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Review Essays

Additional Data

AEMR 15

The Number 15 of AEMR is again a mixture of 8 articles and 3 review essays pointing toward up-coming events. One great topic coming up will be a choice of outstanding biographical studies on music and dance, on various musicians and dancers. Right the first paper is a good beginning into this direction, Sanubar Tursun and Her "Global Moments" by our chief editor. Not less important are all other papers and reviews that reach out from Azerbaijan to New Zealand and from South to Central Asia.

AEMR, also being distributed as printed issue, published by LOGOS Berlin, is striving for higher quality papers and encourages scholars of various fields in music research to submit full papers or reviews of writings, events, or projects.
The central email: aemrc@shcmusic.edu.cn is the main address of the journal, that will receive sub-missions.
In order to make all issues available online, the publisher has introduced a small section with full previous issues in slightly lower resolution. In case you need a printed version, please, contact the publisher. ISSN Number and layout did not change. There are special conditions for purchases of two numbers. Please, also look at our changed Editorial Board. We welcome the newcomers Nurtaza Raushan Sabyrzhanovna, Jonathan P.J. Stock, Rewadee Ungpho and Gong Hong-yu. The Board had a hybrid meeting last November (2024) and integrated finally these EB members.

All who feel the wish to contribute to the success of this journal, can read the last section of this number online or as print. There are plenty of hints about how to submit and how to create a good submission. Additionally, we really will only accept approx. 4000-word papers as articles. It is still crucial to download a model article or review essay of approx. 1200 words for comparison.
AEMR Editors
June 2025

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SANUBAR TURSUN AND HER "GLOBAL MOMENTS"

Xiao Mei[1] [萧梅]

Abstract

It is often said that those prominent personalities in the recent history of music and dance heritage contribute significantly to the cultural landscape of a nation or community. These peaks are not isolated cultural entities but leave unique and irreplaceable "global moments" on the map of music history. Unlike the "global moments" highlighted in European music historiography, exemplified by figures such as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, these individuals gain global significance through transcending local experiences, crossing cultural boundaries, and connecting to the global network via their creative performing activities. This micro-historical perspective is essential for understanding global music history. This paper will explore the "global moments" created by prominent figures in a nation's music scene, focusing on the Uyghur musician Sanubar Tursun. Renowned for her profound artistry and deep connection to her cultural roots, Sanubar Tursun has become a vital bridge between the local and the global. By composing music to the poems of Tagore, Abai Qunanbaiuly, Yesenin, and others, she not only celebrates the literary and cultural heritage of various countries, eras, and ethnicities but also creates a rich mosaic of musical dialogues. Her work exemplifies how an artist can transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, fostering a global appreciation of diverse musical traditions and thus creating unique and irreplaceable "global moments."

Keywords

Sanubar Tursun, Uyghur musician, Rabindranath Tagore, multiethnic translation, global moment

INTRODUCTION

Contacts and encounters between various musical cultures represent nodal points in the network of global music history—what Bohlman refers to as the "global moments." In his book, *Introduction: World Music's Histories*, Bohlman identifies three important "global moments"—technology, missionaries and colonies, and the World's Fairs (Philip V. Bohlman 2013: 1–20)—to examine moments of global encounters between some musical practices. Viewed from a macro-historical perspective, these factors provide essential tools for exploring the interconnections among global music cultures, offering a narrative framework rich in ontological connectivity. However, the historical tapestry within this framework is woven by the musicians and their musicking, who navigate the historical warp and weft of the world.

Notable figures such as Bach and Mozart are widely recognized as masters of European classical music, leaving a lasting impact not only on the history of classical music but also on global perceptions and value systems surrounding music. Their influence extends deeply into global music education systems and performance practices, establishing them as a "global moment." However, when we broaden our perspective, it becomes clear that every community, nation, and ethnic group has its own distinguished figures in the history of music and dance—individuals whose creative brilliance has illuminated the cultural peaks of their societies. This raises an important question: can these figures, too, leave behind a distinctive and even irreplaceable

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"global moment" on the historical map of music? How do they transcend local experiences, cross-cultural boundaries, and connect their creative and performative practices to the global network of music-making? Understanding these processes is a crucial dimension of approaching global music history from a micro-historical perspective.

This paper will discuss the "global moments" of a prominent ethnic figure by examining the case of Uyghur musician Sanubar Tursun, who has composed music based on the poems of Tagore, Abai Qunanbaiuly, Yesenin, and other poets from different places and backgrounds.

Sanubar Tursun

Sanubar Tursun (Figure 1) is a well-known Uyghur female musician, born on 7th January, 1971, in Yining (Ghulja, 伊宁), Xinjiang, into a musical family. She was the seventh in the family of 11 children. Her father, Tursun Memet, was a skilled performer of various Uygur instruments, especially the dulcimer (Chang，چاڭ), and was also an instrument maker. He became a member of the Yili Military District Cultural Troupe when it was founded and then joined the Xinjiang Provincial Military District Cultural Troupe in 1956. In 1959, as a member of the People's Liberation Army's cultural and artistic performance troupe, he participated in the 10th anniversary celebration performance of the founding of the People's Republic of China in Beijing. The state leaders who watched the performance included Chairman Mao, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and so on. During this performance, he earned the honorary title "Tursun Chang" for playing the dulcimer covered with silk, an act that garnered applause from all musicians present.

All 11 children in the family play the tambur, dutar, or sing songs. Five of them have pursued careers in music. From a young age, Sanubar was immersed in Ili folk songs and the 12 Muqams in her family environment. She recalls her father always playing instruments with them and her mother singing some Muqams to lull them to sleep. The learning process in their home focused on ear training, self-teaching, and imitation. Sanubar's elder brother, Nur Muhemmet Tursun, who played the tambur and the setar, created unique playing techniques and styles during his long practice, transforming these traditionally accompanying instruments into solo instruments. His performances have been appreciated by the Uyghurs worldwide.

Figure 1: Cover design of Sanubar Tursun's album *Arzu* (Songs of the Uyghurs) distributed by "Proper Music." Picture in the public domain.

Following in her father's footsteps, Sanubar began her career as a professional musician specializing in the dulcimer. She graduated with a major in a dulcimer from Xinjiang Arts University in 1994 and initially worked in the arts troupe of a steel company before joining the Xinjiang Muqam Art Troupe in 1999. In addition to the dulcimer, she nurtured a passion for singing

while accompanied by the dutar and formed her own band during this time. Although she composed many songs, she eventually grew dissatisfied with the limitations of single melodies and developed a desire to learn the musical knowledge necessary for polyphonic composition and orchestration for ensemble works. She first studied music theory at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and was later admitted to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 2009 to study composition, at the age of 38.

"She is someone who has devoted her youth to music—a true musician." This was a note I recorded during my first interview with her in September 2014. She shared that during her studies at the Shanghai Conservatory. She was given many opportunities to perform in international collaborations. Gradually, she realized that when she performed for foreign audiences, they expected her to play the most "authentic" Uyghur music, while the conservatory's education required her to be "symphonic." After several years of exploration, she found her way back to simplicity and steadily preserved the Uyghur music styles.

In 2008, the renowned pipa player Wu Man invited her and her younger brother to record the album "Borderlands" by Smithsonian Folkways, which was released in 2011. They subsequently undertook a concert tour under the same title. Collaborators for this event included the famous Tajikistani dutar player Sirojiddin Juraev, as well as the Italian musician Andre Pixini, among others. In 2013, her album *Arzu* (Songs of the Uyghurs) was released internationally, featuring muqam and Xinjiang folk songs. As the disc's liner notes say,

> "Stylistically Uyghur music lies somewhere between the Central Asian heartland and the sound worlds of Mongolia and China. In many ways it is closely related to neighboring Central Asian urban traditions" (Proper Music Group Website, 2025).

This series of events has earned her international recognition and invitations to perform in concerts organized in Konya, Paris, London, Geneva, Toronto, and other places.

However, the "global moments" around which this paper is centered are not Sanubar's dissemination of Uyghur folk songs in the international arena. Instead, they focus on her exploration of composing songs to the poetry of foreign poets that resonate with her audience, expressed in her rich Uyghur style of songwriting. Through these compositions, she invites us into microcosmic "global moments" of cultural mobility.

The Network of Global Cultural Mobility: Between Sanubar and Tagore

The first time I heard Sanubar sing *Kongula Nasihat* (كۆڭلۈمنى تىنىچلىق قىلىدۇ) in the Uyghur language, which means *Peace, My Heart*, I didn't realize at all that it was a song composed to lyrics by a foreign poet. Because the Uyghur audience at the concert was able to sing along with her, I initially assumed it was an authentic traditional folk song. When I learnt that she had composed the song in 2006 using a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, Sergei Yesenin and Bella Ahmadolinna, Venezuela's Burelli Rivas, and the Kazakh poet Abai Qunanbaiuly. She also used poems by lyricists from other ethnic groups in China.

Poems	Birth and death of the poems' author	The Original Poems' Language	Title of the poem	Title of the song	Year of composition by Sanubar
Rabindranath Tagore	1861-1941	Bengali	nameless	Kongulga Nasuhat （Peace, My Heart）	2006
			Ziyan-ni toldurush	Bahar kiler(Spring is Coming)/ Tozup yene echilar guller (The Ever-Blooming Flower)	2008
			Kilidu muha bbat yashlighi m bilen	Kilidu muhabbat yashlighim-bilen (The Love That Locked My Youth)	2020
Sergei Aleksandro-vich Yesenin	1895-1925	Russian	unknown	Naxsha bolup yashay yiningda (Living by Your Side Like a Song)	1999
Bella Ahmadolinna	1937-2010	Russian	unknown	Birelmeymen sanga (I Cannot Give You My Love)	2000
Rahile Bekri	1973-	Uyghur via Chin-ese	unknown	Oghlumgha soz (Wise Words)	2018
Abai Qunanbaiuly	1845-1904	Kazakh	Eyittim Salam Kalamkax	Eyittim Salam Kalamkax (Confession to You, Black Eye brows)	2020
Régulo Burelli Rivas	1917-1984	Spanish	Ey Hayat Soyimenseni	Ey Hayat Soyimenseni (Hymn to Life)	2020

Figure 2: The poem titles are in Uyghur and have been retranslated from their Chinese translations, making it impossible to trace the original text. The English translations in parentheses were provided by the author to aid non-Uyghur readers' understanding. (Overview in table format by the author.)

Thus, Sanubar's musical practice goes beyond previous understandings of her as not only a singer and inheritor of traditional Uyghur music, but also as a musician who transcends local experiences, crosses cultural boundaries, and accesses global networks with her own composing-performing activities. This raises several questions: Why did Sanubar compose songs to foreign poems? How did these foreign poems find their way into her reading? And why are her compositions accepted and loved by the Uyghur people?

The first question can be more easily answered. To my knowledge, as a singer-songwriter, Sanubar has composed more than 100 songs so far, of which more than 40 tunes are popular in the Xinjiang region and are even loved by listeners as authentic folk songs. She has a great love for poetry, which, along with nature, serves as a key source for her creativity. Whenever she feels an impact of the minds and a resonance of emotions while reading poetry, she picks up the dutar and starts playing and singing straight away. She told me, "I first read Tagore's poem in 2006, and the poem hit me as if I had written it myself. I had the melody in my head as I read it" (Tursun, Sanubar, and Xiao Mei, 2024). From this, it can be seen that although the authors of poems have national boundaries and the poems are expressed in specific languages, the content, meter, and emotions of poetry can be appreciated and sung across cultural boundaries by people from different countries and ethnic groups.

The second question to address is how foreign poetry entered her reading? Sanubar told me that she read those foreign poems neither in their original languages nor in Chinese. Her ability to perceive meters in the poems depended entirely on the Uyghur translations (ibid.). Through my

research, I learnt that the foreign poems Sanubar read in Uyghur were mainly secondarily translated from Chinese.

One notable example is *Kongulga Nasuhat*, the Uyghur version of Tagore's poem, which appeared in an anthology titled *Wounded Hearts: Selected Outstanding Foreign Poetry*, translated by Perhat Ilyas (ئىلياس پەرھات) and published in March 1998 by the Xinjiang People's Publishing House. The translator was born in Ili in 1964 and studied at the Central Minzu University in Beijing from 1982 to 1987, after which he returned to Xinjiang as a teacher. After 1990, he worked as an editor for the Xinjiang People's Publishing House and the Uyghur edition of Selected Translations of World Literature. In addition to that, he has also translated works by Hui and Han writers. Perhat Ilyas' experience is not an isolated case; during my research, I have learnt that many foreign and non-Uyghur works have been translated into Uyghur primarily from Chinese translations. Thus, to answer the second question, therefore, we also need to examine the context of Uyghur text translations of Sanubar's compositions to foreign poetry.

Tracing the written history back, Uyghur authors presented two remarkable works to the wider world almost simultaneously in the 11th century—the philosophical poetic drama Blessed Wisdom (Qutadğu Bilig), written by Yusuf Khass Hajib (يۈسۈپ خاس ھاجىپ) in Kashgar in 1069–1070, and the encyclopaedic dictionary of Turkic Languages (Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk), completed by the linguist Mehmud Qeshqiri (مەھمۇد قەشقەرىي) in Baghdad in 1072–1074. Subsequently, for a considerable period of history, poets in Uyghur society mainly adopted a creative tendency to emulate classical poetry, with a gradual decline in their contacts with the outside world. From the 1920s to the 1950, Uyghur literature came into contact with Russian literature, and in the 1940s, with Kazakh literature. After 1949, there was a massive influx of Chinese and Soviet literature, resulting in the emergence of several Uyghur translators. This brought Uyghur literature "from an 'isolated island' that had been silent for so many years to the oceans" (Talat Ibrahim, 2012). Since its inception in 1979, the Selected Translations of World Literature (Uyghur Edition) has been published as a monthly journal featuring 12 issues per year, translating foreign poems into Uyghur, with all translations being re-translations from Chinese sources.

If poetry translation embodies a process of cross-cultural communication, it is at the same time a means of communication, as it tells which nations interact with each other. To explain why Perhat Ilyas chose to translate Tagore's poems, it is necessary to mention the process of how Tagore's poetry entered the Chinese consciousness. According to the introduction to the 1922 edition of Stray Birds, translated by Zheng Zhenduo, Tagore's poetry first reached the Chinese world in 1922. In that publication, the translator mentioned that there were six collections of Tagore's poems published in English: (1) Gardener, (2) Gitanjali, (3) Crescent Moon, (4) Fruit-Gathering, (5) Stray Birds, and (6) Lover's Gift and Crossing, which were supplemented and reprinted in 1933 and 1954. Subsequently, a large number of different translations of Tagore's poems in the Chinese world have been based on these six collections (Zheng Zhenduo 1922:4). Since *Kongulga Nasuhat*, the poem that Sanubar chose to set to music, features a title she inscribed based on the poem's content, and because Perhat Ilyas' translation only bore the serial number 42 without a specific title, it remains unclear which of Tagore's original poems inspired her song. Unable to contact the translator for the time being, I went through all six collections of Tagore's poetry but could not find the original poem. Finally, I found a book published in 1997 titled *Chinese Translation of Tagore's English Poetry* by Wu Yan, a senior translator from Shanghai Translation Publishing House. That book, in addition to the aforementioned six collections, is supplemented with another anthology of Tagore's poems compiled by Tagore's

grandson-in-law Krishna Kripalani in his honour, which contains 131 poems that are numbered instead of titled, in which the poem numbered 42 is none other than *Kongulga Nasuhat*.

Through Sanubar's song, we see that the translation of poetry is like a series of bridges connecting cultures. Tagore's original poem was written in Bengali, which he himself translated into English. And the poem No. 42, after Wu Yan's 1997 Chinese translation, soon had a re-translation into Uyghur. That one poem eventually spanned four languages and was titled by Sanubar, becoming a Uyghur song accompanied by the dutar. We can see that translation weaves a network of global cultural flows whereby the poetry is allowed to break down ethnic and national barriers and enter a wider scope.

As to why Tagore is so favoured by Chinese literary translators (Islam, S. Manzoorul, 1995), it is not only because he was the first Asian poet to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, but more importantly because of his great sympathy and love for China, and his tenacity with regard to independence and defiance of colonial hegemony. He travelled to China three times in his life, but that should be another story. Notably, each of Sanubar's compositions based on foreign poems has a story behind it, through which one can learn not only about the process of translation, but also, more importantly, about the literary value of each of the poets featured in their own right, and the social context and ideological conditions under which they were chosen and translated by translators of different nationalities and ethnicities.

The "Localized" Singing

To answer the third question, "Why are her compositions accepted and loved by the Uyghur people?" It is essential to consider both the audience's recognition of her work and the distinctive characteristics of her compositions.

As mentioned above, among the nearly 100 songs she has composed, approximately half have gained widespread popularity in Xinjiang. In 2015, she participated in the Shanghai World Music Festival, where her repertoire primarily featured Ili folk songs and muqam, demonstrating her deep understanding of Uyghur traditional music. In recent years, her musical activities have become increasingly frequent. She has held solo concerts in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Urumqi, all of which were sold out. Additionally, she has organized multiple online concerts, each attracting tens of thousands of viewers. Notably, during her Xinjiang tour from January to March 2024, audiences actively participated, with people of all ages attending, creating an electrifying atmosphere where tickets were in extremely high demand. After one of her performances, an audience member commented, "I first heard this song, Console My Heart, when I was 19 and could not fully grasp its meaning. Now, at 26, I find myself deeply resonating with its emotions" (Comment on the website NetEase Cloud Music).

From my perspective, despite not receiving formal vocal training at a conservatory, her singing has an undeniable emotional impact. She once told me,

> "My voice is neither powerful nor bright, and my vocal range is not particularly wide. However, in my performances, I focus on highlighting the most distinctive stylistic elements of the music and expressing them with sincerity" (Tursun, Sanubar, and Xiao Mei, 2024).

Her mastery of Uyghur musical styles did not happen overnight; rather, it stems from her deep accumulation of traditional musical knowledge, which she has skilfully integrated into her compositions. To better understand her creative style, I will analyse some of its key characteristics.

Many of her works illustrate how she adapts and innovates within the Uyghur musical tradition. The following are three representative examples.

Whether it is the study of musical styles or literary translations, it is important to avoid "swallowing the Western without digesting it." In China's modernization process, experience borrowed from abroad is often criticized for its "foreign accent," but Sanubar's compositions based on foreign poems transcend local experiences and cultural boundaries, yet remain deeply connected with Uyghur musical traditions. To explain how she has accessed global networks with her own composing-performing activities, it is necessary to inquire into the characteristics of her compositions.

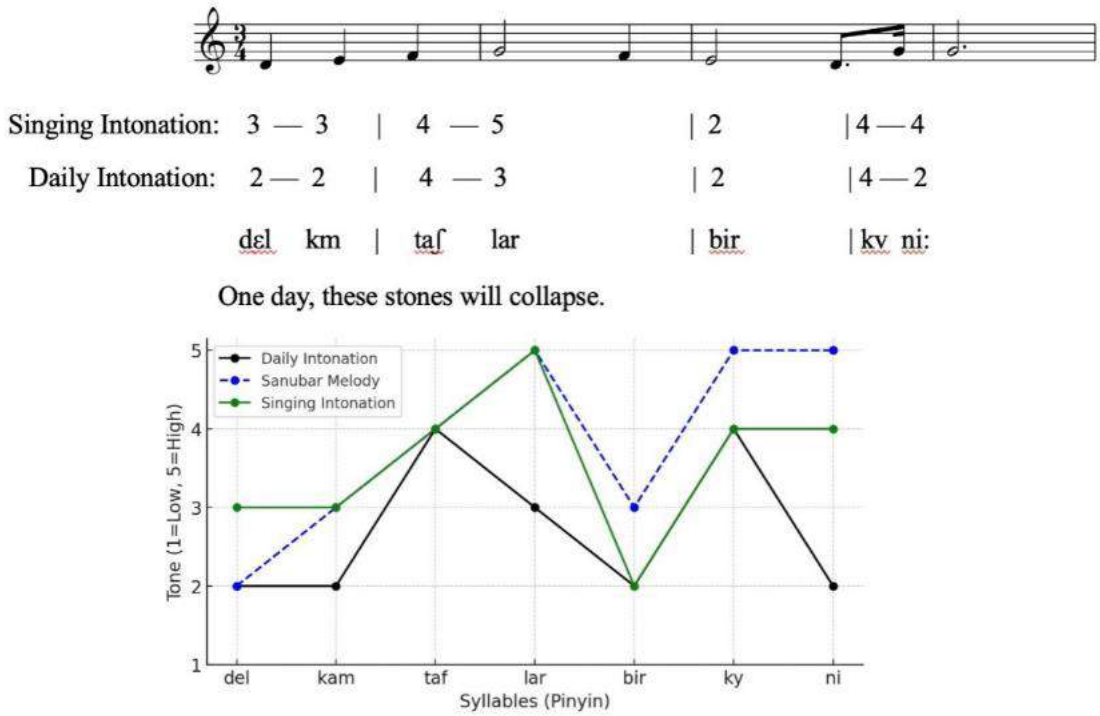

Figure 3: In this example are shown the named differences between singing intonation and daily intonation. (Analytical writing by the author.)

Sanubar's "compositions" are not written in a textual style, but are sung directly while playing the dutar and letting the melodies flow out of her heart. Naturally, during such a compositional process, she has naturally utilized the musical styles she is most familiar with—a style of Uyghur folk songs, especially Ili folk songs, as well as the style of the 12 muqams, while also absorbing elements of pop music. This arises from the fact that she grew up in an environment with a very strong atmosphere of ethnic customs. Indeed, some patterns can be found in her mastery of musical styles, which are mainly reflected in the following aspects.

1) In the composition of a song based on a poem, the relationship between the tunes and the words is most important. In Sanubar's compositional process, she starts with the lyrics' phonetics, paying attention to all the syllables and intonations. In the Uyghur language, intonation is primarily reflected in the rise and fall of vowels and the placement of stress. Sanubar believes the melodies of the muqam music also take the lyrics' phonetics as an important element, and that is the tradition. Therefore, she focuses on the Uyghur language's use of the eight vowels in speech. When she encounters certain vowels that would not articulate well in singing, some alterations must be made.

Thus, when she recites or sings the lyrics, she also employs her own distinctive singing intonation. Based on this, I referenced the International Phonetic Alphabet's notation for pitch patterns

and compared the intonational contours of the first line of Peace, My Heart "كۈنى بىر تاشلار بەلكىم" (belkim tashlar birküni), in daily intonation, singing intonation, and melody (see example in Figure 3).

In addition, the arrangement of syllables, accents, and the meters they form is the core of the rhythmic beats—a key aspect in how the speech tones are shaped into a melody, and even the soul of a song. For example, Sanubar's arrangement of accents in the first line of Tagore's *Peace, My Heart* (Kongulga Nasuhat), with four syllables, del-kim tash-lar, |ta ta ta |ta - - |, would be suitable for triple meter. Obviously, the melodic contour basically corresponds to the language intonation, and tonal accents are emphasized by the triple meter rhythm.

For another example, the song she composed to a poem by the Kazakh poet Abai Qunanbaiuly has the first line, eyttim salam kelem kax, "greetings to black eyebrows." Considering its syllabic rhythm as well as the meaning of its content, the choice of 7/8 time is required. The meters, syllables, and rhymes of each line of the lyrics require different rhythmic beats. Therefore, the lyrics and the melody are naturally intertwined. This is the fundamental reason why Sanubar's songs have a strong Uyghur musical character.

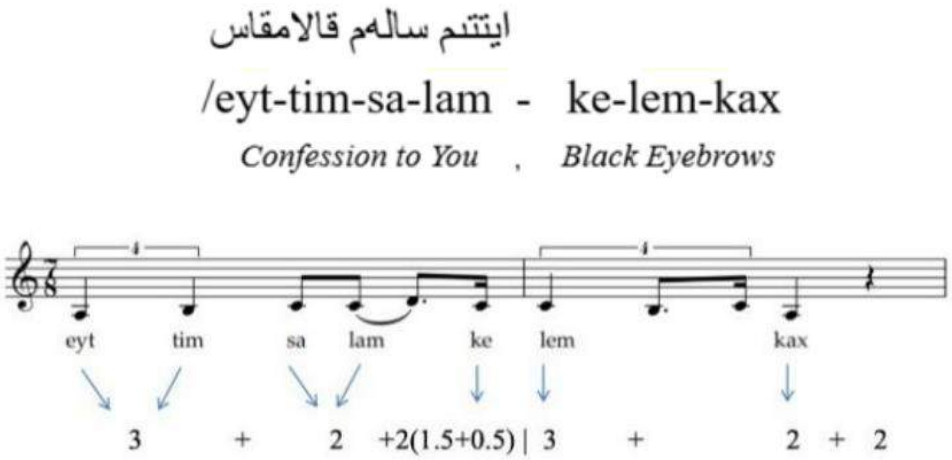

Figure 4: This second example shows that the lyrics and the melody are naturally intertwined. (Analytical writing by the author.)

2) As a singer-songwriter, the way Sanubar sings is also an important factor in the success of her songs. Sanubar strives for a beautiful vocal expression of every line of words, every word in the melody, and even every letter in each word. Because she composes her melodies while singing, she pays close attention to the meaning and emotion of the lyrics, which requires a high degree of the rendering of the "meter." For the sake of the meters, the words are not sung in their entirety in order; some redundant parts could even be deleted occasionally to fit better with the tune as it unfolds. In order to better express the meaning of the words, Sanubar will use her facial expression, adjust her vocal resonance to the articulation position of the words, and even utilize her body movements to achieve the best timbral effect and musical expression.

Moreover, I have observed that Sanubar's audience is not limited to Uyghur listeners—people from other cultural backgrounds also deeply appreciate her music. This is closely tied to the multicultural and multiethnic nature of Xinjiang, a land where diverse communities coexist and interact. In this region, Uyghurs, Han Chinese, Kazakhs, and other ethnic groups live harmoniously, exchanging cultural influences. The interweaving of different musical traditions has provided Sanubar with a rich source of inspiration for her compositions.

In September 2023, while chatting with Sanubar at Xiyou, a well-known live house in Urumqi, we noticed a dombra hanging on the wall. Sanubar recalled that when she was a child, her arms

were too short to play the dutar comfortably, so she often practiced on a custom-made dombra crafted by her father. Unlike the dutar, whose bridge is positioned near the bottom of the soundboard, the dombra has its bridge placed at the centre. When she prepared to play and sing with the dombra, a then student, Zhang Shan, instinctively picked up the instrument and attempted to move the bridge downward to make it resemble the dutar more closely. However, Sanubar adjusted it back to its original position. When Zhang Shan asked, "Why not place the bridge the same way as on a dutar?", she responded, "Shifting the dombra's bridge to the bottom would indeed make its tone more similar to that of a dutar, but the proportion between the bridge position and the string length is also crucial. Altering the bridge position would result in inaccurate high notes, so I prefer to keep it as it is and rely on my fingers to adjust dombra's pitch and timbre" (Tursun, Sanubar, and Xiao Mei, 2023).

This anecdote vividly illustrates how, through years of musical practice, Sanubar has mastered the skilful use of her fingers to bring out the essence of Uyghur music on different instruments.

3) In order to be more suitable for singing in the Uyghur language, Sanubar also needs to make some arrangements of the lyrics. Those modifications are also part of her ongoing understanding of the poems. For instance, for a poem by Tagore translated as تولدۇرۇش زىياننى (which means *Compensation for the loss* in Uyghur), in order to express her own understanding in singing, she chose one line in the lyrics, *Spring is coming*, as the title of the song. Later, according to her further understanding, she chose another line of the song, *Flowers blossom unceasingly*, as a new title for the song.

زىياننى تولدۇرۇشم	**Compensating for the Loss**
بار ھەسرەت ، بار ئۆلۈپ	There is sorrow, there is death,
بار ھىجراننىڭ ئاچچىق ئازاتى	There is the bitter torment of separation.
باردۇر لېكىن ئارام، شادلىقمۇ	Yet, there is also peace and joy,
ھەم ئويغاقتۇر ئىلاھنىڭ كۆزى	For the eye of the Divine remains ever watchful.
ئاقار تىنماي مەڭگۈلۈك ھايات	Eternal life flows ceaselessly,
كۈلەر قۇياش، ئاي ۋە يۇلتۇزلار	The sun, the moon, and the stars will smile.
باھار كېلەر رەڭدار تون كىيىپ	Spring will arrive, dressed in vibrant colors,
توزۇپ يەنە ئېچىلار گۈلۈر	And flowers will bloom again, endlessly.

Figure 5: A translation of the poem *Compensation for the Loss* by Perhat Ilyas. [ئىلى پەرھا] . 1998. *Wounded Hearts: Selected Outstanding Foreign Poetry*. Urumqi: Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 4. Arrangement and text in the public domain/by the author.

Adaptation is the most significant feature of traditional music. This feature differs from the music existence mode centred on "works" or "texts." It is enriched through the continuous innovation and variation of performers in repeated musical practices. During my interaction with Sanubar, I once mentioned that her rendition of the muqam was different from the recorded version. She replied,

> "When I sing, some traditional muqam performers find it unconventional. This is because muqam singing is typically based on the rhythm of dap (hand drum), whereas I accompany myself with the dutar. Without the constraints of dap, I have more freedom in my interpretation. I also make a conscious effort to emphasize

> the most important words in the lyrics. I believe that I don't necessarily have to follow dap's rhythm to perform this song. I sing from the heart, and as long as I feel that my approach is valid, I will continue down this path. Moreover, I think that the recorded versions of muqam today do not fully capture its essence. muqam can be enriched through certain modifications. That's why my performance style differs from that of the Xinjiang Uyghur muqam Art Troupe. Up to now, I am the only one who has broken away from this rigid structure. Perhaps this will inspire you to see muqam from a different perspective" (Tursun, Sanubar and Xiao Mei, 2024).

In this regard, as Rachel Harris pointed out in her research on Uyghur music,

> "I would suggest that prior to the 20th-century emphasis on national canons, the Twelve Muqam existed less as an actual body of music, and more as a kind of idealised notion or framework surrounding a much more fluid oral tradition, from which individual musicians would learn and perform different parts, and into which musicians might slot their own local repertoires and compositions" (Harris, 2008: 138).

