistic objectness, pre-determinative process, and its very nature as a mediated form of human communication, have all been part of the expressive

colonial inheritance from modern western civilization. As a globalized process in expressive productions, the concept of music creation as an individual act, has been adopted and accepted into the cultural life of any modern or modernizing state.

In Asia, the globalization of music composition is prominently epitomized by the hundreds and thousands of composers, who have assimilated the culture of individualism while mastering the techniques of music writing and have joined their western mentors in vying for individual recognition. As the west continues to wield its ideational influence on the arts of the world's cultures from its seat of economic power and global dominance, a new mode of world expression may be developing through the alternative sources of power based on non-western ethnicities.

In the works of Bela Bartok and Jose Maceda, two world renown composers, their musical expressions were moulded by their deep regard and understanding for ethnicity and ethnic sensibilities. Although they were both working under the purview of western European art music tradition, Bartok refashioned his structural materials according to the textual content of East European song repertoires, while Maceda sought to redefine music composition as an expression of philosophical thought directly or indirectly derived and suggested by [ethnic] village musical practices in Southeast Asia or the classical court traditions in East Asia. He searched for the semanticity and practical meaning of such structures as drone and melody, repetition, timbres, durations, and the phenomenon of untempered intervals and interlocking rhythms.

Two other prominent Asian composers Isang Yun from Korea and the Chinese-American Chou Wen Chung, also contributed to the philosophical dimension of music composition by developing their compositional ethos from the concept of a "single tone" phenomenon in Asian classical court and temple music traditions. According to Yun,

"notes can be compared to brush strokes as opposed to pencil lines. From beginning to end, each note is consciously employed as a means of expression. A note's changes in pitch are regarded less as intervals forming a melody than as an ornamental function and part of the range of expression of one and the same note." (Feliciano, 1983)

In his talks and writings, Chou has advocated the revival of the aesthetic views of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, which according to him, are a “most fundamental force in shaping the course of East Asian music” (Ryker, 1991). Part of these aesthetic views is the triadic integration of language, tone and imagery or poetry, music, and painting, as well as the representation of the cosmos in the musical sphere – the sound of the earth, the heaven and the human being. (It can be noted that a similar concept “Music of the Spheres” existed in western medieval philosophy.)

On the other hand, ethnic musical practices have provided Jose Maceda with an array of new structural materials by which he not only arrived at a new musical order but also extracted their semantic and social meanings that served as his points of trajectory in re-articulating them in larger dimensions as music compositions. The compositional outputs of Maceda actually demonstrated at least three paradigmatic levels of music creation that are rooted in the adoption of ethnicity as process and expressive construct. His early works such as *Ugma-Ugma*, *Agungan*, and *Kubing* illustrate the first level, in which sounds derived from distinctly ethnic domains (Japanese *sho*, Chinese *pai pan*, Indonesian *gender*, flat gongs from Northern Philippines, Chinese gongs, Maguindanao bossed gongs, etc.) are brought together in different combinations and densities, not to fuse or synthesize their sounds but to create a field of independent sounds in opposition to one another, negating in the process, a compositional logic based on melody, tonalities, and hegemonized textures. Another level is the exploration of abstractions abstracted from structures and structural settings that have been derived from the musics of Asia; e.g., drone and melody, repetition, sonic ambiguities, counts of four and the fifth interval, unequal and indeterminate dispersion of sounds, etc. These works represent deep philosophical insights into the modalities of village life – a sense of balance between the material and spiritual world, shared labor, relationship between man and his natural environment, music as a communal act, and indigenous knowledge-based technology. The third level is represented by a group of pieces that Maceda composed in the last years of his life such as *Sujeichon* and *Nan Kuan*, which underscore and highlight their distinctive ethnicities within the purview of a new musical language semantically and aesthetically shaped by his collective view and formulation of Asian musical thought.

From a wider perspective, the totality of Maceda's creative outputs show a whole range of emendations on the once unitary concept of composition as an artistic act. These works represent a variety of creative conditions - perceptual, conceptual, philosophical, affective, and experiential – by which one participates and communes with a differentiated musical circumstance and take part in the exercise of a new language whose syntactic parameters are determined by diverse expressive practices of ethnicity.

Composers from Southeast Asia contributed other aspects of expression which differ from the western linguistic norms of communication. One of these is what can be regarded as conceptual music which is based on extra-musical ideas that are neither abstract nor programmatic. Rather, it is constructed on concepts and ideas like time, society, difference, culture, etc.

A highly conceptual piece of music is Maceda's "Udlot-Udlot", a composition that is based on the concept of time in Southeast Asia as well as shared labor in the communities in the Philippines and Asia. In this composition, the structural elements are simple and can be performed by non-musicians, but what is striking in this work is the constant repetition of these structures and the slowness of their permutations as evocative of the concept of time and infinity in the Southeast Asian landscape.

A far more ambitious work that is based on a concept of atmospheres created by humans is "Ugnayan", involving the participation of communities of people creating a musical environment through the use of radios and the movement of the populace numbering in the thousands.

Ramon Santos composed a piece called Likas-An or "Nature-Ing" in 1978. The concept of the piece is the collaboration of nature in the creative act. He invented musical instruments that could not be fully controlled, like metal junks that I called "recycled carillon", hanging bamboo tubes called "kantawayan", electronic oscillators that was made by the college electrician, whistle flutes, plastic tubes, and different size nails that would be hammered into different sizes of wood. While there was a structural plan when the different instruments would enter, each performance would be quite different from another as "nature" was supposed to take care of the unpredictability of the actual sound and rhythms of the instruments.

On the other hand, creative artists who had been initially trained in traditional Southeast Asian musical forms, are now engaged in experimenting and innovating on the theoretical and technical aspects of composition and performance. Among these are Rahayu Supanga, whose piece entitled *Kartini* (after a princess in Central Java named R.A. Kartini, a pioneering feminist who lived in Indonesia in the late nineteenth century) is very much grounded on traditional formal structures of the gamelan including the concept of layering. Supangga has however added new sound sources and applied new vocal techniques as a way of extending the breadth of sonic colors.

Another composer is Sapto Raharjo, whose *The Kutut Manggung* was realized through digital sampling from a music computer keyboard replacing the traditional instrumental sounds. However, the structural coherence of traditional Indonesian ensemble music is what holds all the sonic elements together.

A highly regarded Cambodian composer is Chinary Ung, a former student of Chou Wen Chung, who had captured the essence of Khmer music in his celebrated works like *Inner Voices* for orchestra, *Khse Buon* for solo viola, and also for solo violoncello, *Singing Inside Aura*, for amplified singing, viola, flute, percussion, piano, violin and cello, all reproducing and replicating the sounds of Cambodian instruments, but more so the Khmer sentiments of spirituality and nature. In a similar mode is Kee Yong Chong, a young Malaysian composer, whose works like *Horizons Chantare II*, and *Yuan He* are dramatic replications of his Chinese heritage. While these extended elements derived from Southeast Asian expressive resources comprise a phenomenon that is undoubtedly part of the global influence of the western avant-garde movement, the interconnection between old and new is not necessarily premised on the interactive fusion of traditional Asian music elements and symbolic structures of the western avant-garde literature, but more as an enculturative process of evolving existing systems in the formalized musics of Southeast Asia.

CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGY

Today, the teaching of Asian folk traditions and repertoires have been subjected to changing pedagogical concepts, strategies and techniques that have

been brought about by western colonization, globalization, introduction of new technologies, and a post-modernist view of society and culture. On the other hand the adoption and transformative application of these strategies and techniques by local educators and modern culture bearers, may be seen as both direct reaction and creative responses to the challenges and dynamics of change (societal and social, political, economic, religious) in sustaining the continuity of, if not preserving, traditional musical practices and similar intangible heritage as sources of cultural identity and sense of selfhood. In this regard, innovative techniques of teaching local musics to a globalized and modernizing community, the utilization and empowerment of indigenous human resources in modern mainstream education, and providing the modern youth alternatives, incentives, and a new meaning to "old" practices through creative productions.

The highly diffused cultural landscape offers an even more challenging educational planning for academic leaders. In general, schools that are part of a university system emphasize a wider world view of musical practice that includes western music with its pedagogical tradition being applied to the study and learning of both classical and folk traditions, as well as other musical cultures (Oriental Music) where materials and expertise may be available. At the same time, the aesthetic and performative aspects of these musical practices themselves formulate and construct their own pedagogical and learning strategies.