It is worth mentioning that the original language of the song *Kongulga Nasuhat* was Bengali, and Tagore could not avoid shattering the original meters of the Bengali language when he translated his mother tongue into English, although in his own view, meter is the highest ideal he pursues— "the fundamental principle and the key to unlocking the mysteries of the universe" (Ji Xianlin, 1999: N.p.[2]).

4) In this regard, some experts believe that Tagore's English translation of his poems, due to the condensation or abridgement in the translation, has lost the original Bengali poems' meters, rhythms, and subtle wording. Yet Tagore himself also realized this, and he wrote in a letter to a friend in this regard,

> "Once upon a time, a certain emotional breeze caused a joyful interest in the heart; nowadays, somehow, it is being anxiously experienced again through the media of other languages." According to Wu Yan, Tagore's translation is "a kind of re-experience and re-creation" (Wu Yan, 1997: V).

Then, the Chinese translation of his poems is still a kind of re-experiencing and re-creation. Both Wu Yan's Chinese translation of the poem No. 42 and Perhat Ilyas' Uyghur re-translation of that endeavour to bring the prose-like free-form poem back to metric poem. Like Tagore, Sanubar also attaches great importance to the "meters" of her songs and regards them as the first principle of composition. Thus, we seem to find a chain of metrical shifts: Bengali meters—English prose—Chinese meters—Uyghur singing meters, the return of meters.

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[2] These materials published in Beijing (by the South Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) later in 1984 were used in the Bengali works already by Sisir Kumar Das and Tan Wen. 1965. *Bitarkita Afifhi*. Calcutta: Prama.; And also in Sisir Kumar Das. 1965. "Hostility During China Visit", The Statesman, 6th May.

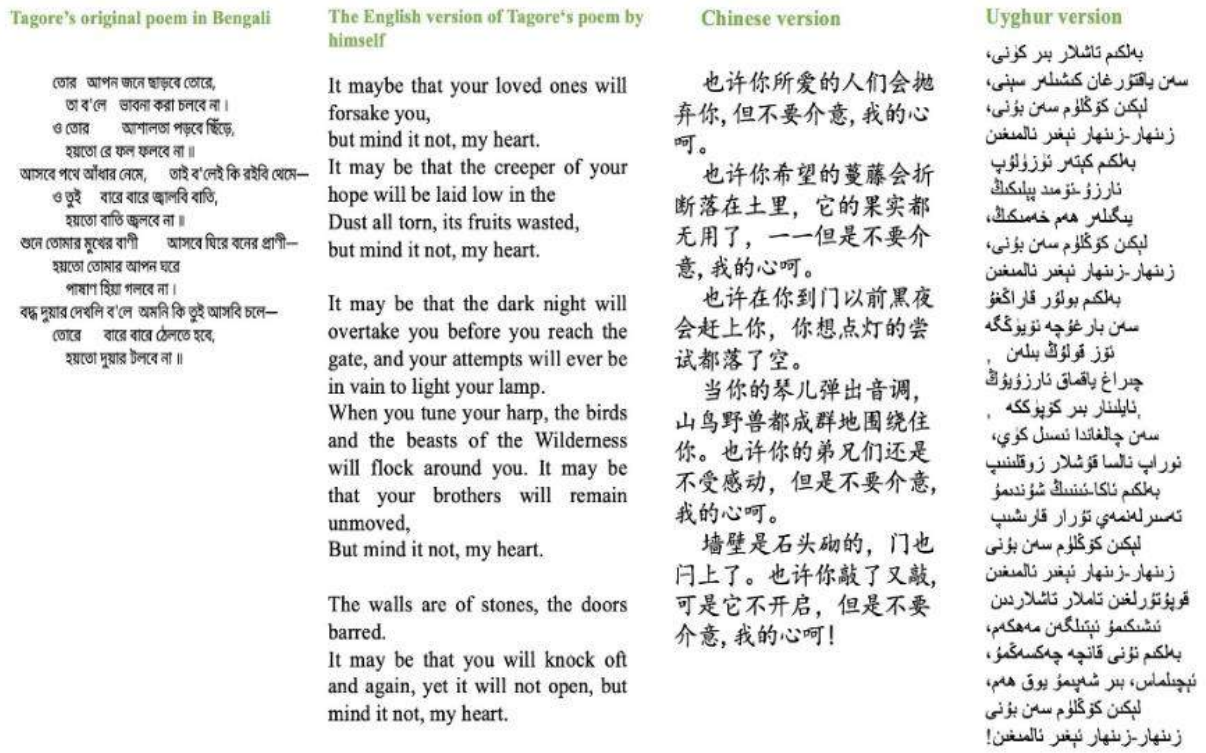

Figure 6: This arrangement shows four language versions of *Peace, My Heart*: The original poem and the English version are quoted from https://www.geetabitan.com/lyrics/index.html, last accessed August 30, 2024. The Chinese version is quoted from Wu Yan, 1998, *Chinese Translation of Tagore's English Poetry*, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1997: 642. The Uyghur version is quoted from Perhat Ilyas, *Wounded Hearts: Selected Outstanding Foreign Poetry*, Urumqi: Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 6.

Through a single poem, one may reach that which allows everyone to reach the microcosmic global history of music—a so-called global moment brought by Sanubar.

Conclusion

Today, with the rapid changes in the global order and geopolitical tensions, populism and trade protectionism are on the rise, which not only challenges the old concept of globalization, but also creates rifts and uncertainties in the world. However, there will always be various forces from the people of different places fostering new forms of promoting the narratives of globalization; the example of Sanubar and her music is a testament to this complex dynamic.

Through her reinterpretation and performance of classical poetry from diverse cultural and geographical origins—India, Russia, Kazakh tradition, and beyond—grounded in the culturally diverse era and homeland that shaped her life, Sanubar has created a vibrant and evolving global moment. Much like the traditions of muqam and other forms of the canon of music, which have gained new meaning and resonance through centuries of transmission and adaptation, Sanubar's music is not merely a preservation of tradition but an active reimagining of it. In this process, Sanubar has transcended her identity as a singer recognized within the Uyghur community, emerging as a significant individual on the global stage.

What is to glimpse through Sanubar's music, perhaps, is not simply a story about setting a certain poem to music, but the vision of one—or even multiple—new worlds. These worlds are not defined by any form of centrism, but by a reconfiguration of transnational connection and

mutual support. In this sense, they resemble golden threads woven across continents—a connective fabric of shared experience and cultural dialogue within the broader narrative of global history.

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The French Cultural Acculturation Process in Vietnamese Songs Before 1975

Tạ Hoàng May Anh[1]

Abstract

Vietnamese songs emerged as a necessity due to the influence of French culture. When Vietnamese New music emerged, Vietnamese people had their own songs. These songs not only inherit elements of Western culture but also bring characteristics of Vietnamese people's composition. The interaction between Eastern and Western cultures in this genre is expressed in various ways. The characteristics of content, theme, style, and genre of the song reflect not only the Vietnamese society of the time and the thoughts and emotions of the Vietnamese people, but also the ways of importing French culture into Vietnam. The musical characteristics, ethnicity, and influences of Western culture are expressed through three typical elements such as structure, material, and tonality. This created an intersection of Eastern–Western culture in the genre of the song.

Keywords

French culture, acculturation, Vietnam, song, Vietnamese music before 1975.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century, French culture deeply influenced many areas of social life in Vietnam, through various means. The fields of arts and culture were greatly influenced by this process, in which the art of music, and particularly Vietnamese songs, expressed this very clearly. The French brought Western musical genres to Vietnam along with new styles of music and writing. It fundamentally changed the way Vietnamese music was composed, from traditional forms of folk music to the fixed form (Bui Huyền Nga, 2002; Đỗ Hồng Quân, 2015) of authorship. The birth and transformation of the music genre in Vietnam from the early 20th century to the early 1975 is one of the pieces of evidences of the exchange and reception of French culture in Vietnam.

The research purpose of this article is to clarify the effects of the French acculturation process on the birth and characteristics of the Vietnamese song genre before 1975.

The approach methods employed include musicological and interdisciplinary approaches to analyze and compare works. It also combines musicological aspects with historical culture to examine the results when comparing musical characteristics in the Vietnamese song genre with Western music in general and French music in particular.

This research method uses theoretical research methods to analyze the musical characteristics of Vietnamese songs and explain the characteristics through the process of French cultural acculturation, more specifically from the characteristics. French songs and other musical forms and instruments were imported into Vietnam.

The impacts and benefits of research results are mainly for the field of musicology. The research results can be considered a reference for those researching music history, music theory, and composition.

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This research will focus on analyzing the process of formation, development, reflection of the social situation, and musical characteristics of Vietnamese songs before 1975 in the context of receiving the influence of French culture and art. The study also highlighted the effects of French culture on Vietnamese music as well as the analysis of Eastern–Western cultural interference in these works.

The Structure

At the beginning of the 20th century, when the French appeared in Indochina, they brought new cultural trends to Vietnam and had a profound influence on the culture of art. In history, this period represents important cultural exchanges that profoundly transformed the artistic scene in general, and particularly music. It is in this context that the genre of Vietnamese song was born. In Vietnam, in all genres of music, we can say that the genre of song always plays a predominant role in reflecting social life, which is remarkable compared to other musical genres. It expresses the musical language of the time in a flexible and characteristic manner. In terms of formation, development, content character, and music of this genre under the influence of French culture, it can be analyzed with two main elements: French culture in Vietnamese song and Eastern–Western exchange in the musical language of this genre.

Vietnamese Songs Reflect Ways of French Cultural Acculturation

The history of world music over different periods has proven that intercultural interaction is indispensable. In the 20th century, this became more powerful and clearer than ever with the introduction of Western civilization to the East, and vice versa, Asian artistic culture began to spread to the West. In Vietnam at this time, the French brought changes in politics, economy, culture, and art. In art, we saw changes in the fields of painting, sculpture, architecture, and the like with an expressive language; the different styles from traditional art have long been in our country. Also, with music, the influence of French music created the emergence of new music genres, contributing to improving the level of theory, composition, performance, and enjoyment of music in Vietnamese society. In the book *Lược sử âm nhạc Việt Nam* (*History of Vietnamese Music*), researcher Thuy Loan mentions the development of the Vietnamese music scene and the cultural revitalization of the West, in which French music, above all, contributed to the emergence of new music genres, including the type of song. The Vietnamese song was born from a combination of cultural, social, and historical factors, including the elements themselves and the elements absorbed from abroad, in which French cultural adaptation played an important role. French music spread to Vietnam in different ways, from community activities, education, religion, communication, and media. Conversely, it is the characteristics of Vietnamese songs, both in terms of lyrics and music, that clearly reflect how French culture entered Vietnam. We can say that these songs reproduced the process of introducing French culture to Vietnam in the early 20th century. The manifestations of the process of introducing French culture into Vietnamese songs are analyzed under two aspects: the direct effects of French music and the indirect effects of French cultural activities.

The Direct Impact of Western Music on Vietnamese Songs

The direct influence of French music on the formation and development of Vietnamese songs contributed to the birth and formation of the compositional language of this genre. This influence is divided into two elements: the first is the influence of French vocal forms in the formation of Vietnamese songs, and the second is the influence of Western musical compositions on the composition of this genre.

First, about the influence of French vocal genre in the formation of Vietnamese song, in the French music scene, which is very popular with the Chanson genre—a genre of music that

emerged from the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance and is widely understood as songs with lyrics. In Vietnam, previously, only folk songs, which are unpublished songs, were used for the entire community, associated with human activities. For this reason, folk songs often have many variants to match the style and culture of each locality. When French songs became widespread in Vietnam, melodies and rhythms immediately became popular among Vietnamese intellectuals. Initially, they put Vietnamese words to these songs, forming the movement Lời ta điệu tây (Vietnamese lyrics, Western music). Until 1938, when Nguyễn Van Tuyen, a songwriter, first presented his works in Hanoi, it gave birth to new Vietnamese music, marking a period when Vietnamese people composed and played their own songs. This is the time when the Vietnamese song was officially published, and only after a short period, this genre developed a variety of very rich styles. These songs are different from folk songs because they are works by specific authors. They are fixed on the melody, so basically no variations. The song is divided into three trends: patriotic, revolutionary, and romantic. From the above three trends, songs have been developed with different themes and genres such as praiseworthy songs, collective songs, marching songs, dream songs, lyrical songs, sympathy songs, folk songs, folk music, and, moreover, there are also songs for children. The song has become the most used type of music in the lives of Vietnamese people until now. Western culture in general and French culture in particular also contribute to shaping a new way of writing in Vietnam, which is poetry with a romantic, lyrical style. After the influence of French romantic literature, a movement of romantic poetry appeared in Vietnam, including the new poetry movement of the Tự lực văn đoàn group. In Vietnam, at that time, many famous works were composed by poets such as Màu Thời Gian by Nguyễn Xuan Khoat (poem by Doan Phu Tu), *Cô Hái Mơ* by Van Cao (poem by Nguyễn Binh), the songs *Lời Kỹ Nữ* (poem by Xuan Dieu), *Bông Hoa Rừng* (poem by The Lu), T*iếng Thùy Dương* (poem *Ngậm Ngùi* by Huy Can), *Lời Vũ Nữ* (poem by Nguyễn Hoang Tu), *Tiếng Hát Thu* by Le Thuong (poem by Luu Trong Lu), *Tống Biệt Hành* by Vo Duc Thu (poem by Tan Da), and the like (Thụy Loan, 1993: 111). And until now, composing songs by poetry is still a popular way in Vietnam.

The influence of French music is an opportunity for Vietnamese people to interact with Western music through a wide variety of musical genres. This contributed to the birth of larger vocal compositions. Genres such as choir, opera, chorus, and theatrical play were born as a manifestation of Western musical acquisition through French cultural reception. The appearance of these genres shows a positive change not only in terms of performance and composition but also in terms of enjoyment and the aesthetics of music for Vietnamese people.

The second is about the influence of access to Western musical instruments on the composition and performance of Vietnamese songs. In the process of cultural exchange, the French also brought Western musical works, performances, and Western musical instruments to Vietnam. Since then, musical instruments have gradually formed in the musical life of the Vietnamese. For this genre of song, the form of the song with musical accompaniment composed by the composer himself gradually formed. This genre is known as the category *Ca khúc nghệ thuật* (Art song), which is close to the Romance vocal genre of Western music. This shows progress in art and professionalism in Vietnamese songs.

Western music in general and French music in particular are also introduced to Vietnam through distinctive brass bands. At the beginning of the 20th century, brass bands were popular in big cities, from national or military performances to orchestras playing in gardens or public places. Previously, in Vietnamese music, only traditional musical instruments such as đàn bầu, đàn tranh, sáo, nhị, and so on were played. The orchestras we most often encounter are the Bát âm orchestra with eight types of instruments and the large and small orchestras of the royal court. Most of them use traditional Vietnamese instruments. Since the 20th century, the structure of the orchestra using brass instruments has begun to appear more and more in Vietnamese music. Conversion to brass orchestras with many works used in military or ceremonial rituals and large-scale national community activities became very popular. The interpretation of Vietnamese songs with brass bands in solemn ceremonies is still widely used today.

The Indirect Effects of French Cultural Exchange on Vietnamese Songs

The composition of Vietnamese songs was influenced by not only musical activities in general but also cultural exchanges through the reception of French culture in Vietnam. This is the spread of knowledge, performance, and musical composition in the spirit of Western music through music lessons in French schools. In addition, the introduction of Western religions to Vietnam is another factor of cultural exchange that has a significant influence and is reflected through the type of song.

About the influence of French music education in Vietnamese songs, music classes in French local schools play an important role in introducing French culture to Vietnam. These schools mainly teach children of local French officials, but also Vietnamese children. These people are the link in the transmission of French music in terms of music theory and popular in terms of characteristics and techniques of Western musical instruments. Vietnamese people first learned to play Western instruments, popularly known as the piano, violin, cello, flute, trumpet, trombone, and the like; after that, Vietnamese composers used these instruments in orchestras dedicated to a group of instruments. They can be played alone or accompanied. In addition, for orchestral works of small to large scale, it is also the time of the emergence and flourishing of musical works. It is a great change in the history of the development of Vietnamese music.

Linked with musical instruments, the genre of art songs is a combination of vocal and instrumental elements. Authors composed the lyrics and joined the fixed accompaniment, which was often played by the piano, but also accompanied by a group of instruments. These are works of the song type, but they are different from collective songs and revolutionary songs. These songs are often chamber music, professional, and artistic both in lyrics and in musical accompaniments. The genre of art song was born around the 1960s of the 20th century, when the formation of Vietnamese music began, and until now, this genre has developed both in quantity and in composition technique, contributing to the professionalism of the song in Vietnam.

In the early 20th century, there was a remarkable period after the era of songs written in the style of *Lời ta điệu tây* (Vietnamese lyrics with Western music), which is known as the period of New Music, also called Renovative Music. These were songs whose compositional language clearly influenced the French musical style. They could be found on phonograph records, in cafes, and in imported books from France. The intellectual class in Vietnam at that time was mostly fluent in French, so the accessibility, understanding, and preference for French songs were widespread. This is reflected in the fact that New Music songs were mainly composed by intellectuals. These songs often reflect the thoughts and emotions of the intellectual class; therefore, the lyrics are aesthetically pleasing, highly imaginative, sometimes poetic, metaphorical, and polysemous, rather than straightforward and rustic like folk songs. These songs apply compositional techniques from Western music, including melody, harmony, structure, style, and performance technique. . These musical works were the most obvious expressions of the influence of French songs on the musical life of Vietnam in the early 20th century.

About the influence of the process of introducing Western religions into Vietnamese songs, one of the most popular ways to spread French culture in Vietnam was through religious activities and movements aimed at spreading Christianity and Protestantism. In Vietnam, Buddhism is considered the main religion. Phan Ngoc, a musicological researcher, in his study Vietnam-France Cultural Contacts, confirmed, In Vietnam, Catholics are the first to have knowledge about the West (Tô Ngọc Thanh et al. 2003), and they are the first to use Western analytical methods as far known to them to examine Vietnamese culture and society. In the past, in traditional music, folk songs often expressed thoughts according to Buddhist doctrine or referred to religious activities such as attending Buddhist ceremonies, praising the beauty of temples, and so forth. Even today, songs about Buddhism continue to be produced increasingly, helping listeners imbibe and understand the teachings of Buddhist philosophy. Until the early 20th century,

when Christianity and Protestantism were disseminated in Vietnam, many composers wrote songs praising the Christian God, expressing faith in the power of God, or incorporating religious content into the thoughts of the songs. Popular songs known include *Sad Hymn* by Nguyễn Vu, *Love God* by Thai Nguyễn, *God Calls Me* by Gia An, and *Thanksgiving Hymn* by Thien An. These songs often have lyric content that is bright, pure, aesthetically pleasing, and highly educational, encouraging people to live a good and righteous life. The melodies are often gentle, flowing, and usually conducted in consonant intervals, avoiding dissonant intervals and melodies contrary to human biological senses. These songs related to Christianity and Catholicism play an important role in reflecting the spread of these religions in Vietnam, as well as reflecting the acceptance and changes in the perspectives and thoughts of the Vietnamese people up to the present day.

Western music in general and French music in particular are also disseminated in Vietnam through brass bands, which are very characteristic. In the early 20th century, brass bands became popular in large cities, from formal performances by the State, the military, and the like to bands playing in flower gardens or public places. Previously, in Vietnamese music, only traditional musical instruments such as the monochord, zither, flute, two-stringed fiddle, and the like were popular. The common ensemble formations were various traditional music ensembles such as Eight sounds ensemble, Big band ensemble, Small band ensemble, mostly using traditional Vietnamese musical instruments. From the 20th century onward, the structure of ensembles using brass instruments began to appear more and more in Vietnamese music compositions. Even with the genre of songs, especially marching and revolutionary songs, which have heroic, collective characteristics, the adaptation of brass band arrangements has become quite popular in military ceremonies or solemn ceremonies, national activities, community events on a large scale, and the like. The performance of Vietnamese songs by brass bands in solemn ceremonies remains widely used to this day.

It can be seen that works in the genre of songs have authentically and specifically reflected the pathways through which French music has been disseminated into Vietnam, from music education activities, musical events, religious activities, and so forth to the changing mindset and language of composition of artists in general, and musicians in particular. In fact, the role of Vietnamese songs is much greater. Reflecting the process of cultural transmission is just one aspect of this role; moreover, songs across different periods are also a chronicle, recreating the history of the Vietnamese nation, not only in the period of struggle for independence but also in the period of renovation and nation-building.

The East-West Convergence in the Musical Characteristics of Songs

Vietnamese music, before being influenced by Western music, was already a distinctive and rich musical tradition. Folk music has a long-lasting, intense vitality, playing an important role as the root of other music genres such as professional music and court music. Through a long period of being influenced by music from China, India, Champa, and the like, traditional music still maintained its roots, and instead, it even more deeply expressed its influence. The melodies, tunes in folk songs, and traditional musical instruments are still preserved in court music and professional music, creating a distinct national character in traditional music genres in Vietnam. When works of New music emerged, alongside the Western-style composition language, the material of ethnic music did not disappear but still existed; authors interwove Western music language with traditional music, creating an East–West exchange in the genre of songs.

East-West Convergence in the Content and Artistic Images

The content of songs shows a clear influence from Western culture, especially topics influenced by late 19th-century Romanticism. During this period, Romantic literary and musical works tended to depart from reality, aiming for lofty dreams that were unattainable in reality, a characteristic that was clearly reflected in Western artworks in general and in songs in particular. For Vietnamese songs, many works were influenced by this theme, creating one of the three main trends, namely the romantic music trend. The trend of romantic songs includes three components: dreamy, sentimental songs; melancholic, compassionate songs; and rustic songs, carrying the influence of folk music. Each component has its own characteristics in terms of melody. In the romantic song category, we can mention songs such as *Dreamy Stream*, *Heaven*, and *Ancient Zither* by composer Van Cao; melancholic and compassionate songs are exemplified by songs such as *Endless Boat*, *Autumn Raindrops* by *Dang The Phong*, *Farewell* by Doan Man, *Winter Night* by Nguyễn Van Thuong, and the like; some songs carrying the influence of rustic, folk music such as *Mother of the Countryside*, *Country Child*, *Rice Carrier* by Pham Duy, *Elephant and Stork Going Out to Eat at Night* by Nguyễn Xuan Khoat, *Thang Bom* by Le Thuong, and the like (Tú Ngọc et al, 2000). Among them, many songs focus on the multifaceted, deeply emotional feelings of individual artists, somewhat detached from reality. The trend of romantic songs has contributed to a period of Vietnamese music with beautiful melodies, rich in imagery, poetic quality, and emotional richness, creating artistic values and developing the mindset and composition language of musicians. However, alongside that, there are songs with themes of rustic, folk character; although they have a romantic nature, they still carry the traditional folk cultural color of Vietnam, that is, the expression of the convergence between Western culture and the traditional culture of the nation in the genre of songs.

In addition to the themes and images influenced by Western culture, Vietnamese songs mainly reflect themes and images related to the country, Vietnamese people, and culture, such as the two national resistance wars, the movement of the country's construction, and the portrait and the emotional life of the Vietnamese people.

During the two national resistance wars, songs from the period 1945–1975 vividly reflect the atmosphere of struggle and urgency of a heroic era, closely following each event and activity in life, in different regions, recording comprehensively the milestones along the historical timeline.

Through the two resistance wars[2] that Vietnam fought against other countries, Vietnamese music gave birth to a large number of songs closely tied to memorable events, such as musical history pages that may help future generations vividly and authentically feel the heroic resistance period of Vietnam. In this period, typical songs include *The National Guard Battalion* by composer Phan Huynh Dieu, *For the People*, *Forget Oneself* by Doan Quang Khai, *Marching Far Away* by Do Nhuan, *307th Battalion* by Nguyễn Huu Tri, *Pulling Cannons* by Hoang Van, or *Binh Tri Thien Smoke and Fire* by Nguyễn Van Thuong.

Furthermore, each event and milestone in the nation's history is vividly recorded in songs, such as the victory at Dien Bien Phu, the struggle in the South, the 1968 Tet Offensive, the Mau Than Offensive, the Khe Sanh campaign, and the great event of Vietnamese national history, the victory of liberating the South, and reunifying the country in 1975.

[2] The war with the French colonizers ending 1954 and then the undeclared war against the American occupants ending 1975.

Songs not only reflect wartime Vietnam but also praise the leadership of the Party and the socialist era. With collective song genres, composers have also composed many songs praising the country, such as *Welcome to the Vietnamese Workers' Party* by Do Minh, *My Homeland is Liberated* by Van Chung, P*eace in Our Country* by Nguyễn Manh Thuong, *Singing for Our Country* by Le Loi, *Celebrating Our Beautiful System* by Xuan Oanh, and *Celebrating Our Beautiful Life* by La Thang. Some songs of the political genre include *My Homeland Over Ten Years Has Grown* by Hong Dang, *Words of the Motherland* by To Hai, *Song to the Mainland* by Luong Ngoc Trac, and *Each Step I Love My Motherland More* by Tan Huyen. Additionally, there are songs written for teenagers to stimulate love for the Party, Youth Union, the system, and the revolution. These songs focus on praising the leadership of the party and the state in leading the nation through the revolution, with great achievements. These songs often have cheerful melodies and lyrics with praising and trusting tones, thereby instilling confidence in the masses in the leadership of the party and the socialist system.

Furthermore, in the genre of songs from the period 1945–1975, we also have a large number of songs praising the love for the homeland. These could be songs praising nature and landscapes of Vietnam. Depicted in these songs are often images of villages, rural landscapes, or historical landmarks. Among them, typical songs written about the villages and rural areas of Vietnam include songs such as *My Village* by Van Cao, *My Hometown* by Nguyen Duc Toan, or even songs written for children such as *Praising the Motherland* by Hoang Van, *My Homeland Brightens* by Mong Lan, *My Village is Green and Fresh* by Phong Nha.

The genre of songs also depicts the people's love for different regions of the Motherland such as Hanoi, Hue, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, and Quang Ninh. Song texts in this theme convey the emotions and impressions of people who have visited these places, thereby helping listeners imagine and gain more knowledge about the various regions in Vietnam.

The theme of patriotism necessarily involves portraying movements, competitive activities in labor and production to contribute to the construction of the country All these activities are vividly depicted in the songs of this period and help future generations imagine in a specific way, a difficult yet heroic time in Vietnam. This atmosphere is clearly reflected in songs about labor activities, production, and nation-building such as The *Construction Chant* by Thai Co, *The Iron Buffalo* by Trần Chuong, The Song of the Forest Worker by Pham Tuyen, Greetings to the Heroic Ma River by Xuan Giao, and Heroic Thanh Hoa by Hoang Dam. Additionally, there are songs about revolutionary movements such as The *Song of the Bomb's Echo, Youth is Always Ready*. *Take to the Streets*, and *Sing for My Compatriots* by young people, especially students striving for achievements in labor and studying to contribute to the construction of the motherland. Even for children, there are songs that elevate the spirit of unity among the Vietnamese people as well as globally.

About the portrait of the Vietnamese people, Vietnamese song texts specifically and subtly portray the image of the Vietnamese people. The depiction of people in songs can be divided into two main groups. The first group includes specific individuals, such as leaders, heroes, or outstanding children of the nation, who are shining examples recorded in music to remind future generations to learn from and emulate. The image of uncle Ho is a noble image, present in songs as a monument to patriotism, compassion for the people, and spiritual support for the Vietnamese people to confidently overcome the difficult revolutionary period. It is easy to see that the image of uncle Ho is a pervasive image throughout various stages of song genres, dominated by the musical praise and nostalgic feelings of people from all walks of life and regions of the homeland, always looking toward the great father figure of the nation with boundless love and respect. Even in children's songs, the image of uncle Ho has spread to the younger generation in a very innocent and pure way. Furthermore, songs from this period also dedicate a large

number to praising outstanding individuals of the nation, along with their achievements, unwavering sacrifices, and the nostalgia for those who stayed behind, such as songs about Vo Thị Sau, Nguyễn Van Troi, Trần Thị Ly, Nguyễn Viet Xuan, Be Van Dan, and Nguyễn Duc Canh. These are heroic history pages that help future generations understand the resilience and steadfastness of their ancestors during the 30-year period of resistance to build and defend the nation.

The second group is songs that depict the portrait of the people of the era, the image of people throughout a historical period recorded in combat, labor, production, and daily life. The portrait of the Vietnamese people in this period is dominated by the image of resilient fighters in combat. It can be said that the image of people in combat is the main theme in songs from 1945 to 1975, with stories of soldiers' lives in fierce resistance battles. This is the career of training and fighting for soldiers on the battlefield, in combat, and on large battlefields. Alongside this is the image of people in labor, production, and nation-building. These are people associated with images of fields, factories, and farms, working diligently to restore and build the country. Moreover, we cannot overlook the image of Vietnamese people in emotional relationships such as camaraderie, military–civilian unity, and family affection. It can be seen that songs from this period authentically and vividly depict the urgent labor atmosphere to restore and build the country during and after the resistance wars.

A profoundly humane and 'Asian-themed' topic is the image of women. The image of women always plays an important role in songs at any stage. They are not only hardworking, kind-hearted individuals but also heroic, resilient mothers who become a solid rear support, contributing significantly to the victory of the entire nation. Women are depicted in songs praising maternal love and about women in the battlefields of the South, rural women, and girls in the rear area.

A characteristic theme about the emotional life of the Vietnamese people is deeply portrayed in the genre of songs, namely the theme of the emotional life of the Vietnamese people. And for a country that has gone through many years of tumultuous resistance, the most frequently addressed theme is camaraderie, comradeship, the bond between the military and the people, the bond of village solidarity, and romantic love. The songs depict the bonds, sharing in struggle, in the daily lives on the battlefield, sharing the emotional thoughts of soldiers, and showcasing the close relationship between the military and the people throughout the journey of resistance until today. Village solidarity, the tradition of mutual aid and sharing among the Vietnamese people, is also a common theme in various stages of Vietnamese songs. Additionally, there are songs about romantic love—or love songs—which occupy a considerable amount of time in this period. In the context of a nation enduring prolonged, fierce wars, romantic love alongside independent works can also be intertwined and integrated into love for the country.

Thus, alongside themes of romance, detached from the influence of Romanticism in Western culture, themes about the country, its people, and cultural life in Vietnam are the factors that give color to the national identity and Vietnamese traditions in the genre of songs.