In this regard, Asian traditional art forms have been re-evaluated and dissected to fit into the academic framework of western music education. The implantation of new educational and academic structures has created a condition in which traditional practices need to be studied from a learning tradition and educational process derived from the west; i.e. a consciousness for theory and practice (history, research, etc.), classroom teaching methodologies, and highly structured frameworks of learning. These traditions are further re-defined in terms of their aesthetic, functional, artistic, and social significance. Modern education has adopted the compartmentalized notions of the arts and therefore the approaches to teaching have been highly specialized according to various aspects of performance. Practical skills, aesthetic consciousness, canonic intuition, repertoire, notion of style, and creativity, which were all part of the integrated process of oral pedagogy and oral

practice, have now been reconfigured as separate abilities and instructional areas, such as theory, reading, notation, practical, aesthetics, literature, methodology, and composition.

The concern not to break away from the chain of transmission with the preservation and enhancement has been primarily realized through the employment of masters in the faculty ranks, not only in the study of traditional arts, but also in the application and reinvention of indigenous modes of learning. Whether they do actual teaching or simply lending their iconic presence in the teaching environment or classroom setting, the effect on the students is not only one of intimidation but also of inspiration, very visibly different as when they are just taught or guided in their practices by young lecturers. The long and short of the current situation is that master artists and pedagogues have now to adjust to the present order of things in the field of pedagogy. Thus, a master is asked to teach more and difficult repertoires to majors and less and easier repertoires to minors.

Because of the compartmentalization scheme of the new educational system, old forms of performance traditions have been schematized according to lengths and degrees of difficulty, as the entire concept of the music in constant permutation has become music as separate individual pieces just like in western music. Furthermore, the growing reliance of students on writing in all aspects of modern education has greatly affected aural memory which was the principal mechanism in both the learning process and performance practice of traditional expressive cultures. The issue here is not the notation per se, but the change of the entire concept of pedagogy, where time allotment is limited, the accessibility of the teacher (who is the living source of learning and not a music score) has also been temporally encapsulated. Before the advent of formalized teaching, pedagogy was exercised in homes and families. In such discipleship learning conditions, time was not prescribed and the main goal was not to complete so many hours of study but to learn the music the way the master executes it.

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY AND RESEARCH

And then, there is the discipline called ethnomusicology which has been conceived in the west and has now been adopted in practically all the major institutions of higher learning with music programs in Asia. Although the teaching of practice of ethnomusicology is differentiated from the west, ethnomusicology has become particularly popular in the realm of education in traditional musical arts. While it is considered as a non-performative discipline, it provides the door for “intellectuals” and theoreticians to enter the performative realm in traditional art forms. In a way, ethnomusicology is another form of modernizing the entire domain of traditional arts.

In this regard, research is one potential activity that can unravel what is unknown to us and yet have been existing in our midst for a long period of time, whether as culture or as history. It is an endeavor that can both tell us what is existing and at the same time understand their existence. But although research is a wonderful tool in knowing the unknown, its multi-dimensionality creates for its practitioners a dilemma in the application of the appropriate approaches and directions. In musical discourse, for example, what has been learned from the west in terms of theory and practice, may not be that relevant to the musical conditions in other cultures. According to John Blacking, “any assessment of human musicality must account for processes that are extra-musical and that these should be included in the analysis of the music. The answers to many important questions about musical structure may not be strictly musical.” (Blacking p. 89) Thus, the parameters by which one considers and deals with musical traditions from Asia should be the parameters that Asians would recognize, fathom, and apply. When expressive practices with sound are all categorized as music (from the western viewpoint), it is already a misnomer, since they do not possess the theory, nor the practice of the real music in western standards. Our research must therefore apply not only to a multi-perspectival approach but also to the unorthodox and creative techniques towards discovering the highly complex cultural realities in these traditions, and to find meaning, both esoteric and pragmatic, in their practices. It is for this reason that modern research should refocus its scope in revealing these parameters towards a true appreciation of the different forms of expressive traditions coming from different cultures, more specifically from Southeast Asia.