The Intersection of East and West in the Language of Music

The language of music is a clear manifestation of the combination of Western and Eastern cultures in Vietnamese songs. French songs have been present in Vietnamese cultural life in many different forms; Vietnamese people have embraced these songs through various channels, from religion and culture to daily activities. The influences of music in French songs combined with the traditional vitality of the Vietnamese people have been clearly reflected in the language of music in Vietnamese songs, where the three most apparent aspects are musical structure, material, and tonal.

In terms of musical structure, French songs are often composed in small forms such as one-, two-, or three-part forms. This has had a clear influence on Vietnamese songs. Most Vietnamese

songs from the past to the present have been written in similar forms and structures, with both one-part form and two- or three-part form being common. The division of different structural scales such as musical phrases, musical sentences, and musical sections is inherited with balance, symmetry, coherence, and a clear cyclical nature. Therefore, the common method of dividing structures is still symmetrical, with a musical section divided into two musical sentences, each musical sentence divided into two musical phrases, and the like, and parallel structures are usually equal in the number of main beats. An exemplary song from the Modern music period that can illustrate this is Winter Night by Nguyễn Van Thuong. In the musical sections, musical sentences, and musical phrases, balance is formed, and they often mimic or use similar musical material, creating a unified musical language for the entire piece.

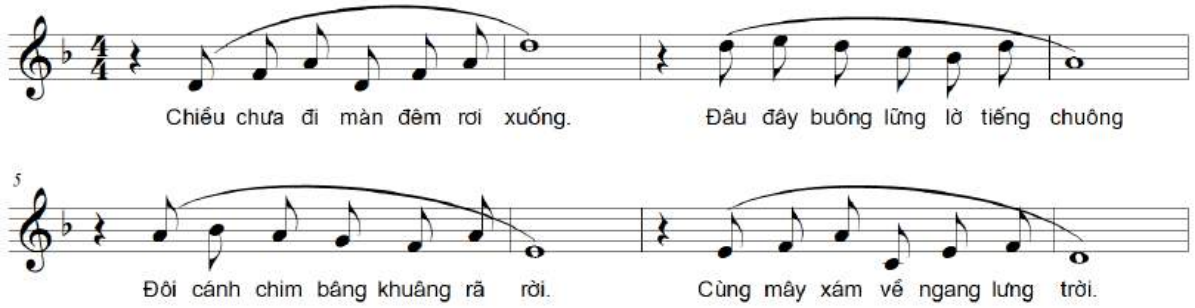

Figure 1: Đêm đông [*Winter night*] by Nguyễn Van Thuong. Reprint with permission of the author from a song leaflet.

In addition to this, there are many other songs that clearly demonstrate the method of dividing structures as illustrated above. The forms inherited from French music in Vietnamese songs have brought about balance and neatness according to a clear, understandable, and perceptible principle. This can be said to be the most important factor in the structural aspect that French music has influenced in Vietnamese songs. However, despite undergoing many developmental stages with various changes, in the structural language of Vietnamese songs, we can still find the characteristic imprints of traditional Vietnamese music.

According to Doãn Nho, Vietnamese folklore can be divided into two groups: singing groups and recitation groups to improvise a poem, which will be then recited. Previously, in traditional Vietnamese music and folk songs, we can also easily find structures that are not balanced. At this time, the lengths of musical phrases and musical sentences depend on the expression and meaning of the lyrics. For example, in the folk song Lullaby of the Xe Dang ethnic group.

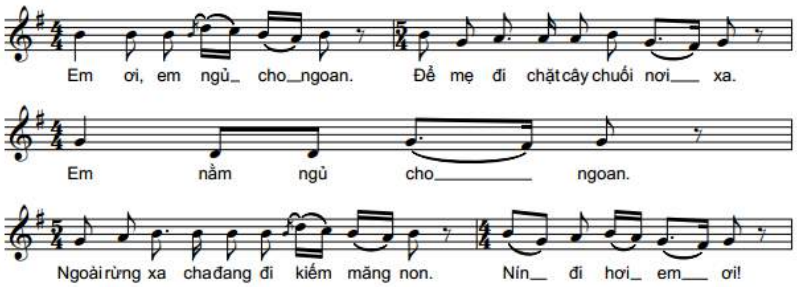

Figure 2: Complete outline of the song *Ru em*, Xe Dang folksong. Reprinted from a song leaflet with permission.

In this folk song, we can see that musical sentences and musical phrases are constantly changing in length, creating a shift in rhythm in the music. With folk music, the lyrics are a reenactment of human thoughts and feelings, so the lyrics are often simple, easy to understand, innocent, and straightforward, so the simple musical structure is the flow of human thought; it can be long, short, and change the position of accents to fit the content and nature of the song. This is

quite common not only in folk songs specifically but also in other genres of folk and traditional music in Vietnam.

Therefore, in songs from the modern period to the present, alongside songs with balance, neatness, and composition according to the formulas of single-, double-, or triple-section forms, besides that, breaking the balance is still quite common but usually only to a certain extent, in combination with balance. For example, a musical section is divided into two equal musical sentences, but within each musical sentence, it can be divided into unequal musical phrases. Especially in songs with folk influences, the freedom in the framework of structures is much clearer than in songs composed entirely in Western musical language. This can be illustrated in the song *Konia Tree Shadow* by Phan Huynh Dieu, with lyrics by Ngoc Anh.

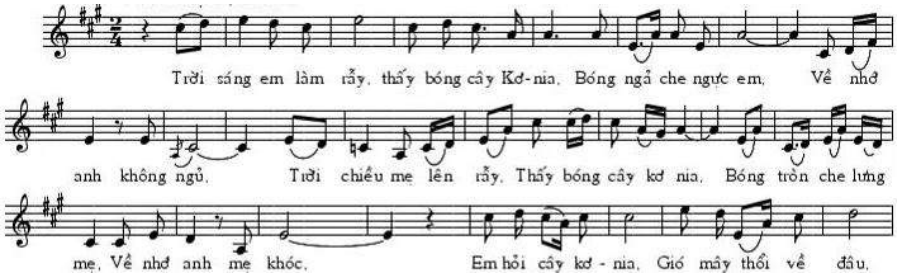

Figure 3: Outline of the song *Bóng cây Kơ nia*, music: Phan Huynh Dieu; lyrics: Ngoc Anh. Reprinted by the author from a song leaflet with permission.

In addition, another way that authors (Phạm Xuân Hùng, 2025) often use to incorporate the national character in songs is by combining the song genre with traditional folk music genres, leading to changes in the structure of the songs, most commonly in the arrangement of auxiliary parts such as introductions, interludes, or conclusions. In many traditional Vietnamese music genres, there are forms of free singing or spoken singing in auxiliary parts, interspersed with the main part. The most common are genres such as ho , vi , giam , and the like with free rhythmic singing or spoken parts interwoven with singing sections. For example, in the song Vietnam, the most beautiful name, the author introduced a free singing section at the beginning, using the interjection *Ho... o, ho... o* as the opening part in the Southern folk songs. Or in the song *Going up the mountain* by Hoang Viet, which also begins with a free rhythm section like a ho verse, but not only using interjections but with clear lyrical content, structured as a complete musical section, although it still resembles a non-divided musical section. In another song, with a complete introductory musical section with a slow singing style, the division of musical phrases is clear and balanced, such as in the song *Spring Returns to Dak K'rông River* by To Hai.

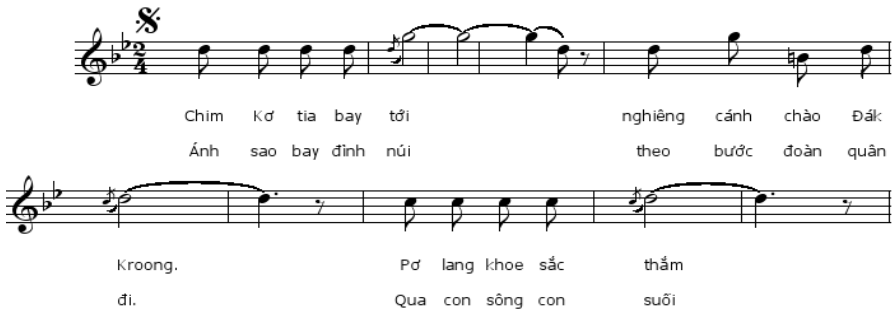

Figure 4: *Sông Đắc K'rông mùa xuân về* [Spring Returns to Dak K'rông River] of To Hai. Reprinted with permission from a song leaflet.

This introductory section is distinguished from the subsequent sections by its slow pace and undefined rhythm. Not only the introduction but also the interlude sections within the structure of the song are used to vividly showcase the colors of Vietnamese folk music, often presented

as complete musical sections in both music and lyrics, presented in the form of tempo rubato. Other songs use introductory or interlude sections with a free rhythm character and carry the flavor of folk music. Examples include *A Glimpse of West Lake* by Pho Duc Phuong, *The Singing of Lam River* by Dinh Quang Hop, *The La River Girl* by Doan Nho, and *Who Goes to Hue* by Duy Khanh. Thus, the combination of various structural scales, from small to large, from the main part to the auxiliary part in songs combined with traditional Vietnamese music genres, is also a typical manifestation of the fusion between Eastern and Western music in this genre.

Many Vietnamese songs have integrated Western-style composition structures with traditional music structures, combining Western song genres with typical structures of Vietnamese folk music genres and creating works that express the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures in the language of music.

About musical materials, it can be seen that many Vietnamese songs have popularized compositions based on the mentioned rhythm styles, which is a very clear expression of absorbing Western musical language, here directly from French songs. This influence is still very common today, but it has been expanded to include rhythms imported from Latin America such as bolero, Chachacha, Rhumba, Salsa, Samba, and Tango, creating a rich repertoire of styles for composers to express their intentions accurately and specifically.

However, alongside exploring rhythms imported from the West, Vietnamese composers have also incorporated traditional music materials into song genres, creating folk flavors and national colors in songs. Distinctive folk music genres such as ho , ve , and li are flexibly and logically combined to create the fusion of East and West in song genres, which is a genre introduced to Vietnam through cultural exchanges from the West in general, and from France in particular. Vietnamese songs have a characteristic dominance of pitch in both lyrics and melody. Vietnamese songs have six tones: flat, grave, acute, question, tilde, heavy. Each tone gives a different feeling of high- and low-pitch frequencies. Vietnam is a multiethnic country, with each ethnic group in each region having different pronunciation characteristics and tones. Therefore, the correlation between melody, pitch, and tones in lyrics creates a distinctive feature for the music of each region. Songs that apply the characteristic features of a region will create the influence of that region. Songs with folk influences are very popular in Vietnam. Since its inception to the present day, it is very easy to find songs with folk influences. Most folk music genres are inherited and appear in song genres. The application is mainly based on the characteristic intonation and pronunciation of each region and typical melodies in folk music genres.

In the Northern region, the influence of Quan ho folk music appears in songs such as *Evoking Quan ho*, *Love by the Quan ho River* by Duc Mieng, Returning to the Homeland by Pho Duc Phuong, and the like. The color of Cheo melodies is used in songs such as *The Country Girls of Quan ho* by Pho Duc Phuong, *Quickly Harvesting Good Rice* by Le Loi (lyrics by Huyen Tam), *Plowing the Land Solidly* by Nguyễn Cuong, or *Monologue of Thị Mau* by Nguyễn Cuong, or like *Liberation of Dien Bien* by Do Nhuan with the melody of Cheo Sap Qua Cau. Another Northern music genre is Ca tru, which is applied in songs such as *A Note of Ca tru on Spring Days* by Nguyễn Cuong, *Crescent Moon* by Huy Thuc (poetry by Phi Tuyet Ba), *A Glimpse of West Lake* by Pho Duc Phuong. The Northern lullaby style is incorporated into songs like *Mother's Love for Her Child* by Nguyễn Van Ty, or the speaking-singing style in the Xam genre is shown in the song *The Mother Stitched the Soldier's Shirt* by Nguyễn Van Ty. Songs with influences from Middle of Vietnamese folk music genres such as Vi singing and Giặm singing such as *A Sentimental Tune of Ha Tinh People* by Nguyễn Van Ty, *The Singing of Lam River* by Dinh Quang Hop, *The La River Girl* by Doan Nho, *Tied at the Hometown Pier* by An Thuyen, *Angry but Loving* by Trần Hoan; and folk chants are reflected in songs like *Quang Binh, Our Homeland* by Hoang Van, *Who Goes to Hue* by Duy Khanh, and *Welcome to the Mã River Hero* by Xuan Giao. The music of the Central Highlands is brought into songs such as *You Are the Pơ Lang Flower* by Duc Minh, *The Shadow of the Kơ Nia Tree* by Phan Huynh Dieu, and *Spring Returns to Dak K'rông River* by To Hai. For the Southern folk music genres such as Ly melodies, they are used in songs like *Searching for People Who Sing Ly Lovingly* by Vinh An, *Quang*

Nam, Beloved by Phan Huynh Dieu with the Ly Tang Tit melody, and *Mother's Heart* by Y Van with the flavor of Southern folk music. Meanwhile, the Southern lullaby style is used in songs such as *Standing at the Ben Tre Pier* by Nguyễn Van Ty, and there are many more songs using the colors of Southern folk music such as *Vam Co Dong* by Truong Quang Luc and *Still Missing Bitter Vegetables Growing After the Summer* and *You Walk on the Green Gras*s by Bac Son.

The prevalence of songs with folk influences is one of the clearest characteristics of the cultural interaction between East and West in Vietnamese songs, affirming the ethnic identity and the enduring vitality of folk music genres that exist even in genres imported from the West.

In terms of tonal harmony, the most evident expression of the combination of Western musical language and Vietnamese music is modality in a diatonic sense. The musical language in Vietnamese songs has fundamentally changed compared to earlier songs, where the pentatonic scale, which was said to be very common in traditional Vietnamese music, has gradually given way to major and minor scales. Common in Western music are major and minor scales. These scales consist of seven steps, including natural, harmonic, and melodic minor scales. Major and minor scales bring stability and clear attraction to music, so songs written in Western major and minor scales often clearly differentiate between stable and unstable steps. Meanwhile, Vietnamese music before the cultural assimilation with France used to be very popular with the pentatonic scale. According to Associate Professor To Vu, Actually, the new 5-tone system of Vietnamese folk songs is popular and the reason, as suggested, may be due to the tone of the Vietnamese language (Tô Vũ, 2002.). These scales consist of five steps without semitones, depending on the distance between steps, forming different pentatonic scales such as Fa, Huynh, Bac, Nam, and Nao. Unlike major and minor scales, pentatonic scales do not really demonstrate a clear attraction to any particular step; the stability and instability between steps are only relative. Pentatonic scales are one of the most characteristic features of Eastern music in general and of Vietnam in particular, playing an important role in creating the ethnic identity and the folk music flavor in new music works. Each region in Vietnam uses different pentatonic scales, and the pentatonic scales in folk music in the Northern, Middle, Southern, and Central Highlands regions all have their own characteristics. Therefore, each pentatonic scale will create characteristics for the folk music of each region. It can be seen that there are clear differences in the effectiveness of music between major and minor scales and pentatonic scales, creating differences in the characteristic features of the two composing languages between the East and the West. The interaction between East and West in Vietnamese songs can be analyzed based on the combination of types of scales based on two main forms: combining at the same time or alternating.

In many songs, the tonality is formed by combining a major scale with a pentatonic scale. In this case, the music can be expressed in full in seven steps, but among them, the melodic elements focus more on five out of seven steps, creating the flavor of a dominant pentatonic scale on the background of a 7-tone scale. For example, in the work *Farewell* by Dang Huu Phuc, it can be seen that both the melody and the accompaniment are very influenced by the nature of a dominant pentatonic scale A H D E F#, besides the tone G, but the pentatonic-scale tone still dominates. This not only creates a folk flavor but also brings about a very natural harmony, while also creating harmony in the musical colors of Western music and traditional Vietnamese music.

Another way to combine Western 7-tone and 5-tone scales in Vietnamese songs is for these scales to alternate. With this method, the music in the piece will create successive color patches through different stages. In the work Lullaby by Trần Thanh Ha, the author used the tones F G B C D to create a melody with the flavor of traditional Vietnamese music, but in the next section of music, the author switched the scale to the color of B-flat minor, and although it still only consisted of five tones (F Ges B C Des), this formula did not evoke the characteristic of traditional Vietnamese music but instead brought out the color of Western minor scales. This transition phase takes place in just nine beats, then returns to the pentatonic-scale color of traditional

Vietnamese music. The flexible application of major and minor scales with pentatonic scales has created a unique style in each author's Vietnamese song, providing rich colors for works in this genre. With this method, the effectiveness of music is achieved by combining both colors of two different types of scales at the same time, creating the ethnic character of Vietnamese music in harmony with the language of Western music.

The combination of major scales with pentatonic scales brings about an intersection of colors between Western music and traditional Vietnamese music. The use of pentatonic scales in the genre of songs not only simply creates the color of folk music (Bui Huyền Nga, 2002) but also shapes the genre and the regional characteristics of folk music used in songs.

Conclusion

It can be seen that the genre of songs in Vietnamese music before 1975 marked a turning point when Vietnam received influence from French culture. Though this genre was imported from the West, it quickly became the most rapidly developed and popular musical genre in Vietnam. Songs are an inevitability of history, with the direct conditions being influenced by French culture. And conversely, this genre itself reflects very specifically and completely the process of its cultural assimilation through its content, imagery, and characteristics of musical language in works. Vietnamese songs have reproduced an entire period of the country's history in general as well as the culture of art in particular, vividly showing the importation routes of French culture and Western music that were introduced to Vietnam at that time, while also creating an intersection between two cultures in the language of composition.

Thus, the genre of art songs is not only a step in the history of Vietnamese music but also a historical step in the past that marks important periods and events of the country. It is also a cultural page demonstrating the combination of Western art with Vietnamese folk art.

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The Eldarova Archive Project: Opening New Sources in Azerbaijani Musicology

Anna C. Oldfield[1]

Abstract

This paper discusses the life and work of Azerbaijani ethnomusicologist Emina Eldarova [Əmin ə Əldarova] in the context of a new project to open her previously unexamined professional archives. Mentored by composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli in the 1930s, Eldarova was Soviet Azerbaijan's first ashiq musicologist and spent her career researching the bardic *ashiq* [*aşıq*] genre. Starting from her student days, she conducted decades of fieldwork with the last generation of ashiqs trained by 19th-century masters. She led the active life of a public scholar, contributing general interest articles, radio, and television appearances, along with her academic articles and presentations. Her 1984 book, *The Art of the Azerbaijani Ashiq* [Исскуство азербайджанского ашугов] is considered the foundational work on the genre. Eldarova passed away in 2008, leaving a professional archive of field notebooks, photographs, correspondence, recordings, and col- lections of published and unpublished writings. In 2024, Anna Oldfield and Kamila Dadash-zadeh began a Collaborative Heritage Preservation Project, the Eldarova Archives. This project is to catalog and preserve archive materials with the goal of bringing Eldarova's scholarship into global conversations in fields such as Ethnomusicology, Folklore, Oral Narrative Studies, Caucasus Studies, and Post/Soviet Nationalities Studies. This paper is based on the presentation "Exploring the Archives: Emina Eldarova's Contribution to Azerbaijani Ashiq Studies" given by Kamila Dadash-zadeh and Anna Oldfield at the Joint Symposium of the International Council of Music and Dance Study Groups for Global History and Music and Music and Dance of the Turkic World held in Baku in 2024. Drawing from personal inter- views and archives as well as research, this paper will overview Eldarova's life and work while giving a preview of archive highlights.

Keywords

Biographical methods, Emina Eldarova, audiovisual preservation, genre description, global conversations

Introduction

Emina Eldarova was born in 1921 at the dawn of the Soviet era in Azerbaijan and grew up in the capital city of Baku. Baku of the early 20th century was a cosmopolitan center that had seen a century of European cultural influences due to the draw of the oil industry, which had brought in wealthy oil entrepreneurs such as the Nobels and the Rockefellers, who were also art patrons and philanthropists. This class influenced Azerbaijan's educated intelligentsia, who had already been developing an interest in western classical music through Russian colonization since 1835. Major musical venues such as the Baku Philharmonic and the Opera and Ballet Theater were built in 1910–11 and were enthusiastically received. In 1920, the Hajibeyli Azerbaijan State Conservatory (today the Baku Music Academy) was established to train young Azerbaijanis to study western classical music as well as mugham in their own country. The powerful figure behind these developments was the composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli himself, who developed a system for theorizing the Azerbaijani modal mugham system and so opened pathways to combine Azerbaijani mugham art music with western scales. He published his work *Foundations of Azerbaijani Folk Music* [Azərbaycan xalq musiqisinin əsasları] in 1945. He used this methodology with exceptional success to compose his own works, such as his 1908 opera *Leyla and*

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Majnun, which integrated mugham singing with traditional instruments into an orchestral composition. Hajibeyli went on to compose a series of works that integrated Azerbaijani art and composers to gracefully combine these two musical legacies across all genres of music. A young pianist named Emina Eldarova would be among those first generations to be taught di- rectly by Hajibeyli, who himself worked at the Conservatory as an instructor and mentor.When she entered the Conservatory postgraduate program in the 1930s, Eldarova hoped to join the composition program and follow in Hajibeyli's footsteps. Hajibeyli was her instructor and mentor, and in an interview, she recalled the day when he handed the graduate students their dissertation topics. As she related in a 2004 interview, there were only two girls in the class, and the other girl was called first for a theme in classical music. Eldarova expected the same, but it happened quite differently.

STUDYING ASHIQS

> 'And you, Hajibeyli told me, you will study the ashiqs. I almost broke down in tears! Ashiqs? Out in the rural regions? I was a Baku girl. I had always lived in the city. I knew only classical music. I knew nothing about ashiqs. I was in complete shock. I couldn't imagine why he had chosen me, of all people, and a girl too'.

Hajibeyli's choice showed exceptional trust in the young Eldarova. In his quest to understand Azerbaijani music from the inside out, he considered ashiq music to be a foundational genre. At the first Congress of Ashiqs in 1928, he gave a talk about the great importance of the ashiq genre to Azerbaijani music (Eldarova, 1984:24) and wrote his 1936 opera *Koroghlu* based on an ashiq epic. He sent Eldarova to the rural regions where ashiqs were performed to observe, document, and unravel the system, as he had done with mugham. But unlike mugham, ashiq was not art music and was not a Baku tradition—it was performed in rural regions by professional bards called by the title Ashiq. Passed from master to apprentice, it was a bardic tradition that wove oral narrative with music. Performed mostly by men, it was indeed a curious choice to hand it to a young woman from Baku. Nonetheless, it turned out that Hajibeyli's choice showed remarkable foresight. Eldarova would bring not just a dissertation's worth but a lifetime's worth of study to documenting and understanding the ashiq genre. In addition, she befriended ashiq families and became part of their communities, working further as a public intellectual to arouse public understanding of what was perceived by many in Baku as an unsophisticated genre practiced by illiterate rural people.

To the communities where the Ashiq genre was practiced, however, they were already respected figures and were central to community life, as the genre had been practiced by Turkic Azerbaijanis for hundreds of years. The oldest known dastan, *Ashiq Qurbani,* dates to the 16th century and describes a culture in Tabriz where Azerbaijani ashiqs were already part of the social fabric (Arasli, 1957: 6). Judging from these early "dastan," the genre combined Turkic epic traditions with Islamic mysticism expressed in Azerbaijani musical poetics (Baghirova, 125). In the next cen- turies, ashiq bards spread into the Caucasus, establishing distinct regional schools centered around different masters. These local schools blended the original tradition with regional music

and folklore, creating new dastan and poetry based on their own legends and heroes. The genre was passed from master to apprentice with the demand that the apprentice must learn the master's entire repertoire, which kept older dastan alive into the 20th century. The genre is still practiced, albeit mostly in a changed and changing form, in Azerbaijan and in Azerbaijani communities in Iran, and is closely related to the Turkish *ashik* genre and other Turkic epic singing traditions (Nikaeen & Oldfield, 2020: 1).

Ashiqs perform oral literature both in story and song while accompanying themselves on a long-necked wooden lute called the *saz.* In the tradition that Eldarova (1964) found still practiced by older masters, Ashiqs' performances included dastan epics, sung poetry, and verbal dueling contests (Eldarova, 1984: 34). Performances were embedded in contexts that included opening and closing prayers and invocations to past masters. Dastan were heroic, romantic, and spiritual epics performed as one-man theater by ashiqs who would tell, sing, and act out the story. In some regions, ashiqs were accompanied by percussion and/or a *balaban* (double-reed woodwind), but in many regions the ashiq performed solo. In rural regions, Ashiqs were central figures at weddings and life cycle ceremonies and were important in village communities. They also traveled from village to village to perform at gatherings called *majlis,* where they could compete with other ashiqs in verbal dueling contests to show their improvisational skills. Ashiq arts were taught from master to apprentice through oral transmission. In her writing, Eldarova described the master–apprentice method as it was practiced in the early 20th century, where an apprentice would live with their master and spend several years learning the art (Eldarova, 1984: 34). The ashiqs she interviewed would be the last to learn in that tradition, as social change and Soviet policies completely changed the cultural landscape, promoting group lessons, ensemble playing, and fully scripted stage concerts.

During her lifetime, Eldarova would see the ashiq genre change dramatically as the incorporation of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR) into the Soviet Union brought significant cultural changes. Ashiqs navigated complex roles during the Soviet period; the genre, which was already popular with its core audience, was celebrated as authentic people's culture compatible with Soviet ideals. Ashiqs were required to register in order to perform publicly, and state-sponsored Congresses for all the ashiqs in the country were organized to guide them align with state ideals.

As Aida Huseynova writes, the USSR both encouraged and censored arts: "the Soviet system resembled the figure of Janus, simultaneously showing its two sides, one supportive, the other restrictive" (Huseynova, 2016: 40–41). An Ashiq Union was estab- lished to register all performers. By supporting and modifying the genre, Soviet cultural policy attempted to use them to sing about the Bolshevik Revolution in an Azerbaijani voice. This aligned with the official program of being "National in Form, Socialist in Content," which sought to localize Soviet ideologies through national languages and cultures (Frolova-Walker & Zuk, 2017: 331). Officially, many older dastan and poetic traditions were discouraged or banned due to their spiritual content. Ashiqs were encouraged to write new works for this new world. Although they were still called for weddings, ashiqs were increasingly invited to play on stage at state-sponsored concerts and holidays, where they often performed lyric songs, many of which were newly written in a Soviet context (Oldfield, 2018: 142).

In the 1930s, however, when Eldarova began her work, there were still many ashiqs trained in the older methods. Heading out to the country with her notebooks, she threw herself into her work, becoming a part of ashiq communities as a friend and ally as well as a researcher. As she described in an interview, her entire view of this rural art form transformed from estrangement to a profound sense of respect as she realized the intensive training, knowledge, and personal qualities the genre demanded. As she writes,

> "Ustad [Master] ashiqs composed their poetry extemporaneously—in fact, many of them did not know how to write. But despite that, they had great knowledge of life and knew history, classical literature, and theological issues to an impressive degree. Standing out by their high morals, they called others to "behave in a worthy manner." Molla Juma, Mirze Belgar, and others knew several languages" (Eldarova, 1984: 18).

These and other observations challenge the definition of "illiterate," putting Azerbaijani traditional knowledge, passed through oral transmission, on par with knowledge based in literacy. Eldarova wasn't the only one to recognize the value of documenting the genre, and a number of folklorists worked hard to write down dastan variants to preserve them before they were lost. But Eldarova went further to document the contexts in which these dastans were told, including venues, clothing, gestures, and audience interaction (Eldarova, 1964). Eldarova published scholarship based on her fieldwork from the 1940s to the 1990s, but much more information on what she observed is contained in the notebooks in her archive.

Eldarova's notebooks reveal a careful, detailed, observation-based scholar who wrote on all aspects of the art, from musical to literary to social. She collected regional variations, recorded methods of training apprentices, and compiled more than 20 verse structures used to build lengthy epic *dastan* with examples, many of which are not used in written Azerbaijani poetry. She also recorded examples of special types of challenge verse forms that were used for improvised verbal dueling. But she was first and foremost a musicologist, and it is in this field that she made her most enduring contributions. She did not try to force ashiq music into a western musical category, but rather worked through careful observation of what was already there. She took a genre that was, in the current scholarship of her time, seen as unsophisticated, and searched for its native structure. During her fieldwork, she spoke with ashiqs about their terminology and observed musical specifics, documenting and comparing her results from region to region. She collected and transcribed ashiq *saz hava* (musical structures that are the basis for singing and improvisation), and recorded the frets and intervals used by individual ashiqs before the instrument was standardized. Eldarova recorded and worked out scales, tunings, and musical qualities and learned the terminology that ashiqs themselves used. As she worked, Eldarova realized that ashiqs had an orally transmitted musical theory and worked with ashiqs to understand and document it. In an interview she related how "tears came to my eyes when I realized that there was an entire oral system of musical theory based on the names and relationships of the frets. I understood that this was how they were able to pass on the music for hundreds of years with no notation" (February 2005, interview). Eldarova's writings on the complexity of the ashiq arts brought a new dignity to the genre, making it one that the urban musical world could admire and respect.

Historically, Eldarova's work is embedded in her lived experience in Soviet Azerbaijan, and reveals much about it. Her book gives detailed descriptions of three state-sponsored Ashiq Congresses held in 1928, 1938, and 1961, providing valuable insight into her historical context. During the first 1928 meeting, as the State sought to consolidate its cultural policies, ashiqs were instructed in their mission and given artistic guidelines. This first Qurultay featured a markedly paternal speech by the AzSSR's People's Commissar Ruhullah Axundov, who sought to activate the ashiq's role as a communication vehicle from the state to the rural regions, saying

> "They [ashiqs] have traveled here from those far regions where the people cannot even imagine the existence of nails and the iron plow. The revolutionary songs that they will sing will prove that the revolution is in the very blood of the Azerbaijani people" (Eldarova, 1984: 22).

In describing these Congresses, Eldarova documents some of the methods through which power was enacted in the cultural realm, and how this changed through different eras of the 20th century. The 1961 Congress, during the Khrushchev Thaw, in contrast, showed ashiqs and the folklorists who worked with them showing interest in rediscovering their past, valuing the knowledge of the older masters, and in recovering pre-Soviet knowledge. The 1984 Congress,

held in the last decade of the Soviet Union, was especially thick with meaning as constituent Republics were moving toward independence. Eldarova herself was asked to give a plenary speech at that Congress. The text of that speech, photographs, and official programs of all of the Congresses, and her detailed notes from the events in her archive document these transitional times in Azerbaijan.

Writing in an era of censorship where a scholar should not doubt Soviet cultural policies, Eldarova found subtle ways to express her own views. She was very much a traditionalist—having witnessed and documented the genre as it had been passed down from the 19th century to ashiqs still living in the 20th, she was distraught at changes and "innovations" that took place over the 20th century (Personal Interview, 9/15/2004). In her book, although she mentions that saz tunings became standardized, she carefully records the unique, individual tunings of older masters, who tuned to their voice. Or after stressing that an ashiq traditionally performs solo, she writes in a neutral way about the Soviet push toward ensembles:

> "In the Soviet period a new form of ashiq performance was developed, the chorale ensemble. This form has an important place in the activity of Soviet ashiqs. The first choral ensemble with ashiqs singing in unison was the Kirovabad ashiqs. It was organized on the eve of the 20-year anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution by the Honored Artist of the AzSSR Islam Yusuf and consisted of 25 ashiqs and several balabanists" (Eldarova, 1984: 13).

Yet a page later, she describes how the new styles were changing the genre, speaking of ashiqs who:

> "…break the rules of the classical, traditional canon of ashiq music by including episodes of mugham singing that do not belong… Further, the limited musical repertoire and the lack of professional feeling of measure in accompaniment (two balabans, a qosha dumbek drum, and a baraban drum, usually played *forte*), causes the saz to lose its place as the leading instrument, as it should be in ashiq arts; instead, the saz is drowned out by the uncharacteristically (for ashiq music) loud sound of the percussion instruments. This performance style …" is alien to the classical traditions of ashiq arts" (Eldarova, 1984: 14).

Eldarova was clearly invested in the older forms of the traditional genre, lamenting "mistaken tendencies which have become common in recent times among some aşıqs under the name of 'innovation'" (20). Of course, many of these "innovations" had been implemented by Soviet cultural policies. Eldarova's evasion of direct criticism of state influence reminds us that Soviet scholarship, much like literature, developed subtle ways to weave in alternative viewpoints. Devices such as simple omission, deflecting criticism to a different venue, or discussing impossible subjects by setting them in the "feudal" past (such as the religious content of many ashiq verses) were used by writers in their published works (Kamovnikova, 2025: 64-79). Eldarova's notebooks, where she worked out her thoughts before refining them for publication, are a valuable source for further understanding the mechanisms of scholarship under censorship.

As a recognized expert, Eldarova was often asked to give radio interviews and write articles for newspapers and magazines for the general public. Apart from her scholarly work, this gave her an opportunity to reach a large public. In these general interest works, she talked not only about ashiqs, sometimes celebrating individual ashiqs, sometimes about the genre, but also about Azerbaijani composers and classical music. Her public facing work highlights the role she took on as a bridge between ashiq communities in the regions and the greater Azerbaijani population. Her drafts and notes for these events are also in her archive, along with transcripts of the radio shows.

In her scholarly life, she presented at academic events and conferences, which she documented with programs, abstracts, and photographs, as well as her presentation texts and notes. In 1964, she was invited to speak at the *International Scientific Congress of Anthropology and Ethnography* in Moscow, where there were several foreign guests, including an American folklorist named Alan Lomax. Lomax was impressed with her presentation, which included a

performance by Ashiq Akbar Jaffarov and balabanist Musayiv Abbasov, and asked to record an interview with them. Lomax's recording of this meeting with Eldarova and the two artists remained unmarked in the Lomax archives until 2004, when Eldarova identified the recording. This recording is now digitized and available on the Association for Cultural Equity ("Emina Eldarova"). Eldarova's archives include the program from that Conference and her detailed notes on the presentations as well as the text of her own talk. Her collections from this and other conferences and events offer an inside view of the academic world of her era and how it was experienced by an individual scholar.

Eldarova's Professional Life

Eldarova's professional life was rich and varied, stretching across the 20th century from the rural regions of Azerbaijan and from ashiq communities to the academic world of urban Baku. She worked fluidly across these boundaries, not only going to rural Azerbaijan but also bringing ashiqs to Baku for professional-level sound recordings. Among the many recordings made on magnetic tape and preserved in national archives, the recordings of the 72 hava of Ashiq Shamshir stand out as especially valuable. Ashiq Shamshir was born at the end of the 19th century and trained in the pre-Soviet traditions. His repertoire was exceptionally rich, and while by 1950 few ashiqs knew more than 40 saz hava, he had mastered 72. Eldarova's recording of Shamshir on magnetic tapes is the only collection of 72 hava by one ashiq, and is completely unique, as each ashiq improvises within the hava structure. By the 1990s a number of those that Eldarova recorded were no longer played. While these sound recordings are held in national archives, her work with Ashiq Shamshir takes up several of her field notebooks. She has notebooks dedicated to other exceptional master ashiqs, including Ashiq Talib, who was the grandson of the 19th-century master Ashiq Alasgar and trained in his legacy. One of the most revered ashiqs of the 19th century, the blind Ashiq Alasqar here and in subsequent occurrences not only had a vast knowledge of traditional dastan and poetry, but also composed a great deal of original poetry that is still read and admired today. Eldarova's close work with Ashiq Talib, written in several notebooks and documented in photographs, documents a side of Alasqar's legacy that had been preserved only in oral tradition.

Many folklorists and musicologists in Azerbaijan joined Eldarova in documenting and studying the ashiq genre as the 20th century progressed. However, her work stands out as the first comprehensive research based on fieldwork and observation. She attained the status of elder expert in her field, and went on to mentor new generations of students. One of those mentees was Kamila Dadash-zadeh, who went on to have a distinguished career researching, writing, and teaching on ashiq arts and is currently the Rector of the Azerbaijan National Conservatory. Another was Anna Oldfield (2018), who studied with and recorded a series of interviews with Eldarova in the early 2000s. When Eldarova passed away, her family bequeathed the archive to Dadash-zadeh, and in 2024 Dadash-Zade and Oldfield ~~were awarded~~ began the Collaborative Heritage Preservation Project for the Eldarova Archives~~,~~ which is currently in progress.

Eldarova had collected her materials in seven folders, which are partly chronological and partly thematic, with certain groups of items clipped together. The archive also contains many photographs, preserving the visual history of the ashiqs across the 20th century. Folder 1 primarily contains Eldarova's academic and public presentations, covering topics such as the saz as an instrument and the legacies of specific ashiqs, demonstrating her work as a scholar and public speaker on Azerbaijani musical traditions. Folder 2 is a visual record, filled with photographs of the 2nd and 3rd Ashiq Congresses, master Ashiqs, and related cultural events, offering a window into the social and artistic world of these performers. Folder 3 focuses on research into the technical aspects of ashiq music, with notebooks of transcribed saz hava, interviews, and notes on musical theory and practice, giving insight into Eldarova's detailed study of the music

itself. Folder 4 documents her academic trajectory and professional interactions, including her thesis written for Hajibeyli, her correspondence with notable figures including Viktor Beliaev, and detailed notes on recorded performances. Folder 5 contains notebooks of saz tunings collected under Uzeyir Hajibeyli's direction, providing valuable historical information on the instrument's technical aspects. Folder 6 expands beyond the ashiq genre, containing texts of presentations on various composers and broader musical topics, demonstrating her diverse expertise in Soviet and Azerbaijani music. Finally, Folder 7 holds Eldarova's research notes on oral traditions including the Dede Qorgud epic, Ashiq poetry, and the 'Koroglu' epic, highlighting her engagement with the cultural context of Ashiq music. Many of these documents have never been researched before.

While the archive has been indexed for its contents, it remains to be studied and explored. Because of the fragile nature of the originals, they must be digitized in order to be safely used. The task of the Collaborative Heritage Project will be to catalogue, digitize, and then store the original contents in archival conditions, retaining Eldarova's organization. The project will culminate in a public-facing website with a trilingual (Azerbaijani, English, Russian) annotated catalogue, which should be available by late summer 2025. The project intends that new research using the contents of the archive will be productive for many years. This paper has sought to highlight Eldarova's contribution to scholarship in multiple fields and contextualize the importance of the archive project, which will open a new window into the life and work of a remarkable scholar.

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CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND REGIONAL ADAPTATION OF A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT IN ASIA: DOCUMENTING THE CHING IN THAILAND

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Abstract

This study explores the historical and cultural journey of the ching, a traditional Thai musical instrument, within the broader context of Asian musical cultures. Using archaeological findings, historical documentation, and field interviews, the researchers trace the diffusion and adaptation of the ching from its origins along the Silk Road to its contemporary significance in Thailand. The analysis reveals how the *ching* has become a symbol of national Thai identity, undergoing local transformations that reflect the dynamic interactions between indigenous practices and foreign influences. By examining the *ching*'s role in various regional ensembles and its physical and acoustical variance, this paper highlights the instrument's impact on the preservation of cultural heritage and the ongoing dialogue between tradition and global influences in Thai music. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the sociocultural dynamics that shape musical identities in a globalized context.

Keywords

Ching, cultural transmission, musical instruments, silk road, Thai music culture

INTRODUCTION

Music as an intangible cultural heritage is transmitted over time, but is shaped by the tangible heritage of the instruments used to play it. One such instrument is the *ching*, a Thai musical instrument that plays a primary role in dictating rhythm within an ensemble. It is present in folk bands across various regions of Thailand. However, this type of instrument can be seen in many countries along the path of the former Silk Road, from Western Asia to Southeast Asia, with similar names, sizes, shapes, and playing styles:

- In Arab cultures, it is referred to as *sagat* (Egypt) and *zills* (Turkey) (Danielson, Marcus, and Reynolds, 2002).
- South Asian cultures, including India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, call it *manjira*, while it is *tingsha* in Nepal and Tibet (Nettl et al., 1998).
- In East Asian cultures, it is the *pengling* (China) and *denshig* (Mongolia) (Lau, 2015).
- Southeast Asian cultures, especially Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, refer to it as the *ching*, and it is known as the *si* in Myanmar (Miller & Shahriari, 2017).

The appearance of the same instrument in such a variety of cultures raises intriguing questions about how these instruments gained so much prominence in such a wide geographical scope, especially concerning cultural transmission through generations. In all these cultures, the sound of the *ching* acts as a connector, drawing the listener in with its clear and steady rhythm within the composition. The *ching* in Thai musical culture is of particular interest due to its appearance in many significant and sophisticated forms, from the selection of materials for instrument making to its appropriate use in performances by experienced musicians. Besides its significant

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role as a musical instrument, the *ching* also symbolizes and identifies national identity in Thailand. Thus, the researcher was interested in studying the origins and role of the *ching* in Thai musical ensembles, as well as its regional differences and relationship to Asian musical culture. The primary objective was to document how *ching* sounds, styles, and production vary across Thailand and place this within the wider history of *ching* development across Asia.

Literature Review

Historical Appearance of the Ching in Asian Musical Culture

Archaeological findings show that small cymbals have been used in musical cultures throughout history and in multiple geographic locations. In Mesopotamia, ancient musical instruments known as finger cymbals were shaped like small cups, measuring 3.5 cm in height and 6.3 cm in width, made from a copper alloy, dating back to 900–800 BC (Duchesne-Guillemin, 1981; Yalcin Dittgen, 2023). Similar evidence has been found from the Roman Empire in Palestrina, Italy, which is now preserved in the National Museum in London, UK (Habetzeder, 2012; Wardle, 1981). Mosaic murals from ancient Pompeii also show musicians, some possibly from the Cybele cult, moving toward a ceremonial platform, accompanied by a variety of instruments and dancers (Mungari and Wyslucha, 2021). Excavations in Baqa al-Gharbiya, Israel, uncovered medieval copper finger cymbals from the late Byzantine period, measuring 5 cm in width, showcasing the continuity and spread of cymbal use across cultures and periods (Radwan, 2016).

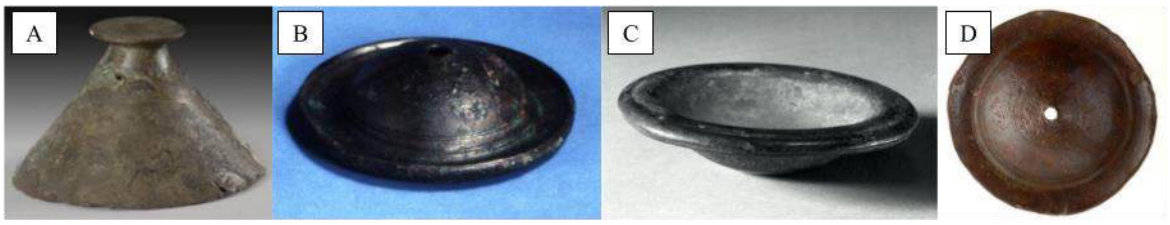

Figure 1: *Ching*-like instruments from (A) Mesopotamian civilization, discovered in Nineveh, Iraq; (B) Roman civilization, discovered in Palestrina, Italy; (C) Greco-Roman civilization, discovered in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur; (D) Ancient India, discovered in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. All photographs in the public domain and re-printed with permission.

In China, during the era of the Three Kingdoms, followed by the Sui (AD 589–618) and Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties, there was significant cultural and religious development. Tang murals and terracotta figurines within the Tomb of Tang Li Daojian in Shaanxi, China, depict the Ruan Wu Dance, and the figurines are holding musical instruments (Lawergren, 2017; Whitener and Shu, 2018). In the Indian subcontinent, the Gupta Dynasty (approx. 4th to 6th centuries CE) was marked by significant advancements in art, education, and religion (Uddhav, 2021). Artifacts from this era include sculptures and cave paintings at Ajanta and Aurangabad, showcasing musicians in ancient Indian settings (Pacciolla, 2022). Music in the Southern Indian dynasties, including the Pandya, Chola, and Chera (Kerala), flourished independently, often from as early as the Ashokan period (Hamid, 2019). These dynasties contributed significantly to India's cultural and religious landscape. Architecture such as the Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple shows intricate sculptures of dancers and musicians in devotion to Lord Shiva (Tallotte 2022). These disparate examples of musical culture reached Thailand along the Silk Road, and especially through the Indian-influenced Dvaravati culture, spanning from Myanmar to Thailand (Baumann, 2018; Jamnongsarn, 2022; Johnston, 2010). Artifacts and architectural remnants, particularly in Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, and Suphanburi provinces in Thailand, highlight the influence of these diverse cultures on the region. Thailand has a unique position as a Southeast Asian nation that was never formally colonized. Unlike its neighbors, Thailand

navigated the pressures of Western imperialism through a combination of diplomacy and strategic modernization efforts. This unique historical trajectory has profound implications for understanding the *ching*'s cultural resilience and adaptation. Thailand's sovereignty allowed for a continuous, unbroken transmission of its musical traditions, including the *ching*. Post-colonial theory suggests that non-colonized nations like Thailand maintained and adapted their cultural practices amid external influences (Peleggi, 2007; Winichakul, 1994). This framework helps explain how the *ching* reached Thailand through cross-cultural exchanges facilitated by trade routes such as the Silk Road, influenced local musical culture, and was preserved and transformed through stable domestic support.

THE TRANSCULTURAL JOURNEY OF THE CHING

The *ching*'s presence in various Asian cultures exemplifies the dynamic process of its cultural exchange and adaptation. These interactions involved complex negotiations of identity and cultural autonomy and reflect a broader trend of selective integration of foreign elements into local traditions, serving as an early example of globalization (Reynolds, 1998; Connors, 2007). Nonetheless, Marie Thorsten (2005) argues that the Silk Road has become a nostalgia for globalists expressing a longing for a cosmopolitan home. This longing is for a perceived time when a vast global flow of ideas and things permitted adventure, romance, and knowledge (Boym, 2008). The Silk Road, though often referred to in the singular, denotes multiple networks flourishing from around 100 BCE to the 15th century, facilitating extensive cultural and commercial exchanges between what are now considered Eastern and Western cultures. This exchange is often romanticized in popular narratives, depicting tales of long-buried treasures, transcontinental expeditions, and trade alliances, thereby naturalizing the globalization of the present (Thorsten, 2005). These narratives construct a shared memory that emphasizes common humanity and universalism, suggesting that differences can be celebrated without being exoticized or forgotten (Huyssen, 2003). In this context, studying music within its historical framework offers a lens through which these cultural exchanges can be understood, not just as trade or migration, but as deeply interwoven threads of sociocultural continuity (Millward, 2018). This romanticized view of the Silk Road resonates with the *ching*'s history and presence in other Asian cultures, highlighting its role in fostering a sense of global community and cultural belonging (Boym, 2008). In turn, this reflects the prismatic nature of global memory, which, though heterogeneous, fosters an inclusive sense of identity and cultural continuity.

The transmission of musical instruments along the Silk Road signifies the diffusion and transformation of musical ideas and practices across different cultures. Aside from being tools for entertainment, instruments were symbols of cultural identity, reflecting the interplay of music, politics, and religion in their historical context. For example, Millward (2018) found that lutes disappeared from Indian iconography in c.700 CE, but re-emerged in the courts of Central Asian conquerors, who introduced the instruments as part of a broader cultural influence. The reintroduction sparked the development of hybrid instruments such as the sitar. Similar themes of external introduction of musical instruments have been identified in Chinese and Thai musical cultures (Chang, 1993; Wang, 2023). This process of cultural transmission necessitated their adaptation to fit local musical sensibilities and practices, and to take ownership of the cultural narrative. This illustrates how cultural exchanges were active engagements that reshaped the musical landscapes of the regions they touched. The role of musicians and instrument makers as agents of innovation was pivotal, blending different musical influences to create instruments that met the evolving aesthetic and cultural demands of their societies (Millward, 2018). Naming conventions also indicate attempts to naturalize imported instruments, as Johnson (1996) documented with his analysis of the Japanese Koto. Johnson demonstrated that the naming of musical instruments enables local people to retain a sense of identity and reveals much about the transmission of cultural heritage.

Regional folk identity lies at the core of Thai musical culture. A singular Thai culture was cultivated largely by government initiatives in the twentieth century, which brought together a disparate, albeit related, range of local indigenous practices through a variety of methods (Connors, 2005; Laochockchaikul and Ratnatilaka Na Bhuket, 2024). The narrative has (rightly or wrongly) forged a shared mainstream identity with regional peculiarities. Traditional Thai music is thus an amalgamation of indigenous music from Tai, Khmer, Malay, and countless other ethnic groups, with historic influences from Indo-Chinese merchants and traders (Miller, 2010; Miller and Chonpairot, 1994; Morton and Duriyanga, 1976). Curiously, there is a modern backlash against the global interference of Western, Japanese, and Korean popular music in the development of traditional Thai music, despite the clear impact of global music cultures in creating the modern understanding of traditional Thai music (Chuppunnarat et al, 2020; Zaimi, 2020). Despite these tensions between tradition and global influence, the ongoing dialogue within Thai musical culture illustrates a broader pattern evident in musical traditions worldwide. This reflects a dynamic interplay between maintaining cultural heritage and embracing global influences, a theme central to this study. This paper will explore how similar dynamics are mirrored in the evolution of the *ching* in Thailand, demonstrating its significance as a symbol of broader cultural interconnections and transformations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this qualitative investigation, the researcher examined documentary and historical evidence within Thailand and internationally. Field data was collected from interviews with two groups of respondents. The first group was composed of 22 individuals, including national artists, scholars, and musicians, including national artists in the field of Thai music and performing arts, scholars in musicology from higher educational institutions, and artists from the Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture. This group comprised experts in traditional Thai music, Southern folk performing arts, ethnomusicology, Thai musical scholarship from various universities, and practitioners from the Department of Fine Arts. The second group was composed of individuals from three traditional Thai musical instrument shops, which included factories that produce and distribute Thai musical instruments. These shops are in Bangkok and external provinces, representing a significant portion of *ching* distributors in the country. All research participants provided informed consent to participate in the study and for their data to be used for the research and related publications. All informants named in this study gave their permission.

At the start of the research process, the researchers prepared a detailed outline on the topic, followed by the collection of relevant documents and data according to the set objectives. The study phase focused on exploring the history and cultural context of Thai music culture, specifically the *ching*, its musical characteristics, and the methodologies of playing the *ching* in Thai orchestras. During the data study phase, data were collected from domestic and international literature, as well as fieldwork through formal and informal interviews, and non-participatory observations. Research equipment used in data collection included a still camera, a motion camera (SJCAM SJ6 Legend), an MP3 audio recorder (SONY Digital Music Player NWZ-B152F), a sound level meter (ZOOM Handy Recorder H4n), a noise level meter (AMMOON AMT-01GB), an electronic scale, and interview forms related to the research objectives. In the data processing phase, the researchers synthesized documentary data, historical evidence, audiovisual materials, interview data, and print media in alignment with the research objectives. This was achieved by analytic induction and typological analysis. All data was validated by source and methodological triangulation. The analysis phase was conducted based on the established research questions and objectives.

The research aimed to achieve two primary objectives. The first objective was to study the *ching* in the context of Asian musical culture. To achieve this objective, the researchers used the documentary data, including historical literature, articles, books, art images, mural paintings, and archaeological artifacts. These materials were analyzed to sequence the periods and create

a timeline of the *ching*'s appearance across different eras both in Thailand and abroad. Additionally, musical data was gathered to understand the cultural context of music in various regions, focusing on the structure, forms, and methodologies of playing the *ching*. The second objective was to examine the *ching* within Thai musical culture pathways. This required an in-depth study of documentary data to explore the cultural context of Thai music, focusing on the elements of the *ching* in traditional and folk music. Field data and interviews were also collected to complement the documentary data. This included studying the history and cultural context of Thai music through photographs and interviews, and analyzing the musical characteristics of the *ching* by examining its playing styles, physical characteristics, and sound qualities.

RESULTS

CHING STYLES IN THE MUSIC CULTURE OF THAILAND

Ching occupy a significant role in Thai musical culture. One of the earliest pieces of evidence showcasing ching in Thai music culture is found in the Dvaravati period, represented by a sculpture group of female musicians at a temple base in Khu Bua, Ratchaburi, Thailand. This ensemble, called a mahori band, consists of various traditional instruments, including ching, indicating their historical significance in Thai culture. The Khmer Empire, with its capital at Angkor, also left behind evidence of *ching*'s presence in the region, particularly through architectural and sculptural works. These include the celebrated bas-relief of Shiva Nataraja at Sikhoraphum Temple, Surin, Thailand, where Brahma is shown playing *ching*, highlighting the instrument's ceremonial importance.

During the Sukhothai period, literature and art flourished, and with them, the documentation and portrayal of *ching* in Thai culture. The Tri Phum Phra Ruang, a significant literary work from King Li Thai's reign, mentions *ching* among the instruments in a grand musical ensemble, showcasing its pivotal role in the royal and religious ceremonies. *Ching*'s presence in these periods underscores its versatility and enduring presence in Thai musical traditions. Whether in grand royal ceremonies, religious rituals, or folk performances, the *ching* has played a fundamental role, reflecting the social, religious, and cultural values of the Thai people over centuries.

During the Ayutthaya Kingdom, the *ching* held a vibrant role within the musical tapestry of Thailand. Literary evidence from Nicolas Gervaise, a French Jesuit, in his description of Siamese lifestyle, highlights the lively boat races accompanied by music and rhythm from various instruments including the *ching*, creating a festive atmosphere along the rivers. This account underlines the integration of ching into the social and ceremonial life of Ayutthaya, showcasing its importance in entertainment and cultural expressions. Another literary piece from the late Ayutthaya period, the *Praise of the Mahori Teachers*, delineates an ensemble including *ching* among instruments in a ceremonial context, suggesting its significance in formal and ritualistic settings. Latterly, in the Rattanakosin era, wall paintings from Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram (Wat Phra Kaew), dating back to the late 19th century, depict various scenes of mythical narratives and daily life activities, incorporating *ching* in the portrayal of musical ensembles. These artworks reflect the continuity and evolution of the *ching*'s role in Thai culture.

The spread of *ching* across various regions of Thailand illustrates its adaptability and integration into local musical traditions. In Northern Thailand, the instrument has been incorporated into ensembles like the *klong song na* and *mahori*, serving to maintain rhythm and enhance the musical texture with its distinctive sound. In Lanna (Northern Thailand), the instrument similar to *ching*, known as *sing*, has been traditionally used in ensembles such as *klong sing mong* (drums, *sing*, and gongs ensemble). Over time, *sing* found its place in modern ensembles, blending with other regional instruments to create a unique northern Thai musical identity. From historical accounts and artistic representations, it is evident that the *ching* has been an integral part of Thailand's musical heritage across various eras and regions. The sizes of

northern Thai *ching* range from 5.5 to 7 cm in diameter, with weights ranging from 156 to 512 g (Figure 2a). There are three types of dome shapes: (1) half-circle dome: D1.1, D1.5; (2) high bowl-shaped dome: D1.2, D1.3; (3) wide-brimmed hat dome: D1.4, D1.6.

Code	Weight (g)	Diameter (cm)
D1.1	512	7
D1.2	255	5.5
D1.3	291	5.5
D1.4	261	6.3
D1.5	339	6
D1.6	156	5.5

Figure 2a: Table showing the size and form of northern Thai Ching.

From the data on northern cymbals' physical characteristics: Northeastern Thai music can be divided into two areas: northern and southern Isan. In Nong Phok District, Roi Et Province, Mr. Songsak Prathumsin stated that in northern Isan, cymbals are not used with traditional Isan music, but are instead used in Luk Thung Isan bands and central Thai Luk Thung music more often. This interview led the researcher to Phlap Phla Chai District, Buriram Province, where Mr. Phiphat Sudsiang, who preserves southern Isan music culture, manages the Pah Ploy Mor Isan ensemble. Mr. Phiphat Sudsiang mentioned that cymbals are used in two ensembles: the Mor Isan ensemble and the Kantrem ensemble. The Mor Isan ensemble, used for listening and processions, includes the Krapue (fretted floor zither), Japuey (small cymbals), Tru (fiddle), Sakaur (drum), Pi Sai, *ching*, clash cymbals, and Krap. The Kantrem ensemble, popular in auspicious ceremonies and processions, consists of the Pa Yor O (a type of oboe), Tru (fiddle), Sokol (a double-headed drum), singers, *ching*, clash cymbals, and Krap. The researcher collected examples of cymbals used in the Mor Isan ensemble, totaling two pairs (Figure 2b). There are two types of dome shapes: (1) high-domed bowl: E1.1; (2) wide-brimmed hat dome: E1.2.

Code	Weight (g)	Diameter (cm)
E1.1	326	6.4
E1.2	287	6.3

Figure 2b: Table showing the size and form of Northeastern Thai Ching.

In Southern Thai music, during field research, it was found that Mr. Khwan Tuan Yoke, a national artist in the field of performing arts (Southern folk music), uses cymbals in various musical ensembles, including Song Baok, Nora, Shadow Play, and Jungle Likay. Song Baok uses cymbals primarily for rhythm, accompanying spoken poetry and different poetic structures. Nora and Shadow Play ensembles include a pair of cymbals, a Tuk drum, Mohng (a pair of small cymbals), *ching*, and Pi Ton (a type of flute). However, modern Shadow Play has incorporated Western musical instruments, creating differences between Nora and Shadow Play music. Jungle Likay consists of Mohng (a pair of small cymbals), *ching*, Pi Yot (a type of flute), and Rammana dance. The researcher collected samples of *ching* used in Song Baok and Nora performance music, totaling five pairs (Figure 3a). From the physical characteristics of cymbals in the Southern region, there are two types of dome shapes: (1) wide-brimmed hat dome: F1.2; (2) thick-brimmed hat dome: F1.1, F1.3, F1.4.

Code	Weight (g)	Diameter (cm)
F1.1	427	7.3
F1.2	212	5.4
F1.3	328	6.5
F1.4	358	6.7

Figure 3a: Table showing the size and form of Southern Thai Ching.

The use of *ching* in the local music of the Central region is widespread, used in performances, songs, and ceremonies. *Ching* plays a crucial role in rhythm and timing for performers, including in the piphat ensemble, string instrument ensemble, and Mor lam music group. The *ching* in central Thai music ensembles has a clear role: to guide the main rhythm in a song. According to an interview with Ms. Tasanee Khunthong, a national artist in the field of performing arts, there are two types of *ching*: large *ching* used with the piphat ensemble for a louder sound and regular-sized *ching* used with the string instrument ensemble and Mor lam music group. The researcher collected samples of *ching* used in performances from Wichian Kerdphol and the Luang Pradit Phairoh Foundation, totaling 13 pairs (Figure 3c). There were five types of dome shapes: (1) half-circle curve dome: G2.3; (2) wide-brimmed hat dome: G2.5; (3) thick-brimmed hat dome: G1.1, G1.2, G1.3, G2.1, G2.2, G2.4, G2.8, G2.9; (4) small cymbal-like dome: G2.7; (5) low mound dome: G2.6.

Code	Weight (g)	Diameter (cm)
G1.1	328	6.5
G1.2	313	6.5
G1.3	299	6.5
G2.1	404	6.5
G2.2	250	5.5
G2.3	225	5.0
G2.4	445	7.5
G2.5	173	5.5
G2.6	227	6.5
G2.7	69	5.4
G2.8	278	6.5
G2.9	165	5.5

Figure 3b: Table showing the size and form of Central Thai Ching.

The following figures offer a summary of the different physical characteristics, weights, and sizes of *ching* across Thailand. Examples of the dome shapes are also provided in Figure 4b.

Dome Type	*Ching* Codes
Half-circle curve dome	D1.1, D1.5, G2.3
High bowl-shaped dome	D1.2, D1.3, E1.1
Wide-brimmed hat dome	D1.4, D1.6, E1.2, F1.2, G2.5
Thick-brimmed hat dome	F1.1, F1.3, F1.4, F2.1, G1.1, G1.2, G1.3, G2.1, G2.2, G2.4, G2.8, G2.9
Small cymbal-like dome	G2.7
Low mound dome	G2.6

Figure 3c: Table showing physical characteristics of cymbal domes.