CONVERGENCES

As the whole world has become smaller in size due to the advent of technological advances in transportation and communication, regional alliances to exchange information and educational materials on local folk performing arts need to be put in place, not only as a means of understanding artistic practices outside our own, but also in discovering historical as well as cultural ties that had been temporarily severed by different colonial experiences. In this regard, the traditional performing arts can play a most important role towards gaining a feeling and sense of greater solidarity in developing and further cultivating cultural cooperation, regional integration and consolidation among the member nation-states. The arts and culture are in great part, the source of common identity among the peoples of Southeast Asia, and it is through the arts and culture that one can assert the uniqueness and distinction of the quality and value of life in the region.

At the height of the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information's various projects in the 1980's up to 2000's, a period of convergence materialized among the members of the ASEAN community, starting with five and later on to ten countries in the region: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. From the ASEAN Youth Music Workshop which was coming together of orchestral musicians from the different member countries, the projects turned into the different traditional cultures of the association. There was the Sonic Orders which was a field and laboratory study of musical cultures and systems in Southeast Asia, spearheaded by Singapore. The ASEAN Composers Forum on Traditional Music was conceived in order to orient composers from the member countries on the traditional music of the hosting nation in order to enable the participants to create music derived from the theoretical constructs or materials of the cultural musical practice.

In 2014, the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music held an International Symposium "Classical Music in ASEAN Context", which attempted to bring all music practitioners together: composers, music educators, musicologists, and interdisciplinary experts in tackling the meaning of "classical music" from the perspective of a global audience, but at the same time, using the ASEAN context and promoting a mutual understanding of musical cultures between ASEAN Countries. Among

the performers was the ASEAN Youth Ensemble (AYE), which was a partnership project between the Ministry of Culture, Thailand and the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music. The AYE aims to promote a mutual collaboration between young musicians in Southeast Asia through a joint performances of young musicians, and calling for music experts from each country to experiment in combining traditional music from their individual countries.

The ASEAN Youth Music Camp was revived by the Philippines in 2015, which featured traditional instruments common among the ASEAN member countries—gongs and bamboo—while gathering a select group of alumni from the same traditional music field of expertise, to serve as adult leaders for their respective delegations. In keeping with the provisions of the Declaration on “ASEAN Unity in Cultural Diversity: Towards Strengthening ASEAN Community”, the camp is supposed to promote the idea that cultural traditions are an integral part of Southeast Asia’s heritage and that it is an effective way of bringing Southeast Asian peoples together to recognize their regional identity and relatedness. While the different countries have a diverse yet common tradition of music played on gongs and bamboo instruments, the camp aimed to celebrate the dynamic presence of gongs and bamboo music traditions that had their beginnings centuries ago and yet remain strong to this day, as practiced in communities all over Southeast Asia. As the delegations each had its own presentation of their traditional musics, the final piece was composed by the camp director, Ramon P. Santos, using all the instruments that were brought by the participants, proving the possibility of the different timbres and colors eliciting a uniquely Southeast Asian sonic experience.

In 2019, Narongrit Dhamabutra’s “Civilizations of ASEAN”, A Concerto for ASEAN Instruments and Orchestra was held in Chulalongkorn University. It featured a roneat aek, a dan day, a sow sam sai, kaen, gender, and pat waign, together with a western chamber orchestra. While the form derived its structural materials from the west, the Asian instruments lent their distinctive timbres and flavor to the whole composition.

The 14th SEADOM Congress “Empowering Music in Society: Celebrating Diversity, Connecting Communities” was held at the Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music in March of 2025. Among the different activities including keynote

sessions, panel discussions and group dialogues, what stood out was the production of a modern theater in a giant digital design with live music coming from a piphat ensemble, reinforced with Indonesian gamelan gongs and Philippine bamboo instruments, with martial arts dance, dialogue and singing, and the use of leather puppet-like cut-outs. This conglomerate performing art form was the product of a collaborative effort which is highly contemporary and yet truly Southeast Asian in spirit and character. Such a production could presage future efforts in the invention of new creative works through artistic partnerships, the use of the plethora of instrumental and other sonic resources, as well as the utilization of Southeast Asian dramatic forms.

These series of convergences have led not only to new efforts at revitalizing relationships with neighboring societies, but also in re-establishing cultural affinities and kinship amongst the peoples of Southeast Asia, amidst the diversity of traditional practices that have evolved in the entire region. It is to be hoped that this energy and determination can be institutionalized in order to ensure the consistency of efforts to continue strengthening the legacy of the past, even as we forge new paths into the future in expressing and articulating the humanism of our Southeast Asian civilization.

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