Region	**Lightest weight (g)**	**Heaviest weight (g)**	**Smallest diameter (cm)**	**Largest diameter (cm)**
Northern	156	512	5.5	7
Northeastern	287	326	6.3	6.4
Southern	212	358	5.4	7.3
Central	69	445	5	7.5

Figure 4a: Table showing weights and sizes of ching across Thailand.

Figure 4b. Dome shapes of ching. (A) Half-circle curve dome (Code D1.1); (B) high bowl-shaped dome (Code D1.2); (C) wide-brimmed hat dome (Code D1.4); (D) thick-brimmed hat dome (Code F1.1); (E) small cymbal-like dome (Code G2.7); (F) low mound dome (Code G2.6).

PLAYING TECHNIQUES

The method of playing the *ching* involves specific starting and sitting positions. The player sits in a cross-legged position or with legs folded back, maintaining a straight posture. The right hand grips the string in a pinching manner with the thumb and index finger, holding the cymbal facing down to control its movement. The left hand also grips the string with the thumb and index finger, but in a grasping manner, holding the cymbal facing up for stability. The cymbals

are held at chest level or at the level of the Thai flute's mouthpiece, with the right hand slightly above the left by about a hand's width. Players can switch hand positions based on comfort.

Striking the *ching* involves three distinct techniques. For the *ching* sound, the right hand controls the top cymbal, striking the edge of the lower cymbal at about halfway to produce a resonant sound, allowing for a slight rebound. The *chap* sound is created by pressing the top cymbal onto the lower one fully or halfway without a forceful impact, closing the middle, ring, and little fingers of the right hand to dampen the sound. For rolling the *ching*, the cymbals are kept an inch apart, with the right hand striking them rapidly and consistently to create a rolling sound effect.

Physical Characteristics and Production of Ching

The researcher conducted fieldwork to collect the processes involved in making ching, which can be divided into two types: hand-hammered and cast. The production of hand-hammered *ching* at Ban Noen Kong Wong, Pran Nok, Bangkok, involves several steps. Preparation begins with arranging the equipment and materials necessary for melting and casting brass, including the preparation of coal and the furnace. The casting process involves pouring molten brass into molds lubricated with motor oil to prevent sticking. Once cast, the brass is hammered into sheets to form the *ching*. Subsequent steps include lathing, tuning, and polishing, where rough polishing and lathing of both exterior and interior surfaces take place, followed by tuning and preparing the *ching* for final polishing with a wet stone. The physical characteristics of the hand-hammered *ching* produced at Ban Noen Kong Wong include weights and diameters as follows: C1.1 weighs 394 g with a diameter of 6.7 cm, C1.2 weighs 438 g with a diameter of 6.8 cm, and C1.3 weighs 564 g with a diameter of 7 cm.

The production of cast *ching* at Boonruen Thai Musical Instrument Shop is a detailed and traditional process. It begins with molding, where special clay is prepared along with molding frames and a water tank. The melting process, which takes about 4–6 h, involves melting copper scraps and tin in specified proportions. Once melted, the brass liquid is poured into molds. The lathing and tuning phases rely heavily on the artisan's expertise, using a standard model for tuning comparison and alternating lathing to achieve the desired sound and size. The final step is polishing and finishing, where the *ching* is polished to a glossy finish before packaging for sale. The physical characteristics of brass cast *ching* from Boonruen Thai Musical Instruments are as follows: B1.1 weighs 135 g with a diameter of 5 cm, B1.2 weighs 138 g with a diameter of 5.5 cm, and B1.3 weighs 183 g with a diameter of 6.2 cm. Additionally, the shop produces another type of *ching*, known as *ching long hin*, with two distinct formulae. The first formula includes three sizes: B2.1 weighs 282 g with a diameter of 5.5 cm, B2.2 weighs 424 g with a diameter of 6.5 cm, and B2.3 weighs 690 g with a diameter of 7.5 cm. The second formula comprises two sizes: B3.1 weighs 290 g with a diameter of 5.1 cm and B3.2 weighs 358 g with a diameter of 6.5 cm. Cast *ching* from a third shop, Malai Thai Musical Instruments, includes Type 1 with A1.2 weighing 303 g and a diameter of 6.3 cm, and Type 2 A1.3 with the same specifications as B3.2.

Sound Characteristics of Produced Ching

The researchers analyzed the sound wave frequencies and musical characteristics of the *ching* using the Audacity program: Fast Fourier Transform (FFT). The frequencies were compared with those of traditional Thai musical instruments and Western musical instruments, detailed in Figure 5.

Code	Sound frequency (Hz)	Sound frequency of Ranad Thum Lek (Thai Musical Instrument Set, Office of Music, Department of Fine Arts) (Hz)		Sound frequency of international musical instrument: Piano (Hz)	
D1.1	10365	Mi 10	9919.2	D#9	9956.20
D1.2	5340	Mi 9	4959.6	E8	5274.07
D1.3	10646	Mi 10	9919.2	E9	10548.47

D1.4	3343	La 8	3337.6	G#7	3322.44
D1.5	4501	Re 9	4492.0	C#8	4434.93
D1.6	3769	Ti 8	3685.0	A#7	3729.31
E1.1	3875	Ti 8	3685.0	B7	3951.07
E1.2	5249	Mi 9	4959.6	E8	5274.07
F1.1	3949	Ti 8	3685.0	B7	3951.07
F1.2	5184	Mi 9	4959.6	E8	5274.07
F1.3	10207	Mi 10	9919.2	D#9	9956.20
F1.4	3989	Ti 8	3685.0	B7	3951.07
G1.1	3492	La 8	3337.6	G#7	3322.44
G1.2	3665	Ti 8	3685.0	A7	3520.00
G1.3	3490	La 8	3337.6	G#7	3322.44
G2.1	4197	Do 9	4068.5	C8	4186.06
G2.2	4866	Re 9	4492.0	D#8	4978.05
G2.3	8277	Do 10	8089.6	C9	8372.12
G2.4	3866	Ti 8	3685.0	B7	3951.07
G2.5	4886	Re 9	4492.0	D#8	4978.05
G2.6	3720	Ti 8	3685.0	A#7	3729.31
G2.7	3739	Ti 8	3685.0	A#7	3729.31
G2.8	8773	Do 10	8089.6	C9	8372.12
G2.9	11159	Fa 10	10959.8	E9	10548.23

Figure 5: Frequency values of *ching* in comparison to some traditional Thai and Western musical instruments.

The analysis showed *ching* as a high-frequency instrument, placing its sound levels (keys) mainly in the octaves 7, 8, 9, and 10, both in Thai and Western music standards. For Thai music, the most frequent sound ranges are Ti (eight times) and La (three times) in octave 8; Re (three times), Do (once), and Mi (three times) in octave 9; and Mi (three times), Fa (once), and Do (twice) in octave 10. The most common frequency range found is Ti 8: 3685.0 to Do 9: 4068.5. For Western music, the frequencies include G# (three times) and A (once) in octave 7, A# (three times), and B (four times); octave 8 includes C (once), C# (once), D# (twice), and E (three times); octave 9 comprises C (twice), D# (twice), and E (twice). The most common range is G#7: 3322.44 to B7: 3951.07. This frequency data reflects the diverse keys used in Thai music ensembles, highlighting the *ching*'s sound characteristics. Figure 6 demonstrates the spectrum plot in Audacity for frequency analysis of *ching*.

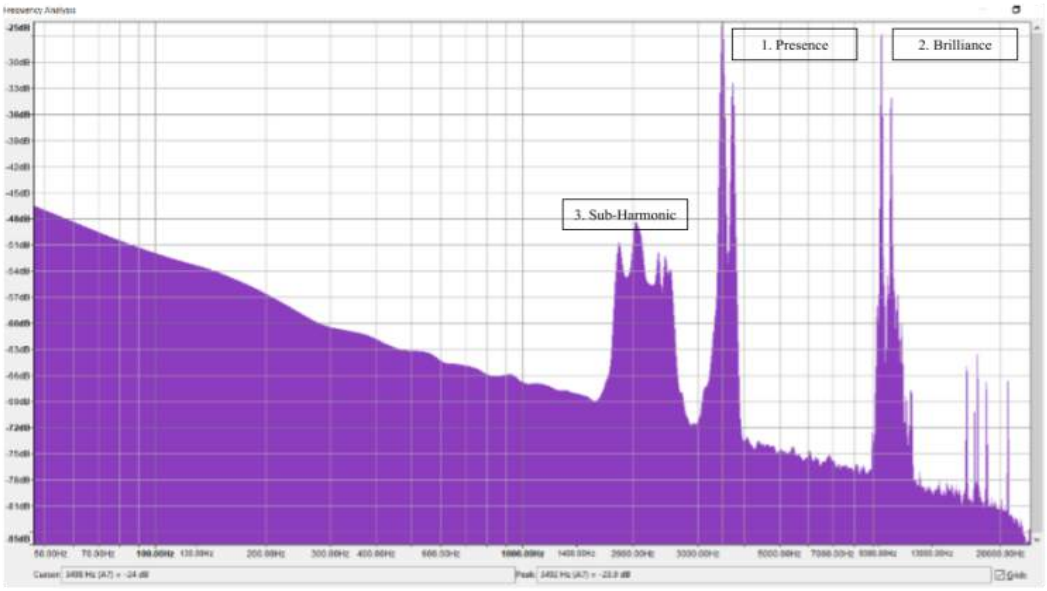

Figure 6: The frequency graph for the *ching.* (Produced by the authors).

The highest frequency zone in the graph, called presence, indicates the intensity and key. The second highest frequency zone, called brilliance, signifies the brightness of the sound (the level of brightness varies with the gap between the two frequency peaks). The third zone, at half the size of the highest frequency zone, called sub-harmonic, strengthens the primary sound, indicating the sound's density and strength. Thus, the sound of *ching* possesses resonance and brightness, yet is also robust and dense.

CONCLUSIONS

The researchers identified musical elements of *ching* in Asia through archaeological and historical evidence, finding that there are four shapes and sizes of domes: high triangular domes, low mounded domes, high cupped domes, and semi-circular curved domes. Three playing grip styles were identified: the first style involves holding the *ching* sideways; the second has one face down and one up, alternating between left and right hands; the third involves holding both faces up. Ensemble types and music genres can be divided into ceremonial music, theatrical music, and entertainment music. Analysis of murals, sculptures, and architectural works shows that *ching* is a type of musical instrument whose origins cannot be definitively traced. However, evidence suggests the *ching* has a long history and widespread presence around the world.

Research into the presence of *ching* in Thai culture suggests that it first emerged in the Dvaravati period, evident in sculptures and base decorations of stupas in Khu Bua, Ratchaburi Province, reflecting ancient ensembles, and in bas-relief sculptures in Sikhoraphum, Surin Province, showcasing assemblies of deities from the Khmer Empire period. These art pieces, found in religious sites, undoubtedly connect to religion. Physical characteristics of *ching* in Thailand show six types of dome shapes and sizes: (1) semi-circular dome, (2) high cupped dome, (3) flared brim dome, (4) thick brim dome, (5) small cymbal-like dome, (6) low mounded dome, with weights ranging from 69 to 512 g and diameters from 5 to 7.5 cm. Analysis of notes identifies two types of rhythms: regular and special. Regular rhythms allow the *ching* to clearly dictate the song's rhythm, aiding instruments in smooth melody progression. Special rhythms are divided into instrumental and vocal accompaniments. Two production methods were identified: hand-forging and casting. Analyzing frequency and musical properties using Audacity: FFT, it was found that the most common frequencies in Thai pitches range from Ti 8: 3685.0 to Do9: 4068.5 and international pitches from G#7: 3322.44 to B7: 3951.07. The analysis shows characteristics of *ching* sound through (1) high frequency, indicating resonance; (2) brightness, reflecting vibrancy and clarity; and (3) depth, giving the sound strength and fullness.

Given its portability, the *ching*'s presence across various regions is not surprising; it is often found in murals, sculptures, and religious and archaeological sites, indicating its connection with beliefs and religious ceremonies. This aligns with iconographic concepts, enabling the interpretation of art content that corresponds with global history and the origins of the *ching* and to the research of Thorsten (2005). Musical instruments like the *ching* function as artifacts of cultural memory, embodying the diversity and interconnectedness of Silk Road societies. The widespread distribution of the *ching* and its variants highlights a complex web of cultural interactions, resonating with the idea of a cosmopolitan nostalgia within global history, where shared cultural elements like the *ching* underscore a collective human experience across geographical and temporal divides (Boym, 2008).

Interviews and fieldwork revealed that the *ching*, traditionally central Thai, was adopted in the north through *piphat* ensembles, valued for its beautiful and bright sound. This pattern is not unique to northern music but is also found in Isan and southern music, where the *ching* does not play a primary rhythmic role but enhances the ensemble's sound quality. Yet, the *ching* remains indispensable for achieving the desired musical effect. This observation led to applying the theory of cultural anthropology to explain the adaptation process that becomes part of one's culture. This adaptive process is reflective of the dynamic nature of cultural preservation and

innovation described by Connors (2007), who emphasized how local traditions are continually redefined through the selective assimilation of foreign elements. The *ching*'s integration into varied regional musical practices in Thailand exemplifies how traditional instruments are actively recontextualized within new cultural settings.

In central Thai music, the *ching* has a defined role, systematically dictating the rhythm, highlighting its significance in the ensemble. This functional specificity contrasts with its use in other regions, showing how the ching has been adapted to different musical contexts. This variation in usage also parallels findings by Reynolds (1998), who argues that the movement of musical instruments across cultures often results in their functional and symbolic transformation. Such adaptability is key to their sustained relevance (Millward, 2018).

Interestingly, Miller (2010) demonstrated that consistent use of the *ching* in local ensembles ensures the retention of Thai identity amid the appropriation of Chinese musical elements. As instruments such as small two-headed wooden Chinese drums or Chinese-style gongs became incorporated into *mahori* or *khruangsai* ensembles (local Thai musical genres), "Thai" percussion instruments such as the *ching* and *chap lek* (larger and flatter cymbals) helped to maintain a Thai sound. This example demonstrates how the *ching*, despite being a foreign import into Thai culture, has been adopted, adapted, and elevated as a symbol of national musical culture. This supports Millward's (2018) conclusions that cultural exchange reshaped regional musical landscapes as instruments evolved to become local representations of the original imports and grew to become recognized as a distinct feature of local music identity. This is clearly true of the ching, with its many local variances, affirming Huyssen's (2003) notion of modernity's quest to reconcile the local with the global through the threads of cultural memory that bind disparate communities.

SUGGESTIONS

From this investigation, the researchers wish to make a few suggestions. First, *ching* production should be promoted and developed to achieve high-quality sound while being environmentally conscious, using new technologies or innovations to save energy and time due to the high material cost and lengthy production process. Furthermore, transmission and revival of playing techniques should be encouraged to accompany singing in theaters, which requires experienced musicians, who are dwindling in number. Regarding future research, the authors feel there is a gap regarding teaching methodologies and song forms where the *ching* plays a crucial role in rhythm control, reflecting the transmission theories and methodologies of teachers. Research into the initial mixing steps for *ching* production in industrial settings could also lead to process improvements and the development of tools for producing higher-quality sound.

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THE PRACTICES AND NARRATIVES ON DOMBRA MUSIC TRADITIONS OF KAZAKH PEOPLE IN THE ALTAI REGION, NORTHERN XINJIANG

Zhang Shan [张珊][1]

Abstract

Kazakhs are to be found primarily in three regions of northern Xinjiang: Altai, Ili, and Tacheng. I chose Altai as my research area because it is still at the end of an era, passing from nomadic to sedentary societies, and most of the places are still in transition. Compared with musicians engaged in artistic work, Altai has more ordinary musical activities. At the same time, the purpose of music is still related to the customs of a nomadic society, and cultural traditions are more well preserved. I chose to use dombra performance as a starting point because this representative instrument of the Kazakh people is used up to now in a variety of musical events. The dombra can be an overarching red thread that connects various playing methods and thus sees the unity of music and regional musical habits.

Keywords

Kazakhs, Altai, dombra, repertoires, artistic work

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: The environment in the Altai Region. Picture by the author in the public domain. (Christl, 2008: 29, reprinted with permission by the editor and the author).

Since 2017, my fieldwork has involved three regions in northern Xinjiang, including almost all counties and cities in the Altai region. Through my own recordings and previous folk music collections, I own more than 1,600 songs and instrumental recordings. In terms of musical practice, I learned to play three instruments: dombra, sıbızğı, and kobyz. Compared to the study of staves during school times, I can experience more rules of instrument performances as expected nowadays and participate in folk music activities, which led to the recognition of a person who plays instrumental music [küyşı[2]] by insiders. All of this has provided important information for my research. Next, I will analyze the tradition of dombra performances in the Altai region through two case studies.

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[2] Küyşı [Kuysi] refers to a person who plays instrumental music.

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Case 1: Adaptation of Dombra Repertoire Based on the Regional Fingering Habitus

In gatherings of artists, it is common to exchange and use each other's instruments. Artists can see the scenes where the instrument is often used from the wear and tear marks of an old dombra, whether it is played as instrumental music or used for singing accompaniment, whether it is in Altai or in Tarbagatai, and they even deduce the age of an instrument. I also realized that even though there are not many differences in the shape of a dombra, there are still many ways to use them, and the difference in wear marks is the most obvious evidence. This inspired me to pay attention to and study the fingering habitus in dombra playing.

The usage marks on the dombra, akin to practical fingerprints, not only demonstrate the instrument's regional characteristics and the owner's musical needs, but also serve as material evidence for demarcating boundaries between different musical applications. Behind these usage traces lie diverse performance practices that are directly related to the instrument's playing techniques. This insight has inspired the author to approach research on the dombra performance system from the perspective of the fingering habitus.

Figure 2: The wear marks on Ohzhat's dombra.
Figure 3: The wear marks on Karpbai's dombra. Both pictures (Figures 2 and 3).

In the field of organology, John Blacking pioneered the recognition of fingering techniques' formative role in shaping musical expressions through his study related to the Butembo flute in Zambia. He interpreted the melodic structure and repetitive patterns through indigenous performers' embodied experience, analyzing conventional fingering combinations and taboos in Butembo flute performance. This led him to propose that "a 'physical' analysis of the instrumental music of Africa may often prove more enlightening than a purely musical analysis ... It seems likely that we should find this even more frequently in African music, which is not written down and where muscular memory must surely play an important part" (Blacking, 1955: N.p.). Blacking emerged as a trailblazer in applying corporeal practice perspectives to African music research within ethnomusicology, personally engaging in instrumental performance to experience the embodied patterns.

John Blacking's work inspired John Baily's approach to studying Afghan music. Drawing from his background in experimental psychology, Baily (1985) incorporated perspectives on human sensorimotor systems into his research. Additionally, his experience as a multi-style guitarist cultivated an acute perception of lute-family instruments. Baily posited that the ergonomic relationship between a performer and their instrument is inherently manifested in performance practice (Baily, 1992), arguing that instrumental morphology structurally channels performance movements, which crystallize into distinct musical styles. Through comparative analysis, he distinguished left-hand motion patterns between the dutar ("linear array") and rubab ("tiered array"). These configurations can be further subdivided into combinatorial patterns created by discrete movements of the first, second, and third fingers. These left-hand techniques ultimately manifest the raga system, while Baily identified six fundamental right-hand motion principles involving upward and downward strokes.

Both scholars' investigations converged on the instrument–body relationship, explicitly articulating how instrument morphology shapes corporeal engagement and consequently the melodic

formation. Baily's research not only theoretically demonstrates the performance study's importance in revealing emic musical cognition, but also provides analytical frameworks applicable to dombra performance systems.

Within the shared musical repertoire of Kazakh music, recurring melodic patterns permeate performances of the dombra, sıbızğı, and songs. Although debates continue among musicians regarding the chronological precedence of different versions, this study posits that analyzing cross-genre transposition and adaptation processes can illuminate the embedded local logic. Focusing on the adaptation rules applied to transposing the sıbızğı piece *The Waves of the Irtysh River* to be applied on the dombra, this case study seeks to unravel the foundational principles governing such musical transformations. Both Kazakh sıbızğı and dombra feature numerous wave-themed compositions. Musically, the piece employs free rhythm that maintains fixed temporal organization—while metrically flexible, its overall temporal structure follows a consistent pattern across performances. Furthermore, the melody unfolds through sıbızğı's breath-centered musical syntax, with approximately 23-s phrases demarcated by performers' respiration cycles. This contrasts sharply with the dombra's typical modular melodic construction and repetition-based development, posing significant challenges for instrumental transposition. For dombra performers, the primary adaptation difficulty lies in devising appropriate left/right-hand fingering habitus that preserves the original melodic framework while incorporating idiomatic dombra expressions.

During my fieldwork, the author observed two distinct approaches. The first way to do this is to always use finger-tremolo of the right hand. The term "tremolo," derived from the Latin via Italian linguistic evolution and later assimilated into dombra performance terminology, originally connoted "shaking" or "quivering." In dombra playing, it specifically refers to the finger-tremolo technique. Finger-tremolo can connect the dotted notes in plucked music into a line. The left hand can follow the melodic line of free rhythms. Judging by the identity of performers, they are mostly players in orchestras. Although this method of processing the melody based on finger-tremolo has strong applicability and is basically not restricted by the logic of the musical language, the music played by this processing method won't be regarded as qualified work by artists because of a lack of the dombra's performance logic.

Figure 4: The author (left) and Shayilaxi (right). Photo courtesy of Liang Ziqi.

The second treatment is Sayrax's plan. Sayrax is a folk artist from Altai, and most of the repertoire he plays is fifth-degree tuning, with a biphonic structure. The biphonic structure stands as the most fundamental musical conceptual framework in the Altai region, embodying both the Kazakh shamanic cosmology's representation of heaven–earth dynamics and serving as a living heritage of their ancient musical DNA. The region's three core instruments—the dombra, sıbızğı, and kobyz—each cultivate distinct performance techniques, yet collectively adhere to this biphonic structural logic. Such cross-genre commonality not only reaffirms the foundational role of biphonic thinking within nomadic musical traditions, but also reveals its profound integration as a cultural gene within the Altai's musical ecosystem.

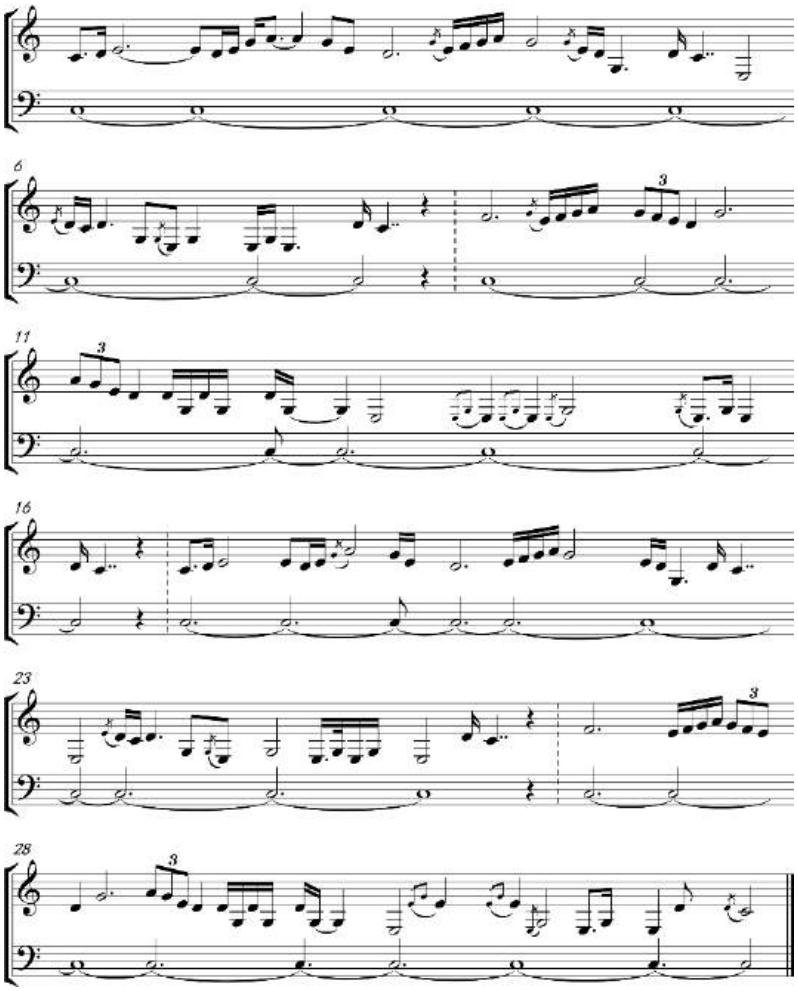


Figure 5: ***The Waves of the Irtysh River*** **(sıbızğı application).**

Sayrax's musical adaptations fundamentally adhere to the biphonic structural framework inherent to Altai regional music. Through rigorous study of Sayrax's pedagogical methods and performance observations, the author has systematized the characteristic fingering logics employed by this master musician, particularly the synergistic correlations between dombra and sıbızğı techniques (Figure 6). Comparative analysis reveals that these instruments not only share conceptual musical frameworks but also demonstrate isomorphic applications of tonal positioning. This technical–conceptual congruence establishes the essential foundation enabling cross-instrumental adaptation.

In the diagrams, I use dots to mark the center of gravity and focus of the gesture, and then connect them with straight lines. In this way, it is easier to think about the rationale of melody generation from the perspective of the body. In addition, there are some specific patterns of fingering connections that I have also marked. For each fingering habitus, I describe the way of tuning, the sound structure, and the applications, all of which together connect the regional attributes, the user group, and the genre of fingering habitus. To enhance Western staff notation's capacity for documenting Altai instrumental practices, I implement a bistave notation system with specialized symbols prioritizing fingering logics and combinatorial techniques. The upper stave codifies left-hand stopping positions on the fretboard, while the lower stave maps right-hand articulation patterns. Distinct notational markers showing plucking downward and flicking upward formally differentiate right-hand attack modalities in the score.

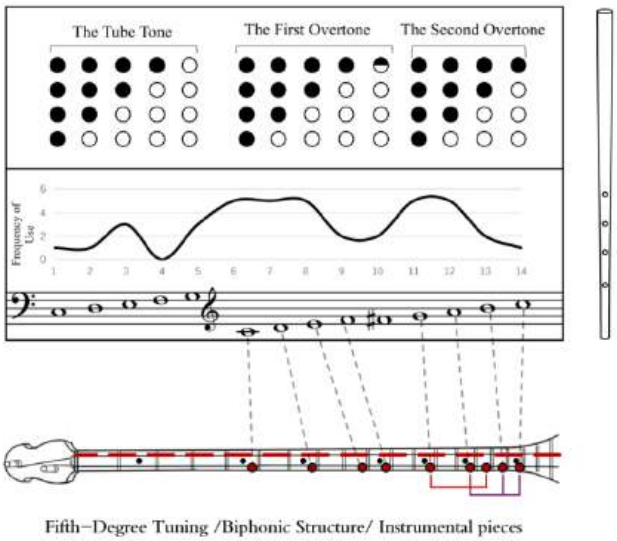


Figure 6：Comparative diagram of fingering habitus for dombra and sıbızğı.

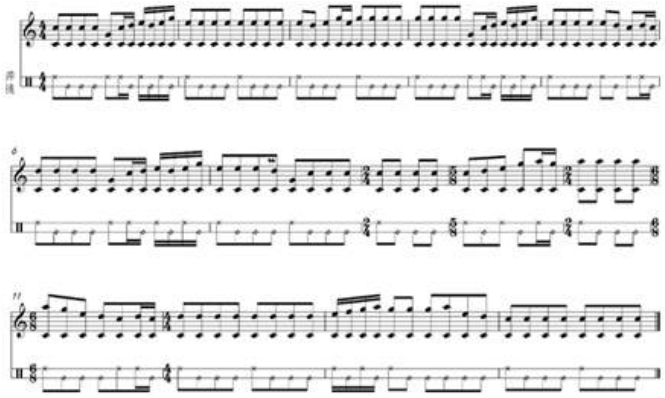
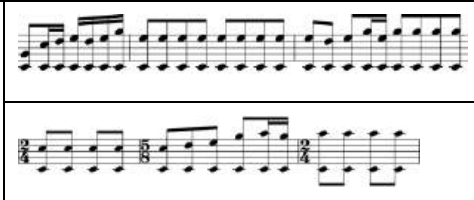
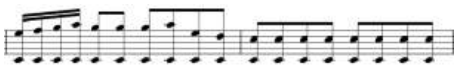


Figure 7：*The Waves of the Irtysh River* (dombra application).

Additionally, Sayrax adapts the melody of *The Waves of the Irtysh River* to the dombra's fingering logic. In the sıbızğı version, the melodic division **"C⁴–D⁴–E⁴ | D⁴–E⁴–G⁴–A⁴"** is constrained by the instrument's physical–acoustic properties. In the dombra version, Sayrax employs the melodic segmentation "**C⁴–D⁴–E⁴–D⁴–E⁴–G⁴**" and "**E⁴–G⁴–A⁴–G⁴–A⁴–C⁵**", demonstrating the ascending stepwise pattern of fingering habits shown in Figure 6. By splitting the original sıbızğı melody into two dombra phrases, Sayrax preserves the overall melodic contour of *The Waves of the Ertis River* while adhering to local fingering conventions and the musical thinking of the biphonic structure. This adaptation thus embodies locality through corporeal habits. The specific conversion method is shown in the following score example.

Serial no.	Sıbızğı edition	Dombra edition
1		
2		

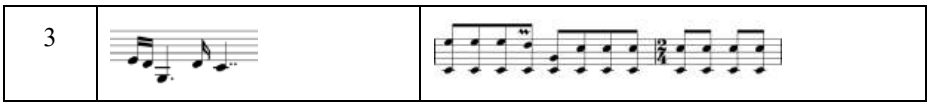


Figure 8：A comparative analysis of the melodic transformation in "*The Waves of the Irtysh River*" between sıbızğı and dombra.

Finally, Sayrax must follow the localized semantic expression habits shaped by the local natural environment. He configures corresponding fingering combinations and selects appropriate string contact points based on the thematic content of the musical pieces to achieve the most cohesive timbre for his fingerings. This reflects a common practice in Altai region folk music.The Altai area boasts numerous river wave–themed compositions, such as *The Waves of White Haba River*, *The Waves of Qinghe River*, and *The Waves of Kanas Lake* in Xinjiang, China, as well as *The Waves of the Bukhtarma River* and *The Waves of the Ob River* in Kazakhstan. Most of these wave-themed pieces relate to imagery of the Irtysh River and its tributaries. As the mother river of the Altai region, the Irtysh originates in Fuyun County, flows through Haba River County into Kazakhstan, and eventually merges into the Arctic Ocean via Russia. Variations in elevation gradients and channel widths across different river segments significantly affect flow speed, a characteristic mirrored in the locally distinctive wave-themed musical expressions.

Figure 9: Beret Igıbäi in his house. (Beret Igıbäi & Zhang Shan, 2022).

In Qinghe County and the mountainous Koktokay area of Fuyun County, where rivers flow swiftly, the local composition *The Waves of Qinghe River* predominantly employs the *tokpe* technique—striking strings with fingernails using a "down-up-down-up" fingering sequence. Conversely, in Buerjin and Habahe counties, where river channels widen and currents slow, the tempo and fingering combinations of *The Waves of White Haba River* sonically mimic this gentler natural topography. *The Waves of the Irtysh River*, primarily circulated in Buerjin County, features sıbızğı melodies and rhythms deeply aligned with local landforms. When adapting this piece to the dombra, Sayrax preserves its regional sonic identity by utilizing the *shertpe* technique system and adopting the Altai-specific "down-up-up-up" fingering pattern designed to evoke calm river flows. Here, downward plucks engage fingernails near the bridge for a more explosive *asti* timbre, mimicking water crashing against rocks, while three upward strums use the fleshier finger pad near the neck–body junction to maximize resonance, producing the *qoner* timbre that embodies the river's tranquility. This interplay of technique systems and timbral cognition fundamentally reflects performers' understanding of the relationship between sound and nature. If not for Sayrax's personal explanation of the adaptation process, many folk musicians would never have discerned the connection between the dombra version and the sıbızğı version of *The Waves of the Irtysh River*, mistaking the dombra arrangement for a traditional piece rather than a newly created work. This highlights the success of the adaptation—the composition seamlessly integrates into the traditional social fabric, retaining an "authentic" aura that conceals its innovative origins.

The adaptation of *The Waves of the Irtysh River* demonstrates that reworking a piece not only requires melodic material from the original but also demands careful alignment with localized instrumental styles. This stylistic rootedness stems from two dimensions: fingering logic and musical expression *conventions* ingrained in folk performers' practices. Crucially, adaptation must also be grounded in the local ecological environment. Only by remaining tethered to the natural and cultural context can a work gain acceptance within the community, allowing it to re-enter folk musicians' repertoires and perpetuate itself through ongoing musical practice.

Case 2: The Narration of the Dombra Repertoire

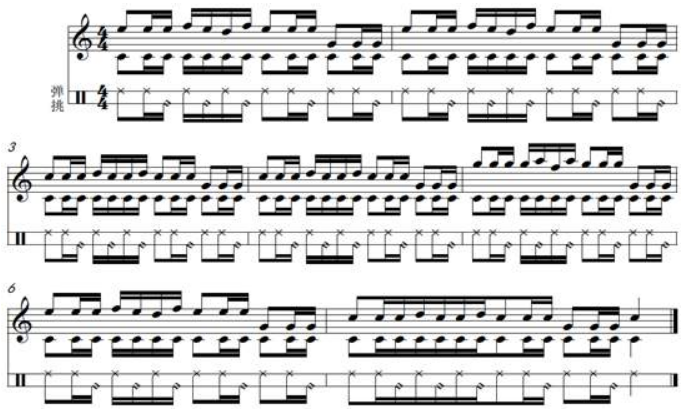
In Kazakh, the term "Küy" translates to instrumental music. However, we should reconsider this translation, as it is challenging to find suitable words in English that fully capture the inherent concept of "Küy". In the concept of *Kazakh* music, particularly as found in northern Xinjiang. "Küy" carries a broader meaning. It not only expresses spirit and emotional states, but also conveys historical stories and life experiences through the changing rhythms and complex melodic patterns. However, in contemporary stage performances, there is a tendency to emphasize the musical attributes of "Küy," which gradually diminishes its narrative tradition.

Behind every dombra piece lies a story. What I want to share today is a special kind of küy. Since I haven't found a common term for Kazakh music, I will temporarily refer to it as "Cyclic Form" repertoire. It *has* the following characteristics. First, the pieces are coherent in plot and interspersed with storytelling, several pieces and stories that together form a single work. Second, each piece is a part of the story. The listener can understand the semantics of music from the performance. Third, due to the development of the storyline, pieces have a fixed performance order, which is reflected in the naming of each piece.

I want to show the importance of Küy's narrative through a case. This "Cyclic Form" repertoire was narrated by Beret. The damage to his fingers has made his dombra technique less than superb, but he has memorized more than 100 traditional dombra pieces and more than 20 "Cyclic Form" repertoires. He doesn't like to create new Küy because he thinks it might affect his *memory* of traditional music. From his experiences, it is evident that the dombra repertoire he performs remains deeply intertwined with nomadic customs and lifeways. Taking the dombra cyclic form *Mañğabı's Dark Horse* (*Mańğabıldıñ Qaraqasqa Atı*) as a case study, this analysis demonstrates how the convergence of cultural, historical, and pastoral contexts is essential for interpreting the narrative layers of such compositions. Despite the wide circulation of this piece across the Altai region and the abundance of performers capable of playing it, most musicians only master fragmented sections. Among the numerous versions documented during fieldwork, the rendition by Beleti stands out for its structural completeness. The discussion will also incorporate supplementary cultural data from the field to reconstruct the interpretative framework for decrypting this cyclic form.

Factual information	**Main text content of cyclic form**	**Associated musical pieces and techniques**
Irı mal "Irı mal" refers to large livestock such as horses and camels in nomadic culture. 80 ırı mals equate to nearly $280,000 in modern terms, a stark contrast to contemporary horse racing prizes (typically awarded per animal). This contrast underscores the historical grandeur of such events, amplifying the repertoire's role in memorializing pivotal historical moments.	A man named Mañğabıl owned a legendary horse called Qaraqasqa, a black stallion marked by distinctive white stripes on its forehead. Even at just one year old, the horse displayed remarkable agility, leaping effortlessly over mares' backs and winning every race it entered. The Qara Qasqa hailed from the Altai region, where its fame grew after competing in a high-stakes race offering a prize of 80 ***ırı mals***. Two ***synşy*** (expert horse appraisers) clashed over predicting the outcome. The first vowed, "*If Qara Qasqa fails to win, I will stake my life!*" The second countered, "*If* ***Kilat*** *[another contender] loses, I'll double the prize!*" On the eve of the race, all horses were taken to a distant starting point. When the race began among 700 competitors, Qara Qasqa surged ahead immediately. At first, the Qara qasqa's gait was like this.	Performance technique When a horse is at a trot, the characteristic rhythmic pattern of its gait can be musically represented as a dotted eighth note followed by two sixteenth notes (♪♬), which is commonly used in music to mimic its gait.

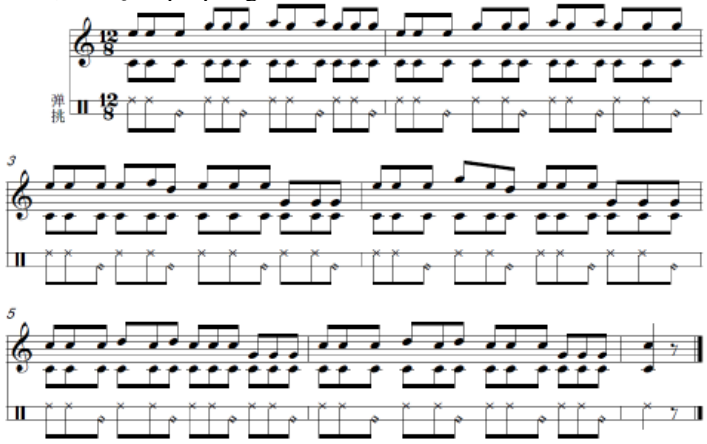
Sınşı are expert horse appraisers within Kazakh communities, tasked with predicting which horse will win first place—a critical pre-competition ritual.



Mañğabı's Dark Horse (Part 1)

Determined to sabotage it, the second synşy intercepted the horse, tying it to a post in a remote village. A local woman, recognizing the famed Qaraqasqa by its attire, freed it—though by then, half the horses had already passed. Shortly after being released, the little black horse once again sprinted to the front, taking the lead. However, the second Sınşı guide once again framed the Qaraqasqa, leading it onto an even more rugged and bumpy path. At this moment, the Qaraqasqa's gait was as follows.

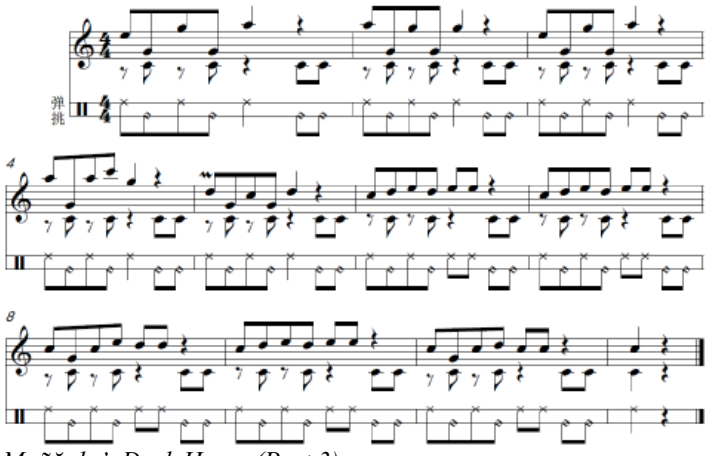
Kilat denotes a now-extinct horse breed once native to the Altai region. Based on Beret's recollections, Kilat horses were characterized by their **ash-blue coat**. This detail within the composition reflects the ecological and cultural shifts in local equine populations.



Mañğabı's Dark Horse (Part 2)

Later, the Qaraqasqa was driven onto an even more distant route, and at this point, its running posture was as follows.

[Attire]
In Altai horse racing traditions, **riders are children aged 7–8 years old.** They ride bareback, **lying prone on a single blanket**. Before the race, the horses' manes are **braided into plaits**, a custom believed to signal the animal's readiness and vitality.



Mañğabı's Dark Horse (Part 3)

Even though he was constantly framed like this, the little dark horse finally won the first place. Someone asked the first synşy later why he had dared to bet his life and say that the little dark horse could win the first place. The Moriche said that when he had looked at the size of Qaraqasqa, he had known that it must have come from a very

[Question]
If there was a child on the back of the horse, why couldn't the child take the reins off himself after the Qaraqasqa was tied down? This pertains to the changes in horse breeds in Altai region during the last century.

[Horse breeds]

[Forcibly equisitioned]
The Black Stallion
Beret
During the Great Leap Forward in the 1950s, a black stallion was brought to Shandong. After arriving in Shandong, the black stallion missed his hometown too much, so he ran all the way back to Xinjiang.

This narrative mirrors pastoral histories of the 1950s Altai region, as recounted by Janat, highlighting the socioeconomic transformations of nomadic herding.

<table>
<tr><td>Janat noted, “During the Great Leap Forward, horses from the Altai region were forcibly requisitioned to the regions of Beijing and Shandong. As many were stallions, the breeding population in Altai collapsed, leading to a severe decline in both the size and numbers of the local horse herds.”</td><td colspan="2">sacred place. “No one can compare to this Qaraqasqa except the birds in the sky,” he had remarked.
After a few years, Mañğabıl fell ill, and Qaraqasqa became thinner and thinner. One day, he lay down in the woods. Mañğabıl’s son asked his father if there was anything he could do to get the horse to stand up. Mañğabıl told him to prepare a few horses and let the child ride beside Qaraqasqa as if in a race. When they did so, Qaraqasqa jumped up.
Later, Mañğabıl died, and his son continued to keep the horse. One day, a thief rode Qaraqasqa from Fuhai to Qinghe, but the horse fell and couldn’t get up. The thief marked the running position of the horse along the way with a dombra. According to Kazakh custom, when a horse dies, its head is cut off and hung on a tall tree, and people recognize the horse and sigh.</td><td rowspan="3">The Brown Horse with Tethered Legs
Karpbai
A poor young man secretly meets his lover, the daughter of a wealthy landowner. Discovered during a rendezvous, he flees on a hobbled brown horse.

The technique employed in “The Brown Horse with Bound Legs” echoes the fingering combinations in Track Two, vividly depicting the horse’s gallop on a rugged path.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">[Analysis]
The historical period told by the repertoire shows that the children of the horses in the Altai region are tied to the back of the horse, which is more than 2 m high, and the child cannot get off the horse, but can only cry. In contrast to the current Altai horses, which are only about 1.5 m, children can get on and off the horses freely.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Some variants describe the Sınşı setting eight obstacles overcome by the legendary black horse Qaraqasqa.</td><td rowspan="2">A specific fingering motif mirrors the weary stride of a horse after enduring repeated sabotage.</td></tr>
<tr><td>[Chop off the horse's head]
The Kazakh cranial veneration ritual dictates that upon a horse’s death, its head is severed, cleansed, sun-dried, and enshrined atop trees or high rocks—a gesture of reverence for the animal’s spirit.</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 10: (with incorporated transcriptions by the author): Narrative analysis of the cyclic form *Mañğabı’s Dark Horse.*

The narrative expression of *Mañğabı’s Dark Horse*, which addresses the transformation of pastoral livelihoods, forms an intertextual dialogue with the narrative of *The Black Stallion* and Janat’s historical memory. The theme of nostalgic longing and homecoming in *The Black Stallion*—embodied in the horse’s return to its homeland—further resonates with the homesick symbolism of camels in *Male Camels in Beijing*. This illustrates that deciphering dombra repertoire narratives is an iterative process of piecing together fragmented information, rather than relying on a singular “interpretive key” to unlock the full meaning of a piece. Crucially, decoding the storytelling within these musical works relies on cultural customs and unspoken agreements rooted in traditional society. Such contextual knowledge is never explicitly articulated in the music itself but exists as a shared cultural consensus. Thus, the core of interpreting the narrative depth of these compositions lies in tracing intertextuality—the interconnected threads weaving through diverse musical stories, historical events, and cultural traditions.

Cross-analyzing dombra melodies through multiple sources reveals that the three fingering combinations within the suite gain narrative clarity when tied to stories, yet remain polysemous without cultural context. Performers now widely adopt compressed frameworks, typically summarizing suite themes with general statements such as “this piece depicts a horse’s galloping posture,” while selecting single melodic segments to represent complete storylines during performances. However, such fragments can only convey fragmented story elements. Consequently, equating these with complete narratives risks generating discrepancies between melodic structures and intended semantic meanings. Furthermore, essential narrative components—including why a horse gallops and how—become obscured during the simplification process. This not only weakens the correspondence between music and textual narratives but also contributes to the disintegration of traditional narrative structures. As musical pieces lose

their original narrative frameworks, the organizational logic of melodic fragments undergoes alteration, thereby accelerating morphological transformations of the tunes.

Conclusion

The traditional performance practices of the dombra in the Altai region can be observed from two perspectives. The rich traces of use preserved on the instruments themselves demonstrate the diversity of performance practices in the region. This also validates the rationale for this study's focus on fingering-based habits as an analytical framework. Analysis of specific musical works reveals that whether through adaptations of folk songs, or cross-genre transplantation of instrumental pieces, folk musicians consistently reinterpret melodies from different ethnicities and genres using their habitual fingering logic. The differentiation of musical practices further illustrates that the application of fingering-based conceptualization in musical creation must strictly adhere to localized semantic conventions. Variations in livestock populations, topography, cultural customs, and narrative archetypes across regions have collectively shaped distinct "sound–semantic" associative systems in different locales.

The narrativity inherent in dombra music requires performers to integrate story logic with melodic structures. When conflicts arise between exogenous musical materials and local traditions, musicians systematically reconfigure melodic content according to indigenous aural cognition patterns. This ongoing bidirectional accommodation generates an intertextual network connecting repertoire with traditional narratives. Through multidimensional interactions with cultural customs, regional histories, and material relics, fragmented musical phrases coalesce into coherent historical storytelling, weaving individual musicians' personal histories into the collective memory of the ethnic group. In the continuous performance and singing, individual memories permeate collective experiences, sustaining the vitality of oral traditions across spatiotemporal dimensions. Compared to the writing traditions of Han Chinese society, this perhaps constitutes the essential distinction of nomadic oral transmission systems.

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TAZUL TAJUDDIN'S OPERA SERIKANDI NUSANTARA: THE DIMINUTION OF FUNCTIONAL TONALITY AND ITS SYMBOLIC ROLE FROM AN ESTHESIS PERSPECTIVE

Mohd Adam Masumi[1] and Tazul Izan Tajuddin[2]

Abstract

Music has become one of the essential communication forms used to evoke symbolic associations of the related extra-musicals, precisely to symbolise a series of events in a story by means of music composition. In the Malaysian context, there is a contemporary opera adaptation of short stories about the legendary Malaysian princesses entitled *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*, composed by Tazul Tajuddin. The music of this opera reveals a stylistic feature different from that of the existing local folktale-based musicals. It conjures up a sense of departure from the conventions of functional tonality in which the musical ideas are organised through the contemporary musical language and imaginative use of instrumental timbre and extended techniques. A vital aspect of Tajuddin's compositional techniques that encompasses the whole work is an emphasis on integrating materials derived from the cultures of traditional Malay music and postmodern compositional practices into its music to allow for great subtlety of symbolic connection with the text. To emphasise novelty as the salient characteristic of the composition, Tajuddin developed highly personal idioms that depended more on tonal ambiguity and folk inspirations than conventional harmony, abandoning the old notions of cadences and harmonic progressions that suggest the need for discords to be resolved. Moving away from or diminishing the traditional system of harmony led him to new ways of organising a multitude of ideas, structural parameters and expressive elements in this opera. Consequently, this kind of treatment expands the possibility of conveying a more abstract level of emotional expression and dramatic effects throughout the opera.

Keywords

Opera, Music analysis, Malaysian music, Intercultural composition, Musical symbolism

INTRODUCTION

The creation of music is commonly associated with extra-musical material. Many composers utilise these non-musical subjects in the form of literature, folktales, poems, painting, architecture and so forth to draw inspiration and inform the manipulation and formulation of ideas for their creative writing. In Malaysia, local composers' practice of putting inspiration into the context of a compositional method is inextricably linked with the attempts to promote and reimagine Malaysia's cultural heritage in a modernised setting. The idea of retelling and symbolising local folklore, legends or myths from a different perspective and in a new distribution and production medium, in this case, their original compositions, plays a prominent role here.

Tazul Tajuddin is a Malaysian composer who needs no introduction to the world of contemporary art music, locally or internationally. He is regarded as the first composer in Malaysia to write music for an opera in the Malay language in a manner inspired by the story of Puteri Saadong—a legendary princess from Kelantan state—using a combination of contemporary musical language and traditional Malay techniques. Focusing on the concept of incorporating extra-musical material pertinent to the Malaysian context into the creative process, Tajuddin's

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compositional approach was further embedded and demonstrated in his recent opera composition, *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*, where a compilation of stories about Malaysian legends drawn from Raman Krishnan's Legendary Princesses of Malaysia was utilised as a source of inspiration to develop this large-scale work.

What can be observed by viewing the existing musical adaptations or renditions of local folktales and legends through my analytical lens is, on the one hand, that they seem to conform to the conventional musical design within the scope of the traditional major–minor-scale system, which was intended as a symbolic representation of the related extra-musicals. These musical adaptations revolved mainly around the mainstream music setting and relied exclusively on a traditional tonal framework for their musical expression and desired musical character. For instance, most musical theatres inspired by Malay mythologies are generally constructed with diatonic materials, limiting the possibilities for a more profound expressive correspondence between music and their extra-musicals. On the other hand, Tajuddin's opera work shows a significant development in terms of compositional style due to his emphasis on the dissolution of traditional tonal functions generated by the fusion of Western contemporary and Asian or Malay musical traditions throughout his original creation. Composing music by abandoning or reducing the sense of traditional tonal functions will enable a composer to generate the music with more latitude and expression as well as to embed their cultural backgrounds more freely as the major key element for their creative voices.

The tendencies towards new musical language, which led to the use of unusual scale resources, new principles of pitch constructions and new kinds of metric and rhythmic approaches, started to emerge among the composers during the post-romantic and impressionistic era, where ambiguity, metaphor, symbol and colour or mood of a particular moment became crucial to their compositional aesthetics. It was the developments in literature and psychology in the late nineteenth century that prompted the opera composers of that period to extend the traditional musical means to reflect and express the new literary assumptions rooted in the operas, conveying the symbolic dimension of the underlying emotional and psychological states of the characters (Antokoletz, 2004). In other words, this new musical language was established when the conventional tonal and harmonic vocabulary could not accommodate the abstract quality of opera's symbolism with regard to the evocation of a sense of imagery, allusion, mystery and certain nonverbal phenomena.

The marriage of stylistic traits derived from the cultures of new music and folk music was influential in *Opera Serikandi* Nusantara for expanding the possibility of articulating a more defined, thorough and expressive meaning of the literary texts through music in this opera. In conjunction with the Malaysian government's effort to uplift public interest and appreciation towards local arts, the making of this large-scale artwork in the form of an opera is aimed at approaching originality as well as embodying part of the cultural identity into this folklore-based music as opposed to the familiar sound-world of the Malaysian mainstream or popular music. It can be noted that there is little exposure to the mass audience in Malaysia concerning the opera adaptations of this type of folklore within the landscape of modern music. Therefore, this study is intended to focus on the realisation of the tonal instability, nonfunctional harmony and new ways of organising rhythms in Tajuddin's *Opera Serikandi Nusantara* by exploring and demystifying the symbolic significance between the organisation and interaction of musical ideas with the dramatic occurrences of the inspired tales from an analyst or researcher standpoint.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyse the creative process regarding integrating and combining various sonic elements of Malay traditional music and contemporary Western compositional techniques to reflect the dramatic symbolisation in Tajuddin's *Opera Serikandi Nusantara.*

2. To construct a reflective commentary on how composing an opera in a contemporary musical idiom by avoiding or minimising the elements of functional tonality can contribute or give rise to the symbolic manifestation of the reimagined stories of the selected Malaysian legends.

To gain information and achieve the objectives, this project adopts a multifaceted approach to musical analysis and symbolism in music drawn from the theoretical writings of Elliot Antokoletz. Component parts of this analytical approach are used in combination to outline and deduce the cause-and-effect relationship between new musical language and its relation to the design of the dramatic scenes—which primarily addresses the fusion of elements from Western contemporary music and East Asian folk music as the structural basis for symbolic representation. The outcome of this study provides a commentary outlining a contextual and substantive strategy for composing music inspired by the tales of legendary Malaysian princesses and offering insight into the creative procedures for adapting and transforming specific dramatic events into the corresponding musical settings.

Furthermore, this study helps inform future generations of composers, music educators, and musicians in Malaysia about incorporating and combining various strands and expressions of Malaysian traditional music and contemporary Western art canon into a new musical composition. The treatment of these Asian or Malay traditional musical materials in this composition is not viewed as "exotic" and additional source material but as one of the key elements that structure this creative work (Tajuddin, 2022, p. 78). In brief, this study documents the result of an exploration into the intelligible relationships between primary dimensions of music and their assigned symbolic meaning from a researcher or analyst's perspective.

Literature Review

The Use of Folk Songs in New Compositions

Folk or traditional music has been associated with the creation of art music compositions musically or culturally for ages. This connection refers to utilising musical strands or expressions drawn from folk music as a source of inspiration and thematic bases to generate and inform the organisation or manipulation of musical ideas for the new composition. Among the master composers who employed this kind of practice are Rimsky Korsakov, Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, Claude Debussy, Sergei Prokofiev, Franz Liszt, Aaron Copland, Jean Sibelius and other great composers. In Malaysia, the creative works inspired by traditional Malay music and instruments give little to no mention of information on the process of contextualising related inspirational sources or ideas into the realisation of new music. The discourse on the cross-cultural approach within the Malaysian context needs to be expanded, outlined and documented for the benefit of composers, researchers, musicologists and educators in integrating materials from two distinct musical techniques and stylistic idioms into a new musical piece (Tajuddin, 2022).

McGab (2002), in his article in the *Berklee Today Fall 2002* magazine, shares some thoughts about utilising folk tunes in new musical pieces. He briefly describes how he integrated folk music melodies into and around his original musical works while preserving the spirit and integrity of the selected folk songs. The intention is not to arrange or harmonise the folk melodies but to create unity, interrelationship and fluency between the melodies and original musical materials, whether rhythmically, harmonically or contrapuntally through these original creations. Although McGab always mentions the importance of conserving the spirit and integrity of folk songs in new compositions, there needs to be more explanation and justification for the particular method used to achieve such aims.

Just as McGab concentrates on how reinterpreting folklore can contribute to the creation of new work, Ginting (2019) similarly discusses the premise of a musical adaptation of folklore in

"Music Creation Based on Folklore" article, which aims to reimagine and transform the story of Senggulat Mbacang, a North Sumatra folklore into a musical setting. In forming a folktale-based piece of music, Ginting (2019) focuses on integrating his cultural background into his musical expression by exploring and realising Karo traditional music through a Western art music perspective. This intercultural exploration involves adopting the rhythmic patterns found in traditional Karo music and experimenting with new sounds through various treatments of a particular set of musical and non-musical instruments using traditional Western notation. A prioritised and important aspect in Ginting's new composition centres on how his reinterpretation of the story's structure and elements helps inform his aesthetic principles and influence artistic goals regarding symbolic affiliations between musical gestures and the cultural context of the narrative.

Exploring Intercultural Composition

In addition, the initial inspiration for a musical composition can also be drawn from subjects outside the musical domain, such as painting, poetry, folktale, sculpture and landscape. Also known as extra-musicals, these initial ideas are normally explored in combination with existing musical materials as part of the creative compositional process. Examining the musical structures and elements of a musical piece—in light of the extra-musical content—that influenced its creation is intended to reveal its symbolic dimension and realise the meaning behind the piece.

It is the consequence of the interpretation and engagement of a composer with this non-musical content domain that inspires and finds symbolic significance in the musical ideas incorporated in the composition (Tiutiunnik, 2013). A number of Tiutiunnik's compositions use selected maqāmāt of Middle Eastern music for the construction of melodies as opposed to the common major–minor-scale system encountered most frequently in the Western tradition. The manifestation of concepts linking specific melody types of non-Western culture with extra-musical domains in these compositions is motivated by her research into the development of the musical heritage of the Middle East, particularly the affective dimension of music as a symbolic form in the Arab or Islamic ethos. For example, multiple symbolic affiliations attributed to maqamat were incorporated into the pieces as the inspirational extra-musical framework intended to convey another level of musical meaning of specific physical, emotional and spiritual states or stations through their musical structures.

Similarly, in *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*, Tazul Tajuddin (2022) has employed both extra-musical and musical sources related to various traditional Malay features and Western art music techniques where they act as the structural basis and generative elements for the orchestral and contrapuntal fabric of this work in correspondence with their symbolic references to contrasting dramatic moments. Apart from the musical scores as the creative output, there is an accompanying documentation in the form of a published article written by Tajuddin to outline his theoretical stances and to document how his composition process operates in varying stylistic traits (Tajuddin, 2022). It is interesting to observe that the non-Western musical materials are used as prominent figures and unifying elements, with their characters intensified throughout this opera rather than merely adding some "ethnic" sound to the texture of the music—by acting as the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic support—which is commonly found in most local mainstream or popular music.

Method

Content analysis is the primary means for this study by which the composition of Tazul Tajuddin's *Opera Serikandi Nusantara* in the primary form of musical scores and an audio recording of its premiere in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, were investigated and documented as a critical and

reflective commentary. A considerable part of the analysis necessitates the process of theorisation contributed by the secondary data sources that involve reading aesthetic, practical and philosophical texts, listening to recordings and studying the related scores of nineteenth- and twentieth-century music composers. This analysis focuses on the scores of the seven selected arias or songs out of the nine arias of this opera. The two arias, Puteri Gunung Ledang and Puteri Hang Li Po, were excluded from the study subjects as they possess little to no implication of the contemporary musical language and cross-cultural techniques compared to the other seven analysed arias and choruses. Regarding the content of the analysis, several dimensions of the music, including motivic/phrase construction, melody, rhythm, texture and instrumental timbre, are determined and specified as the musical units used for conducting and reporting the analysis.

The function of musical analysis in this project is twofold. The first is to assist in generating an extension of knowledge and a practical strategy for intercultural writing, into which materials from Western and Asian musical traditions were integrated and manipulated. It also illustrates how music techniques that emphasise the composer's aesthetic principles through abandoning the traditional thematic development are employed in the opera, contributing to the composition's originality. To effectively convey the narrative of the treatment of materials in *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*, a multifaceted analysis method comprising explanatory texts and graphical views of the proportions of the pieces is used within a post-tonal context. Guided by the analyst's aesthetic goals, these analytical approaches are used in combination to exemplify how individual elements are designed by the composer, to identify meaningful musical relationships between pitch-class collections and to what extent his compositional logic or intention relates to the intercultural activity and prompts unifying effects in the diminution or absence of traditional tonal functions.

Analysis of Arias and Choruses from the Opera *Serikandi Nusantara*

Cik Siti Wang Kembang and Puteri Saadong

Developed within the scope of minimalism, the musical texture of the first song of the opera, titled *Cik Siti Wang Kembang and Puteri Saadong*, is non-imitative polyphonic based on the concept of vocal recitative and drone music. Using a sustained note placed at the lowest part of the texture to accompany the quasi-recitative vocal style helps generate drone and static effects in the background level throughout the song. This underlying drone sound played on a viola serves to imitate the sound and function of rebab and to support the upper voice layers alongside the independent percussion lines coming from the playing of gendang (two-headed drums), gongs and tubular bells. The interplay between the drone and other textural layers is continuously sounded and heard in every part of the song to reflect a calm and serene atmosphere, illustrating the pleasure in mutual recognition and reciprocal interaction between the two characters, Cik Siti Wan Kembang and Puteri Saadong.

When referring to the overall texture of the song, the viola appears to have two functions simultaneously. The lower line is simply a held drone played on the viola's open C string, while the upper line is rhythmically and melodically independent. The latter occasionally shares similar phrasal contours or shapes with the soprano and mezzo-soprano melodies and embraces subtle microtones in a number of phrases, as shown in an example in Figure 1. Having these two contrasting layers or features, specifically, the sustained drone and brief microtonal melody played at the same time on the viola, signifies and sheds light on the composer's intention to produce and experiment with impure sound quality and microtonal inflexions characteristic of traditional Malay music through Western compositional techniques.

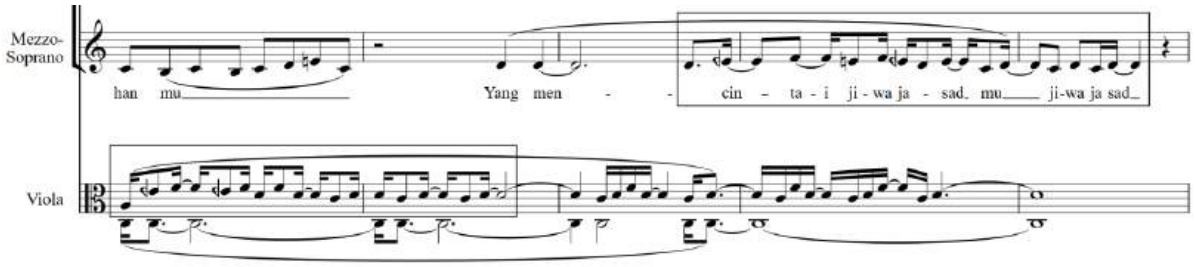

Figure 1: Bars 52–56 from Tajuddin's Cik Siti Wang Kembang and Puteri Saadong.

On another note, although the piece uses the simple common-time metre of 4/4, its rhythms do not articulate the sound of a clear and consistent metre or beat because of the contrasting metrical stress patterns between the rhythmic ideas and the notated beats. With the presence of the characteristics of vocal recitative in the foreground melodies and the flexible rhythms of the viola, the listener perceives no regular pulse throughout this piece since too many rhythmic figurations do not correspond and align to a consistent beat unit of the implied metre. In other words, the summative effect of using ametric music or rhythmic patterns that conflict with the notated metre tends to cause the music to sound like it does not have any perceivable metre and constant tempo, permitted by the disappearance of the sense of a regular hierarchy of rhythmic stress in a measure of 4/4 metre.

Puteri Bidasari

Compared to the other arias in the opera, the musical fabric of Tajuddin's *Puteri Bidasari* aria is considered a thin and expanded monophonic texture. Apart from a vocal line made up of a mixture of melodic phrases that differ in length, it is also accompanied statically by several quarter-note beats of handbells to reinforce and conclude every phrase statement. There is an extensive treatment of tuplets and feathered beams in the melody of this song, which helps stimulate a sort of rhythmic and tempo fluctuation or rubato throughout. The length of the phrases constantly changes, but the melodic outlines remain similar as if there is only one substantial pattern of melodic contour. The phrases do not undergo true development, only variation. Despite the number of notes contained in those melodic motives varied, some with many notes and some with fewer notes, it is clear that they are almost identical in melodic outline due to the limited use of pitch materials and their conformity to the scale or mode of the moment.

Regarding the directionality of the individual phrases, the combination of motifs that make up the phrasal contours for the entire melody is recognised to revolve around the sequence of ascending and descending motions of the hemitonic pentatonic scale in F (comprising semitones), resembling the alternation of the arch and inverted arch shapes. The total effect of each melodic phrase—whether it provides degrees of closure or openness—depends on the placement of the structural tones. In this context, they refer to repeated notes, notes with longer time values than the notes surrounding them, accented notes via syncopated or anticipated rhythms and the highest notes of a phrase. Here is an excerpt of all embellishing tones surrounding the structural tones (labelled as ST) within the F pentatonic sphere at bars 7–10.

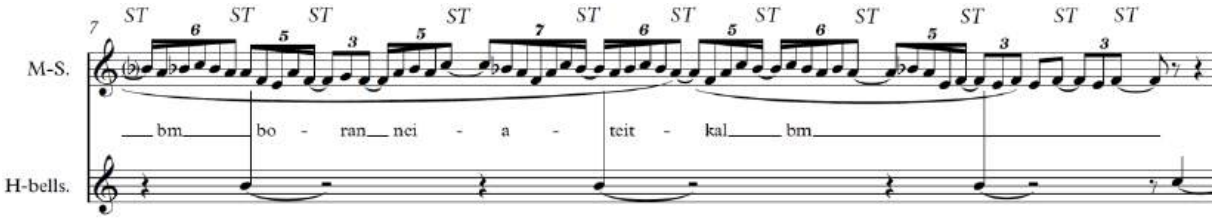

Figure 2: An excerpt from Tajuddin's *Puteri Bidasari*, bars 7–10.

As seen in Figure 2, the embellishing tones make explicit statements about the tonal hierarchy of the F hemitonic pentatonic scale (F, A, Bb, C and E) throughout the melodic phrases—where they move upwards, downwards and stationary—bound by their relationship with the tonal centre, F. Employing a non-diatonic note as the cadence for a phrase, for example, D# within the F hemitonic pentatonic scale, draws attention to increased melodic tension, which sets up listener expectations for the resolution or a sense of forward movement.

The permutation of the hemitonic pentatonic phrases strengthens the melody's character through a series of arch and inverted arch contours, which symbolises Puteri Bidasari's current emotional state after experiencing a traumatic event. Her fluctuating emotions and the decision to escape from this painful situation led her to hide and live in the depths of the forest to alleviate the pain. Bidasari, through her faith, trust and devotion, gradually overcomes the darkness and sadness of her soul but once in a while has doubt and conflicting feelings about her inevitable fate, believing that she has no control over what will happen to her. The indication of Puteri Bidasari's vulnerability to the psychological impact of her traumatic event, followed by an expression of achieving a satisfactory resolution of her pain and suffering after being rescued by Sultan Djouhan from the cruelty of the wicked queen Lida Sari is represented in the final section of the aria.

Towards the end, the vocal line unfolds—through connecting repeated lower tones with varied higher pitches and several zigzag leaps—in a partially recitative style to model the speechlike patterns of rhythm besides heightening the parlando–rubato rhythm and the emotional intensity of the hemitonic pentatonic progression. This method is viewed as a way of reducing the composer's control over the duration of sounds, allowing more flexibility in rhythmic notation by giving the singer liberty and autonomy to interpret the musical score based on their affective and perceptive faculties, guided by the composer's brief performance notes.

Puteri Walinong Sari

The piece is characterised by the use of repetition, which can be said to be a central stylistic feature of Tajuddin's music in this opera. We can see that although each voice and instrument, in its own way, encompasses repetitive material, these repetitions do not overlap with one another, leading to a series of contrapuntal textures and asynchronous overlapping rhythmic periods so they do not start and end at the same time. In addition, the rhythmic aspect and pitch stratification of this aria evolved as a direct result of the voices and instruments of distinct timbres being assigned to their own distinct pitches, rhythms, functions and gestures, which imbue the piece with a sort of nontonal style, a vivid difference of character and the layers of complexity in a coherent musical context.

It is interesting to note that the presence of continuous drone-based effects as generative drivers for the background structure of the song exemplifies Tazul Tajuddin's aesthetic priority and emphasis on the static musical language and quality, in which the almost total absence of harmonic development or progression is evident not only in this song but throughout other songs of the opera.

Furthermore, part of my observation derives from the attempt to answer the question: "How do the story's setting and historical aspect relate to the opera's compositional and contrapuntal logic?" The legendary story of Puteri Walinong Sari is believed to have taken place in Inderapura, known to be the capital city of the medieval kingdom of Pahang, many years ago. Focusing on reimagining the climax part of the tale, Tajuddin integrates musical strands associated with the traditional music of Pahang, precisely the rhythmic and motivic materials emanating from the performance of *Gendang Silat Pahang* into the musical expression of the piece through the Western compositional method. This intercultural realisation mirrors a fighting scene between Puteri Walinong Sari and Raja Mambang Segara, who were renowned for their mastery of the Malay martial art called *Silat*.

The percussion instruments utilised in this aria provide the rhythmic foundation or backbone for the entire song. It brings to mind the irregular, repeating rhythmic patterns in the music of *Gendang Pahang,* which can be seen from bar 58 to the end of the aria.

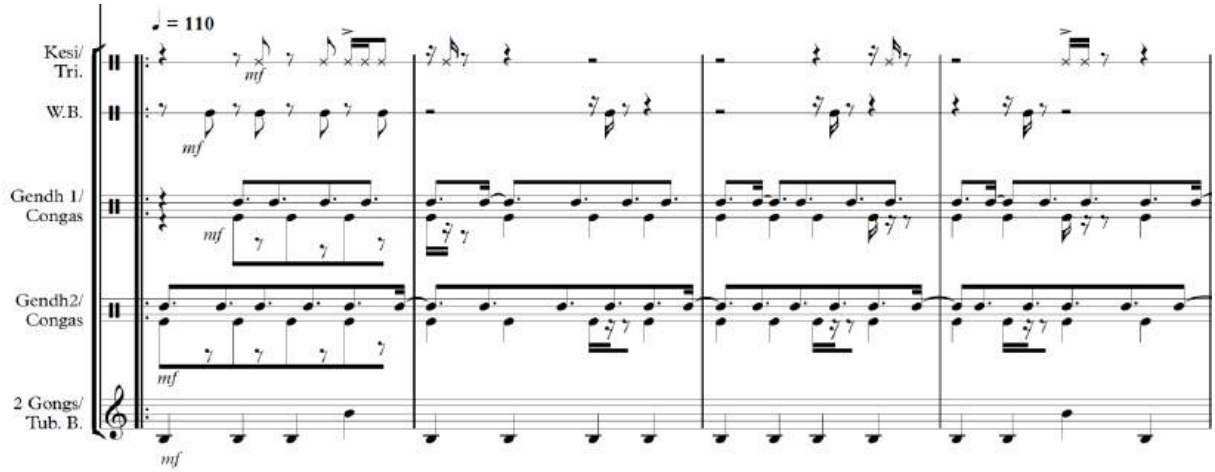

Figure 3: Percussion part of Tajuddin's *Puteri Walinong Sari* (bars 58–61).

Figure 3 shows that the interlocking rhythms associated with the performance of *Gendang Silat Pahang* were assimilated into the rhythmic language of the work through the percussion lines, giving it a distinct rhythmic profile. The independent sequence of pitches, interlocking rhythms and distinctive timbral interactions constructed in this work is the consequence of the composer's synthesis of traditional Malay elements and nontonal techniques, which convey different layers of meaning related to the intrinsic movements, conflict and dramatic situations involved during the Silat duel between Puteri Walinong Sari and Raja Mambang Segara.

PUTERI SANTUBONG AND PUTERI SEJINJANG

Puteri Santubong and Puteri Sejinjang are among the well-known mythological tales of Sarawak. It is a story about two beautiful princesses believed to be associated with the existence of Mount Santubong and the islands of Kera, Satang and Talang-talang (Krishnan, 2013). The notion of incorporating Malay folk traditions thematically into and around the music is continued in this aria, in which its melodic progression was inspired by a portion of a melody derived from the Sarawakian folk song itself, Puteri Santubong. The story's themes and settings are musically articulated by means of two musical sections consisting of contrasting pitch organisation, textural detail and musical statement to portray the two distinct realms and social environments inhabited by both princesses.

In accord with its settings and moods, a further musical representation referring to the polarity of two individual acts or specialities between Puteri Santubong and Puteri Sejinjang can be observed through analysing the interactions of two chief melodies and their accompanying SATB, demonstrated in two types of gestures. Treating the traditional Malay melody in free-style canonic passages depicts a joyful atmosphere surrounding the first segment as a symbolic realm for the clouds, where both princesses live. The two voices seem to manifest an imitative counterpoint formed by the call-and-response phrases between identical melodic fragments and sometimes a succession of varied and independent melodies.

The subsequent scene gives rise to a dramatic buildup in the transformation of moods, reflecting an argument and violent fight—that took place on earth—between both princesses until Princess Santubong and Princess Sejinjang are cursed to become Mount Santubong and the islands of Kera, Satang and Talang-talang, respectively, for breaking a promise to the king. This dramatic moment is symbolised within the rhythmic tutti and atonal passages by transforming a diatonic pitch-class collection into a pervasive chromaticism, particularly the near chromatic-

completion intrusions into the folk melody sphere. In this regard, based on the transformation of tonality from a folklike quality of melodies to a nearly atonal idiom or from traditional to nontraditional pitch collections, these two contrasting characteristics of Tajuddin's orchestral textures are ideally suited to the realisation of the musico-dramatic relationships within the aria: polarity between the realms of the clouds and the earth. The principles regarding some of the polarities between the clouds and earth realms and their corresponding musical structure and process are outlined in the following Table 1.

The Realm of the Clouds (The Pleasant Atmosphere)	The Realm of the Earth (The Argument)
Diatonic scale	Chromatic scale, nearly atonal idiom
Traditional tonality, folklike quality	Near-atonality, nontraditional modulation
Imitative counterpoint, polyphonic construction	Rhythmic tutti, parallelism
Two-voice texture for choir SATB	Chaotic spoken texture for choir SATB
Use mostly stepwise motion	Extensive use of intervallic leaps
Bars 1–101	Bars 102–134

Figure 4: The musico-dramatic polarities for Tajuddin's *Puteri Santubong and Puteri Sejinjang*.

Additionally, due to all the voices moving in parallel motion through the same and repeated rhythmic patterns, this homorhythmic texture (parallelism) underscores the interaction between the symmetrical intervallic properties of the two melodic lines and a complete spoken text by the accompanying SATB. When it comes to expressing musically both of the princesses' attempts to dominate each other to prevail over the quarrel, the multiple dissonant leaps, together with the overlapping differing texts set to the background and foreground vocal lines, play a substantial role in providing a sense of chaotic conversation and spoken texture, which to a certain extent, becomes confusing and unintelligible for the listener. The effect of this musical organisation on the vertical dimension of music inclines toward generating distorted and ambiguous effects in terms of vocal sound production resulting from a synthesis of chromatic inflexion and overlapping recitative style.

Puteri Ulek Mayang

The *Puteri Ulek Mayang* piece demonstrates a distinctive spectrum of the canonic imitation being applied to the melody of the Ulek Mayang folk song. This Malay folk melody is realised as a four-voice canon supported by a bass voice ostinato. Although the four upper voices carry the same melody canonically, slight motivic modifications within the original line create a free canon with a loose imitative relationship between the lines whilst maintaining and preserving the integrity and spirit of the folk melody. What differs between the canonic technique utilised in this chorus and the other conventional canon is that the canonic lines here receive multiple roles and characteristics throughout.

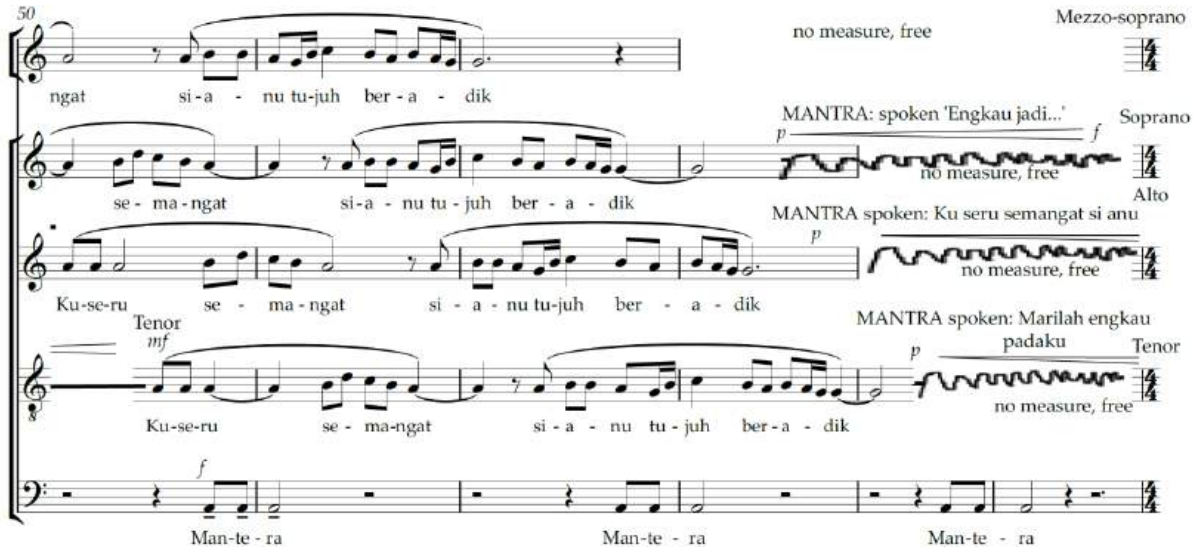

Figure 5: Bars 50–54 from Tajuddin's *Puteri Ulek Mayang.*

As shown in Figure 5, each canonical voice can be seen to alternate its function between melodic motion, vocal effect and spoken text segments. Using graphic notation for the special effects and the overlapping spoken texts allows more freedom for the singers to interpret and express the music according to their artistic and perceptive capabilities. Concerning contrapuntal relationships, the voices are not treated rhythmically proportionally to each other in relation to the treatment of time intervals, which eventually contributes to the asymmetrical and dense rhythmic texture.

Moreover, this piece is often surrounded by a static mood in the background layer since it only uses a bass line ostinato that serves as a monotonous ground bass to accompany the upper canonic figures. With the absence of functional harmony and by not clearly stating or implying the chord factors of the underlying harmonies, the cumulative effect of the vertical sound is relatively minimal and ambiguous in its harmonic implications. Toward the end, a brief, chaotic texture can be heard when the occasional spoken and sung words are used alternately as a symbolic reference to a shaman's attempts to release a young man's soul from sea spirits by chanting ritual spells or incantations against the sea spirits. This conflict reaches its climax when it calls for the attention of Princess Ulek Mayang, who arises from the sea to help save the young man's life. In short, the fusion treatment of materials gleaned from traditional Malay music and Western European classical tradition provides a fresh and exotic interwoven within the musical fabric of the chorus.

Puteri Zaleha

Further stress on the horizontal aspect of the music can be noted in the composition of Tajuddin's *Puteri Zaleha*, a two-voice aria inspired by the tale of the Princess Zaleha of Kedah, best known as the princess of the moon. Two types of melodies were built on polyphonic texture and assigned to solo soprano and viola, each with its own melodic directions, rhythmic motions and unique characters. Viewing the principal melody at a macro level, we can notice the presence of borrowed material from one of the Kedah's heritage: the construction of the soprano melody is influenced by the folk melody of the opening song of *Mek Mulung* performance, a traditional Malay theatre originating from the Kedah state. The repetitive traditional melodic motives of the *Gerak Timpuh* song that characterise the beginning of the *Mek Mulung* dance performance were occasionally contextualised for modern audiences, in which slight variations or modifications are applied to the intervallic structure to avoid monotony in the melody (Jamalludin, 2019).

Encompassing the soprano voice is the fixed seven-bar and three-note (D, E and F#) melodic segments in D Major that repeatedly appear in all phrases and almost always vary in some way with small changes in rhythmic and melodic cells, as shown in Figure 6.

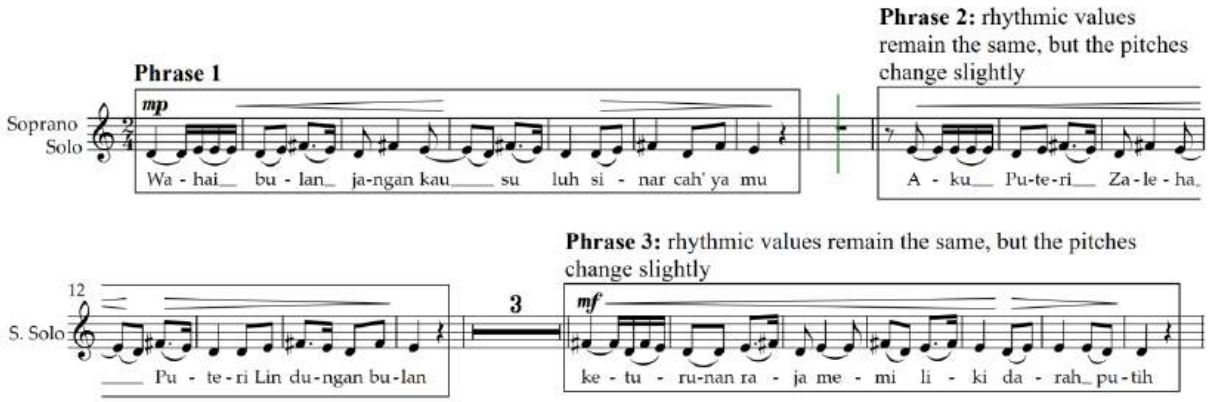

Figure 6: Soprano Solo Part of Tajuddin's *Puteri Zaleha* (Bars 1–25).

Based on the melody sung in the *Gerak Timpuh* song, Tajuddin manipulates some characteristic features of its motives to create a theme or a larger musical grouping and further develops the entire piece by retaining the important rhythmic values of a phrase but changing its interval features and contour motives slightly. Because the chosen folk song is originally monophonic, it tends to provide some latitude to the composer with regard to the possible harmonic setting and treatment. However, Tajuddin opted not to harmonise or arrange the melody but to generate a different layer of independent melody for the viola through repeated tones, intervallic tensions and ascending and descending movements of seconds within a narrow melody range.

The cadential areas in almost all phrases are imbued with structural and tonal ambiguity. Interestingly, although they seem rhythmically closed in terms of the rhythmic phrase structure—due to all their last rhythms being articulated on the downbeat of beat one—the dissonant harmonic intervals on the viola provide various degrees of tension at the cadential points. Besides, through a clearly defined melody that operated within a very limited body of an identifiable three-tone folk nature, a sense of forward motion and resolution normally found in the popular aesthetic of standard repertoire is replaced or at least reduced by the more static and irresolute tonality of mood and atmosphere in this piece, which appears to be inextricably correlated with the condition of the main character and her acts on the surroundings. The interaction and gestural shape of the soprano and viola lines represent the chief part of Princess Zaleha's action (princess of the moon). This refers to the moment when the princess evokes response and protection from the moon so as not to reveal her presence in the forest to Sultan Iskandar Musa, symbolising the polarity of light versus darkness.

Conceived as the creative output of the composer's interpretation with the extra-musical and existing musical domains, the composition of the score manifests how realising music from several cultures can influence the compositional process. In this context, Tajuddin's compositional approach includes infusing the exotic resonance of a folk melody into the contrapuntal design of an art music composition and simultaneously contextualising his practice with regard to the cultural expression of a traditional Malay art form associated with Western musical idioms.

TUN FATIMAH

Every aria or chorus in this opera is embedded with its recognisable attribute in the music, giving each work its character and identity. This unifying feature throughout *Tun Fatimah* aria can be perceived in the counterpoint of the upper and middle voices, which has the underlying sixteenth-note modulating scales built solely on the first, second, fourth, fifth and sixth notes

of natural minor scales and played by various definite pitch percussion instruments through a succession of keys and thematic material. It modulates from one key to another as it progresses, enabling the composer to have chromatic flexibility while still employing a diatonic tonality in the entire contrapuntal fabric. What differentiates this song from the others is the application of shifted tonality and restless modulations or sudden transpositions of the motivic fragments. Without involving a pivot chord and stopping to cadence, these abrupt modulations occur anywhere within a section or phrase, sometimes when a new phrase is introduced, and sometimes in the middle of a phrase. The layering of melodic passages in different keys is conceived in a contrapuntal context, specifically a free imitative canon at intervals other than the octave, as outlined in Figure 6.

<table>
<tr><td>BARS</td><td>78</td><td>79</td><td>80</td><td>81</td><td>82</td><td>83</td><td>84</td><td>85</td><td>86</td><td>87</td><td>88</td></tr>
<tr><td>VOICE 1</td><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="3">Canon at the thirds in G minor</td><td colspan="3">Melody in A minor</td><td colspan="2">Sustained B note</td></tr>
<tr><td>VOICE 2</td><td></td><td colspan="3">Canon at the thirds in C minor</td><td colspan="3">Melody in D minor</td><td colspan="4">Sustained D note</td></tr>
<tr><td>VOICE 3</td><td></td><td colspan="4">Melody in C minor</td><td colspan="2">Canon at the thirds in D minor</td><td colspan="4">Sustained G note</td></tr>
<tr><td>VOICE 4</td><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="5">Melody in G minor</td><td colspan="2">Canon at the unison in A minor</td><td>Sustained C# note</td></tr>
<tr><td>KEYS/CHORDS</td><td>C minor</td><td colspan="4">G minor</td><td colspan="4">D minor</td><td colspan="2">E minor</td><td>B minor</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 7: Map of canon for Tajuddin's *Tun Fatimah*, bars 78–88.

Polytonal writing becomes obvious from bar 78 onwards when two keys are sounded simultaneously, resulting from the overlapping melodic phrases in different tonalities between two textural fabrics: the vocal and percussion lines. As we can see, the ending notes of certain phrases were retained through harmonic succession, generating a sustained intervallic tension and unresolved dissonance within a number of measures. In the context of the piece's tonal design, this no-resolution musical event is typically absent or rarely found in the compositional idioms of Malaysian mainstream or popular music. Tajuddin's concept of experimenting with texture and resonance by projecting diverse keys in two-part interpolations is particularly relevant to the musical symbolism that suggests another level of dramatic association in reference to Tun Fatimah's traumatic reaction to her catastrophic experience.

Conclusion

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the tonal system, which is based on the diatonic scales and triadic harmony, had begun to collapse under the weight of increasingly complex chromaticism. The radical departure from traditional tonal functions was also matched by another departure from earlier organisations of rhythm, which has seen the cultivation of more flexible uses of rhythm and phrase patterns in music.

Nonetheless, it is a different case in the Malaysian music ecosystem, where the dissemination and distribution of information and commodification about this musical modernism has little impact on the general public compared to the mass appeal of popular entertainment. In an attempt to articulate the stories of the selected legendary Malaysian princesses musically by means of contemporary musical language, Tazul Tajuddin presents new ways of organising a multitude of ideas, structural parameters, durations and expressive elements in *Opera Serikandi Nusantara* to evoke a more abstract level of dramatic association and a vast range of emotional expression. Since this musical work is viewed as neither completely tonal nor completely atonal, many of the musical features and techniques developed in this opera are discussed beyond the framework of functional tonality.

One of the obvious musical features employed in this opera is related to how the composer organises the opera's rhythms and metrical framework in nontraditional ways and how they are connected to the musical attributes of twentieth-century music. Apart from utilising irregular phrases, many of the rhythmic patterns in this opera do not line up neatly with the notated beats. This metrical displacement technique prevents the rhythms from accentuating the strong beats of the basic metre, which causes listener expectations to rise by shifting the regularly recurring strong–weak stress patterns to different beats and accents, leading to temporary contradictions between the concurrent rhythmic stress and metric stress. To this extent, there is a feeling of ametric music or lack of perceivable metre throughout certain arias and choruses of the opera.

A closer inspection of the operatic piece reveals that it has a certain informality and freedom in the spatial stratification of musical parts. Tajuddin's treatment of the opera specifically portrays different principles of adopting and structuring the raw materials of music into unified phrases and gestures, for instance, employing diatonic and pentatonic collections in complex and independent canonic or contrapuntal manners and quoting folk melodies in fragmentary and repetitive ways. There is little to no functional use of its seven- and five-scale degrees to form the harmonic figures. The melodic or horizontal dimension is nearly always the focal point of the music and not so much the vertical dimension as the consequence of the superposition of lines. Through his music, Tajuddin aimed for complete integration and mediation of the vernacular language, the philosophical and the aesthetic from the cultures of both Western art canon and traditional East Asian music in accord with his goals of creating a large-scale composition pertinent to the Malaysian context.

Remarks

All depictions and notations are by the authors before printing.

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AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE SINGING STYLE OF THE DAMBANA ĀDIVĀSI COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Indigenous people in Sri Lanka (*Ādivāsi*) are usually an isolated community living in a country or region who have a specific language, culture, and way of life belonging to generations that are endemic to each country or region. While indigenous communities are the inheritors of the earliest history of a country, those in Sri Lanka are referred to as the "*Vedi*" community (*Veddas*). Possessing a unique language, culture, and lifestyle, they have coined the term "*Wanniyalaeto*" (forest dwellers) to refer to themselves. The purpose of this research is to identify the music of the *Dambāna Ādivāsi* community and to examine the characteristics of their music from an ethnomusicological aspect. The analysis of this research is twofold: qualitatively and quantitatively. Data was collected through the use of audio-recorded interviews, field observations, formal discussions as well as studying existing literature on the matter. The basic features of chanting can be seen in the *Vedi* chants of the *Ādivāsi* folk, while reflections of man's first attempts at singing a line of words can be gleaned at through *Vedi* songs. *Vedi Daru Nalavili* (indigenous lullabies) in the *Dambana* region are a prominent source in the study of ethnomusicology in Sri Lanka. In finding the unique identity possessed by *Ādivāsi* music through examination of the notations and tonality of their music, a new method of analyzing audio recordings is introduced in this study. Here, the use of Python programming to extract and filter the pitch-time data of an audio signal and then graphically analyze it using Origin is utilized. Within this analysis approach, the tonality of the music, as well as the quotients between successive intervals was also noted. A significant aspect of this study is that while the music of the *Ādivāsi* community is discussed in researches, a quantitative study into it has not been approached since Myers' analysis of *Ādivāsi* music, which is found as a chapter in the text by the Seligmanns in 1911, which might also be the given time frame of the identification. This study also goes on to show that the music of the *Veddas* can indeed be considered as prehistoric music[3], and the importance of conserving this intangible cultural heritage is of utmost importance in contemporary times.

Keywords

Ādivāsi, prehistoric music, Sri Lankan indigenous music, Vedda community.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations State of the World's Indigenous Peoples report considers the definition of an indigenous community to be as outlined by Jose R. Martinez Cobo as,

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[3] The ideas and conclusions given here are solely those of the responsible authors. Editors and reviewers had only minimal impact on that.

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AEMR, 15: 73-86.
DOI: 10.30819/aemr.15-7

> … those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. (United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2011).

In adherence to this definition, the *Vedda* (also written as *Vedda, Vedi*) or what later came to be referred to as the *Ādivāsi* community of Sri Lanka can be identified as a community of indigenous people in Sri Lanka. This is further supported by the fact that these communities have been shown through many literary texts as to having existed before the first historic settlements in Sri Lanka by foreign entities such as the Portuguese, Dutch, or British, the presence of cultural affairs unique and isolated to them in contemporary times, and the continuance of a developed social system within their community.

It is documented that the earliest civilizations of Sri Lanka were separated into two main communities based on whether they worshipped the *Nāgayo* (serpents) or the *Yakshayo* (demons) (Amarawansha Thero & Dissanayake, 1994; Blundell, 2012; Withanachchi, 2017). The former has been attributed to those who were seafarers and/or led livelihoods connected to water sources, while the latter were described to occupy the more central areas of Sri Lanka, particularly engaged in cultivations and forestry (Kulatillake, 1991). The *Mahavamsa* mentions the origin story of the *Veddas* to be in the form of the offspring of the *Yaksha* tribe's queen, *Kuveni* (Amarawansha Thero and Dissanayake 1994). Indigenous communities themselves refer to *Kuveni* in their own language as *Kukulapola Kiriamma*, and proclaim that they are descended from her. However, archeological evidences suggest that the *Veddas* show links to have existed 34,000 years ago, predating *Kuveni* by a great amount, and studies even suggest a link between *Veddas* and specimens of prehistoric man found in Sri Lanka (Deraniyagala, 1971).

While historically hunting and foraging have been the livelihood of the *Veddas*, it has been seen that the exchange of goods with the main population of the country has taken place (De Silva and Punchihewa, 2011). While trade between the main populace had taken place, the Seligmanns had observed that the *Veddas* had not started to share their cultural elements with the main population until around the 20th century[4] (Myers, 1911)[5]. The livelihoods of the *Veddas*, however, began to change drastically in the past 50 years, the most notable event being the declaration of indigenous land as a part of the *Maduru Oya* wildlife sanctuary in 1983 by the Government of Sri Lanka. Following this, the *Vedda* community had to abandon their hunting and foraging practices due to the loss of rights to do so in the forest areas by the 270/9 gazette published on November 9, 1983. This forced the indigenous community to not only abandon their unique lifestyle, but also to adapt to contemporary farming practices to sustain themselves (Wanniyalaeto 2014). Furthermore, they express woe in having to conform to laws set out by "Englishmen" and having their land and, in extension, their freedom confined to a minuscule portion of what they used to enjoy by the laws set out by the government (Wanniyalaeto, 2014).

[4] This statement, however, needs to be taken under the understanding that cultural changes may have already occurred by the time the Seligmanns conducted their study on the Veddas. Since there are no recordings of the music of the Veddas predating the ones recorded by the Seligmanns this study will factor those recordings and findings as a foundational baseline.

[5] Myers notes that the Seligmanns observations were that while most of the Vedda tribes did not exchange cultural affairs with the Sinhalese, some tribes, given the opportunity, would incorporate Sinhalese percussion instruments in their rituals and songs.

With these conditions, the cultural identity of the *Veddas* is put to risk. Myers describes songs that were sung to commemorate the success or failure of hunts or forages for honey in his chapter of the Seligmanns' account of the *Vedi* community published in 1911. But in contrast to the early 20th century, modern-day indigenous communities have very little practical use for these songs as they are bound by the current laws to abandon the lifestyle that was inherent to their culture. So it is not only a decline in the uniqueness of their lifestyle, but also a decline of their culture that is prevalent in modern times. Thus, an urgent need to not only conserve, but also compare and estimate the degree to which their culture has changed is important for the protection of this intangible cultural heritage.

Within the context of this research, the music of the *Dambana Ādivāsi* community has been considered on a judgment sampling basis for analysis. Using the lyrical and contextual background of these songs, the identity of the indigenous community's music is established qualitatively. Following this, a novel approach to analyze these songs quantitatively is introduced and applied in order to establish the cultural identity present in these songs quantitatively. This method can also be applied to provide an inroad to measure the changes and influences of contemporary music sources on modern recordings of indigenous music. The following are aimed to be accomplished through this research.

- Identifying the sociocultural practices, in particular the music of the *Dambana* Indigenous community.
- Examining the music of the said community from an ethnomusicological perspective to establish the cultural identity of the music of the community.
- Development of a new approach to analyze audio recordings of prehistoric music in order to draw comparisons between different samples to a higher degree of accuracy, as well as aid in the reconstruction of these songs to their original form.

The research employs a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods, while data was mainly collected through field visits and observations, formal interviews, and perusing literary sources and existing audio recordings in archives.

LITERARY SURVEY

Many international and national scholarly works provide a variety of accounts on the *Ādivāsi* community of Sri Lanka. The first mentions of the community in English texts were the accounts of life in (then) Ceylon by Robert Knox in 1681. The epitome of texts on *Veddas* is widely accepted as the account written by the Seligmanns in 1911. While this is an extensive account of the ceremonies, societal structure, properties, and cultural practices of the *Veddas*, the chapter on Music of the *Veddas* by C. S. Myers plays a crucial role as it is the only in-depth analysis of their music till the present day. This lack of an extensive study to the level given by the Seligmanns and Myers on the music of the *Veddas* is mentioned in many reports on the indigenous community written within the last two decades (De Silva & Punchihewa, 2011). This gap is what this study attempts to address, specifically, to reexamine the musical analysis laid out by Myers.

Some texts refer to two main types of *Veddas* as *Gam Veddo* (*Vedda* communities that have formed village-like social structures) and *Gal Veddo* (*Vedda* communities that frequented or occupied caves and rock formations or their immediate vicinities) (Vimalavansha Thero 2000), while a third type called *Muhudu Veddo* has also been mentioned in other texts (Seligmann and Seligmann 1911; Dart 1985; Weerakkody and Muhudu Veddo Premaweera, 2013). This latter type formed settlements around the Eastern and Northern coastal regions and is mostly employed in livelihoods connected to fisheries. R. L. Spittel's non-fiction literary works "Wild Ceylon" (1924), "Far-off Things" (1933); and novels such as "Savage Sanctuary" (1941) and

"Vanished Trails" (1950) provide valuable insight into the lifestyle of the *Ādivāsi* community as well as reflects on their interactions with various communities external to their own. However, within his works, there is rarely a mention of the *Muhudu Veddo,* and the descriptions are mostly revolving around *Gam Veddo*.

The Sri Lankan ethnologist Nandadewa Wijesekara goes into a detailed description of the lifestyle and distribution of the *Veddas* in his book "*Veddas* in Transition" (1964), but a deep discussion of their music is absent. De Silva and Punchihewa (2011) have given a rather extensive and excellent effort in describing the modern socioeconomical and statistical conditions of the *Ādivāsi* community. While this text has been cited by many authors writing on the *Ādivāsi* communities, this too does not include a discussion on the music of the *Veddas,* akin to that brought up by Myers in 1911. C. De Silva Kulatillake has taken strides to analyze the music of the *Veddas* in his book (1991) as well. While he too collected and archived several *Vedi Gee* (songs of the *Veddas*) in 1984, his analysis on the collection gives note to the mono-melodic feature present in their singing style. He further elaborates that while the language of the *Veddas* is pronounced at a faster speed, and this quality is present even in their songs, the prevailing sense of a meter in their music is a strange feature. The rushed pronunciation should not allow for a meter within their music, nor are they even aware of such a construct within music, yet a rudimentary notion of timing is present (Kulatillake, The Veddas 2009). These audio recordings are currently kept at a variety of collections in the country, including the National Archives, Archives of the National Broadcasting Corporation, university archives as well as personal collections. A great number of recordings on folk music recorded by him are also housed at the C. De Silva Kulatillake Archival and Research Unit at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Lanka.

Further mentions of rites of passage within the *Ādivāsi* communities regarding birthing ceremonies are given in Uthpala Ekanayake's book *The Music of the Prehistoric People of Sri Lanka* (2015) as well as within texts mentioned above. These rituals play an important part in the establishment of the identity of the music of the *Veddas*, as well as in providing a contextual background to understand the lyrics of these songs.

THE DAMBANA ĀDIVĀSI COMMUNITY

While it has been documented that there was a rather large distribution of *Vedda* settlements in the historic periods of Sri Lanka, we can only see a very few of these in present times. While a few settlements can be seen in the Eastern coastal area, Figure 1 clearly shows the greater density of the indigenous community in the *Badulla* district. The central city for the *Ādivāsi* community can be seen to be *Dambāna*, a *Grama Seva* Division of *Mahiyanganaya,* which is in the *Badulla* district. The indigenous community refers to *Mahiyanganaya* as *Bintenna*, which is rooted in the Pali language to mean "flat land." Many estuaries of the *Mahaveli* River can be found within this area.

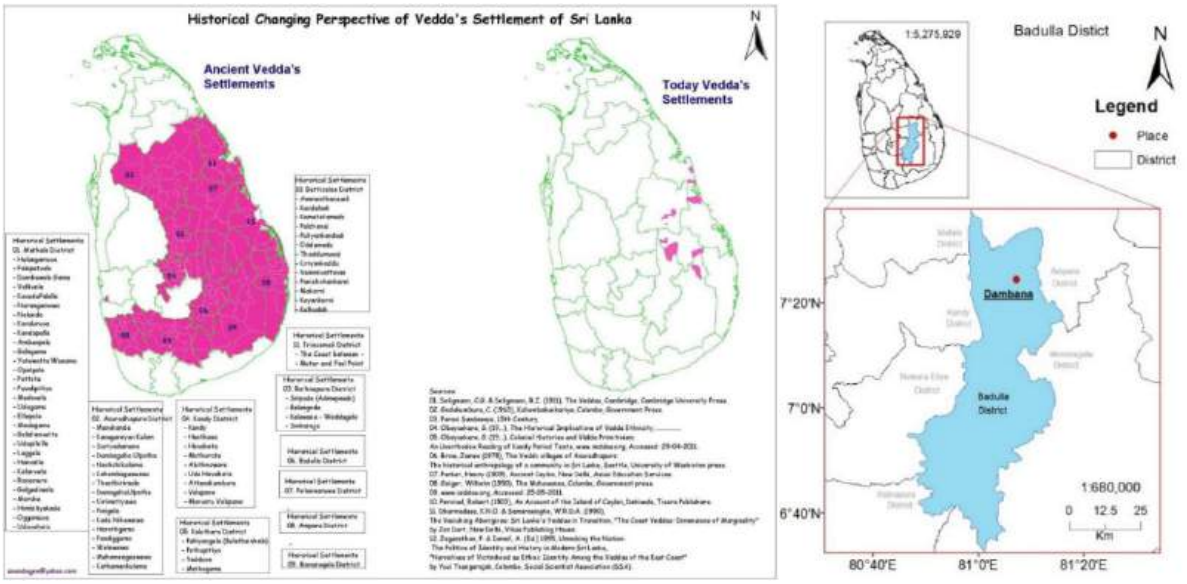

Figure 1 and 2: The distribution of the Ādivāsi community's settlements in historic times (left) as compared to modern (2010) times (right) (De Silva and Punchihewa 2011). While Dambāna is considered the most prominent Vedda settlement in the modern day, it can be seen that it is also the largest indigenous settlement in Sri Lanka. A district map depicting Dambāna, the area that was selected for this research.

he boundaries of the *Dambāna Grama Seva* Division are the *Maduru Oya* national park to the North, the *Kukulāpola Wasama* (Village Division) to the East, the *Ridimaliyadda* District Secretariat office to the South, and the *Ulhitiya* reservoir to the West. Within the *Dambāna Grama Seva* Division are villages such as *Gurukumbura, Wathuyāya, Kotabakiniya, Walpalewela, Bimmalamulla*, and *Dambāna*; the first three villages mentioned here being noted as prominent *Ādivāsi* settlements[6]. 1004 families and 3281 individuals are reported to belong to the *Dambāna Grama Seva* Division, from which around 375 families and 847 individuals belong to the indigenous community as of December 2023 (Wijekoon & Weerakkody, 2023). It has been found that of these individuals, 79% have fathers of the *Vedda* origin, and 83% have mothers of the *Vedda* origin (De Silva & Punchihewa, 2011).

The report by De Silva & Punchihewa in 2011 further shows the generational spread of the *Veddas*, where 42% of the population belongs to the *Ūru Varige* familial clan and 15% to the *Unapana Varige* clan. A striking point here is that 31% of the indigenous population here do not attribute themselves to be belonging to any such clan, giving room to speculation as to whether they are descended from a now extinct clan, or being descended from a cross-breeding between the *Vedda* and Sinhala communities, or simply whether they are in fact members of the Sinhala community who wrongfully seeking to benefit from the provisions given to the indigenous community by the government or foreign entities. While 96.6% of the *Vedi* community have answered to following Buddhism, 0.4% of the population have stated that they strictly follow *Yaksha* worship. However, it should be noted that the religious practice of Buddhism in Sri Lanka does overlap with the rituals for *Nāga-Yaksha* deities, and the remaining 3% answered as to following the Buddhist philosophy with the belief in *Yaksha* worship as well.

The leader of the indigenous community of Sri Lanka, referred to as *Vanniyalaeto*, resides in the *Kotabakiniya* village. Often regarded as the "face" of the indigenous community, this

[6] Over 85% of the members of the *Dambāna Ādivāsi* community reside in these three villages according to data obtained by the *Dambāna Grama Seva* Office, 2023.

village is mainly a tourism-based area, and a more real picture of the *Veddas* can be seen as moving to the outskirts of the *Kotabakiniya* village. It has also been noted that the main livelihood of employed members of the indigenous community is in Chena or paddy cultivation. While some members also engage in tourism activities, a few discrepancies between quantitative and qualitative descriptions of their income sources are noted in De Silva and Punchihewa's report.

THE IDENTITY OF ĀDIVĀSI MUSIC IN SRI LANKA

While the vast majority of the modern-day *Ādivāsi* community follow Buddhism, their cultural identity and historic practices are deeply rooted in the worship of *Yakshayo* (demons). Even in the present day, rituals and traditions to worship male demons (*Kande Yaka, Indigolle Yaka, Bilindi Yaka, Kadawara Yaka*), female demons (*Ela Kalu Sāli, Maha Kalu Pāli, Maha Yama Palli*), *Kiri Ammāwaru* (ancestral female deities) (*Indigole Kiriamma, Unapane Kiriamma, Kukulāpola Kiriamma*), and a number of *Deviwaru* (gods) (*Bandāra Deviwaru, Irugal Bandāra*) can be seen (Maddumage, 2021). These rituals can be seen in the form of white magic. *Næ Yakun Pidum Maduwa, Næ Yakun Adukku Maduwa, Hangalē Panama, Hækmē Natuma,* and *Kirikoraha Natuma* are a few rituals that take place even in modern days, not merely as a show for tourists but as an essential part of their lifestyle. These rituals are filled with a healthy number of *Vedi Gee* (*Vedi* songs), which is one form in which indigenous music can be seen in. Some of these songs are sung exclusively at particular rituals within the community and are not sung in the presence of an outside audience.

Referred to as "*Yādini*", the lyrics to many of these songs implore blessings to be bestowed upon the singer (and the people involved in the ritual) from their ancestral deities. Referred to as *Na Yakun*, they can be called upon by any member of the Indigenous community (Blundell 2012). These blessings may be for a fertile harvest, successful hunts, or even to ward off sickness. These are often rather lengthy and sung in a prose style. One such song is as mentioned below.

Ara uni kiri- *gal poj-je* *van-ga-na* *van-ni-ya* *ara de-va* *gal poj-je* *ran-ga-na* *van-ni-ya…*[7]	To he (the *Yakshaya*) who has taken residence in *giri gal poththa* (*Girigala* mountain), to he (the *Deviya*) who has taken residence in *deva gal poththa* (*Devagala* mountain) … (this is a song that seeks to praise the relatives and deities of importance to the singer)

Here, while each line contains only one or two words, they are often broken down into two or three syllables as shown above to compensate for the rhythm and meter of the song. This sense of rhythm is further enhanced by the repetition of lines (or more precisely words), or by replacing a single word in a previous line and repeating it in the same rhythm. During the course of these rituals, it is often seen that they engage in body percussion. This was also observed by the Seligmanns as well as other documentations on the *Veddas* in the 20th century.

While songs for blessings are present, it was also seen that there are songs sung by *Ādivāsi* womenfolk to their husbands who return after unsuccessful trips into the forest to collect honey

[7] This song is given in audio recording #02. Audio recording #01 is also a such *Yādini* song.

(Seligmann & Seligmann, 1911). The importance of food within a lyrical context is emphasized further in lullabies.

When compared to many other traditional lullabies in Sri Lanka, those of the *Ādivāsi* community are rather fast-paced. Giving a special place for phonetics that appeal to young infants, these lullabies are often two- or three-note melodies with extra notes added as grace notes when phonetic sounds are dragged while singing the lullaby. The use of phrases such as "*ammī rōi roi roi rōi – appī rōi roi roi rōi*" and "*ten tendināne tendināne*" is also seen as an enhancement to the phonetic nature of the lullabies. The lyrical line, "*Pati andanne monnata do bala*" (why is the infant crying?) is greatly found in multiple places of the lullaby. In some instances, the line is sung as with the i sound in *pati* being dragged (*patī*) while in other instances the word *andanne* is broken into syllables and the last phonetic sound is dragged as *an-dan-nē*. The lyrical content of their lullabies mainly revolves around this question, asking it in one line and proceeding to ask the infant if he will be appeased with a specific item of food and stop crying. This is often followed by the person singing the lullaby asking another to give some of the mentioned food items to the infant (Weerakkody, 2013).

Patīdan-nē mon-nā-ta do bala	Why is the baby crying?
gavarage thelatai an-dan-nē e-kā-t di-pā-n pa-tī-tâ	It cries asking for the fat of the bull Give one for the child then
… go-na-la bok-ki-ta an-dan-nē	…
… hin-tha-la ma-le-ta an-dan-nē	It cries asking for *Gonala* (a type of potato)
… katu-ala bok-ki-ta an-dan-nē…	… It cries asking for a vegetable (that grows as a vine) … It cries asking for *Katuala* (a type of potato)

The *Veddas* are described in most accounts as being in tune with the nature around them. While they hunt for meat, they are often described as nonviolent toward their fellow humans. This compassion and simplicity are expressed greatly in their songs. Lullabies are often a reflection of their livelihoods of foraging, and the experiences they derive while out in the forests. While the womenfolk usually do not step outside of their homes, most recordings of *Ādivāsi* lullabies are sung by men. This stands true for many recordings and attempts at recording their lullabies[8].

Romance is also a part of the music of the Veddas[9], often describing activities in the forest. Invitation to a female member of the community to enjoy the freshness of the fruits of the forest, to witness the sights of the birds, and such are described in the lyrics of these songs.

When looking at the music of the Veddas qualitatively, understanding that these songs have been passed down through oral traditions for millennia, as well as the nature of these songs, suggests that the collection of indigenous music must be a limited and small one. The use of phonetic sounds to enhance their songs, as well as the syllabic approach to sounding out words to preserve rhythm, is indicative of a tribal aspect in their music. Furthermore, studies have shown that these songs are in fact mostly comprising of two-, three-, or four-note melodies. This is a rare feature that has not been observed even in the indigenous tribes of the Oceanic-

[8] Audio recordings #07 #08, #09, #10, #11, and #12 are all lullabies. A point of interest is that #11 is a lullaby sung by an *Ādivāsi* woman.

[9] Audio recordings #03, #04, #05, and #06 are all such songs.

Pacific or American regions (Myers 1911). These points prove sufficient to reason that the music of the Sri Lankan indigenous community is, in fact, prehistoric music.

Studies into *Vedi Gee* are also important as they establish not only the musical identity of the *Ādivāsi* community of Sri Lanka, but also their linguistic identity. Surveys show that only 21.5% of the *Ādivāsi* population know how to sing their lullabies in modern days, and an alarming number of only 6.6% are able to sing *Yādini* songs. This decline can also be attributed to the loss of their indigenous language in the modern day, as only 11% of the *Vedda* population is conversant in their language, while most of these are in the 50–70 years of age category (De Silva and Punchihewa 2011). Another reason for the loss of cultural aspects is due to the upheaval of their traditional lifestyle. Poverty has caused women who traditionally did not step out of their houses to go out in order to ensure that the family is financially supported. The hunting and foraging lifestyle, too, is now almost completely abandoned. This brings up the simple question as to whether they would engage in the simplest of cultural practices such as singing lullabies and songs about the forest when they do not engage in these activities themselves now. The conservation of both the *Ādivāsi* language and their music is an act of great importance to preserving the indigenous culture of Sri Lanka and in maintaining one of the oldest forms of prehistoric music in the world.

An Analytical Approach to Studying and Reconstructing Audio Files

The audio files that were considered for this analysis process were those that were recorded by Mr. C. De Silva Kulathilake in 1984 of the *Ādivāsi* songs. While audio files of the same songs were obtained during field visits at *Dambāna* in 2010, 2014, and 2021, these were not considered for the analysis pertaining to this paper. This is due to the observation and well-documented fact of the loss of identity to the songs of the indigenous tribes of Sri Lanka, with influences of modern and classical Hindustani music elements in contemporary times[10] (Myers 1911).

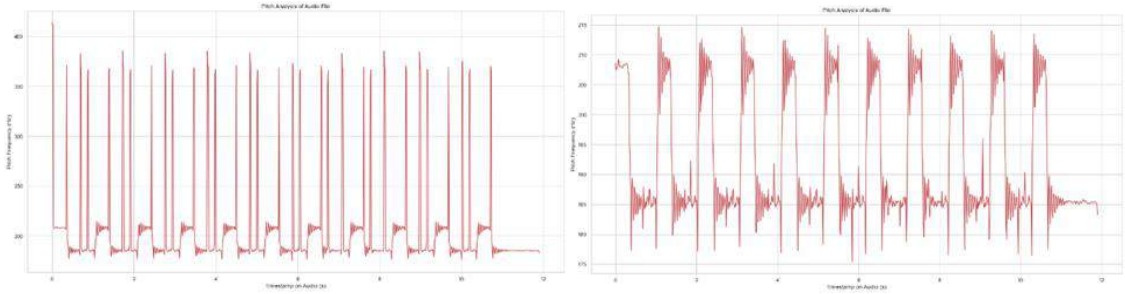

Figure 3: A Python plot showing the pitch analysis without proper filtering.

Figure 4: A sample whose pitch has been properly filtered is displayed in this Python plot.

The Python programming language–based Jupyter console was used in writing the program to perform the numerical segments of the analysis, while the graphical analysis segments were carried out using Origin 2021. Standard numerical computation libraries *numpy* and *pandas* were imported as well as the library *librosa* for audio analysis. *matplotlib* and *seaborn* libraries were also imported to view data graphically in the Jupyter console. First, the considered audio recording was imported into Adobe Audition 1.5 and was trimmed to around 10–12 s. This trimming was done after identifying a consistently repetitive wave form in the recording that is

[10] These differences between older and contemporary recordings of *Ādivāsi* music, as well as comparisons between musical influences and *Ādivāsi* music are to be studied separately in an upcoming paper.

devoid of extended silences or sharp intakes of breathing that occur when ending one line of a song to move to the next. The trimmed audio was not manipulated in any other way and simply exported as a *.wav* (Wave Audio) file. This audio sample was then imported to the Jupyter console for analysis.

First, using the functions of the *librosa* library, the audio signal was loaded with no difference to its existing sample rate, and the pitch-time data were extracted using the library's in-built harmonic–percussive separation function. The obtained array for pitch values was filtered by removing all silences and observed graphically as shown in Figure 9. The sharper, singular peaks were compared to the audio file as seen in Adobe Audition and were noted to be inflections caused by taking breaths at the start or end of each word. Thus, these singular peaks were filtered out too, and the resulting was plotted as shown in Figure 10. The results obtained using the program are corroborated by those obtained using the Auto Pitch function of the audio analysis software SIL Speech Analyzer version 3.1.2.0[11]. The pitch and time stamp arrays were then exported to an Excel sheet and imported into Origin.

First, the pitch frequency vs. time graph of the audio sample was plotted, and then two smoothening functions were approximated for it. The first was a loess filter and the second a fast Fourier transform (FFT) filter. These filters are applied to better aid in reconstructing the audio sample using classical notation. The resultant curves were plotted alongside the curve of the original audio sample. The average value for the peaks and troughs obtained by each curve was then computed and marked using horizontal lines as shown in Figure 11.

Using this graphical representation, conclusions on the number of semitones used in a song, the range of semitones used in a song, and comparisons between semitones described by the cents system can be drawn. These conclusions are important in studying the music of indigenous communities, especially those that show attributes of prehistoric music[12].

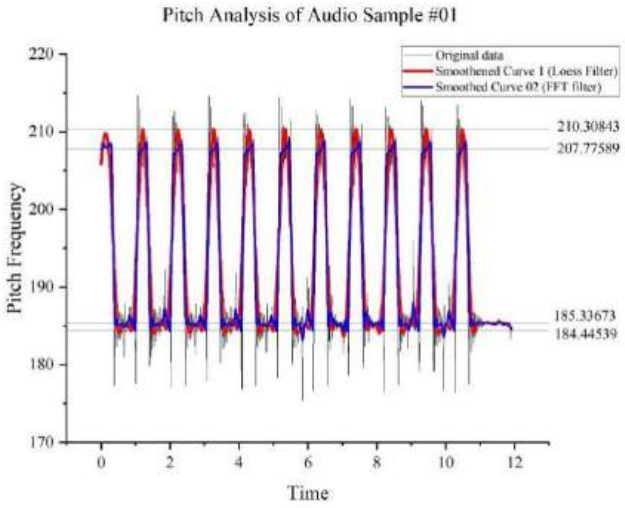

Figure 5: The graphical representation of the audio sample along with the smoothened curves. It can be seen here that the FFT filter provides a curve that is more in line with the cent system described by John Ellis (F#3 is given as 185 Hz and G#3 as 207.65 Hz). The loess filter, however, describes a tonality that does not adhere to the cent system.

[11] While this software suffices to produce graphical representations of the required parameters of audio analysis, an in-depth consideration of the data is not possible, hence the requirement to formulate a methodology that is more flexible for audio analysis and comparisons.

[12] It is expected to transcribe the analyzed audio recordings into classical music notation and compare them side by side with the original audio files. This is an important step to understand the relevance of the classical cent system in studying Sri Lankan indigenous music.

A Quantitative Look into the Music of the Dambana Indigenous Community

Following the process outlined in the previous segment, 12 audio recordings of a variety of Vedi Songs were analyzed. The lowest marked frequency is considered as a baseline to obtain the necessary ratios. According to previous analytical work on the music of the Veddas, the songs analyzed in this study fell into two groups: songs which predominantly had only two notes or two notes with one or more grace notes present (group A), and songs that contained three notes (group B) (Myers, 1911; Kulatillake, 1988; Kulatillake, 2009).

Upon noting down the relevant pitch approximations obtained by the two smoothened curves, respectively, the intervals were converted to quotients and cents as mentioned in the analysis by Myers in 1911. The results for each group with the selected smoothening filter are tabulated in Table 1. The deviation of the obtained results from those described by Myers too are noted side by side.

Recording #	Quotients		Cents	
1 (L)	1.1304	(0.4%)	212	(3.5%)
10 (L)	1.0836	(0.8%)	139	(11.1%)
	(1.1456)		(235)	1st Grace tone
	(1.2853)		(435)	2nd Grace tone
12 (FFT)	1.1538	(2.5%)	248	(20.8%)
	(1.7446)		(963)	1st Grace tone

Figure 6: Showing a table of the analysis of the Ādivāsi songs belonging to group A.

We can see that recordings #1 and #12 show an approximate whole tone interval between the two notes of the song, while the interval in recording #10 is closer to five-eighths of a whole tone. These results are in close agreement with those obtained by Myers in 1911. However, the same cannot be said when comparing some of the cent values of the intervals in group B songs Table 2). But this is contrasted by an acceptable set of values for the interval quotients.

Recording #	Quotients		Cents	
5 (L)	1.0868	(0.02%)	144	(0.07%)
	1.2275	(9.50%)	354	(80%)
	1.1021		168	1st Grace tone
6 (FFT)	1.1185	(1.2%)	194	(2.5%)
	1.1854	(5.6%)	294	(34.4%)
7 (FFT)	1.0840	(0.3%)	140	(0.02%)
	1.2010	(0.8%)	316	(60.5%)
8 (L)	1.1467	(0.9%)		
	1.1546	(1.6%)		
9 (FFT)	1.0901	(0.29%)	149	(3.7%)
	1.2257	(1.30%)	352	(78.8%)

	1.7984		1016	1st Grace tone
11 (FFT)	1.2437	(14.4%)		
	1.3213	(9.2%)		
	1.2146	1st Grace tone		

Figure 7: Showing a table of the analysis of the *Ādivāsi* songs belonging to group B.

Recording #	Quotients		Cents
3 (FFT)	1.1256	(2.3%)	205
	1.1108	(4.8%)	182
	1.0958	(3.4%)	158
4 (FFT)	1.2118	(5.4%)	332
	1.0771	(1.2%)	128
	1.2536	(17.2%)	391

Figure 8: Showing a table of the analysis of the *Ādivāsi* songs belonging to group C.

A point of note here is that as the majority of songs are sung in a prose style, the song is interrupted from time to time for the singer to draw in breath. Following this, the pitch may shift upward or downward in the next set of lines of the song, and usually the tempo is quickened. But the difference in intervals is still maintained, no matter where the pitch starts from. This implies a rudimentary sense of tonality, as it is clear that the song segments stick to a limited range. Furthermore, the prominence of two- and three-note songs in *Vedi* music establishes the fact that Sri Lankan indigenous music is, in fact, prehistoric music.

Another striking point, as brought up by Kulatillake (1991), is that an obvious sense of rhythm and meter is present in *Ādivāsi* music. Even with the song being interrupted regularly to inhale, the meter never falters to continue from where it stopped. However, in no way have they been introduced to or are knowledgeable about meters. This speaks to a primal sense of timing and rhythm within the Ādivāsi community. Transcribing the audio recordings into classical music notation[13] gives a clear picture of this remarkable sense of meter possessed by the *Ādivāsi* community (Myers, 1911).

[13] This can be done considering the pitch of the notes to provide a full analysis, or disregarding the pitch and focusing on the rhythm and metre (Figure 10).

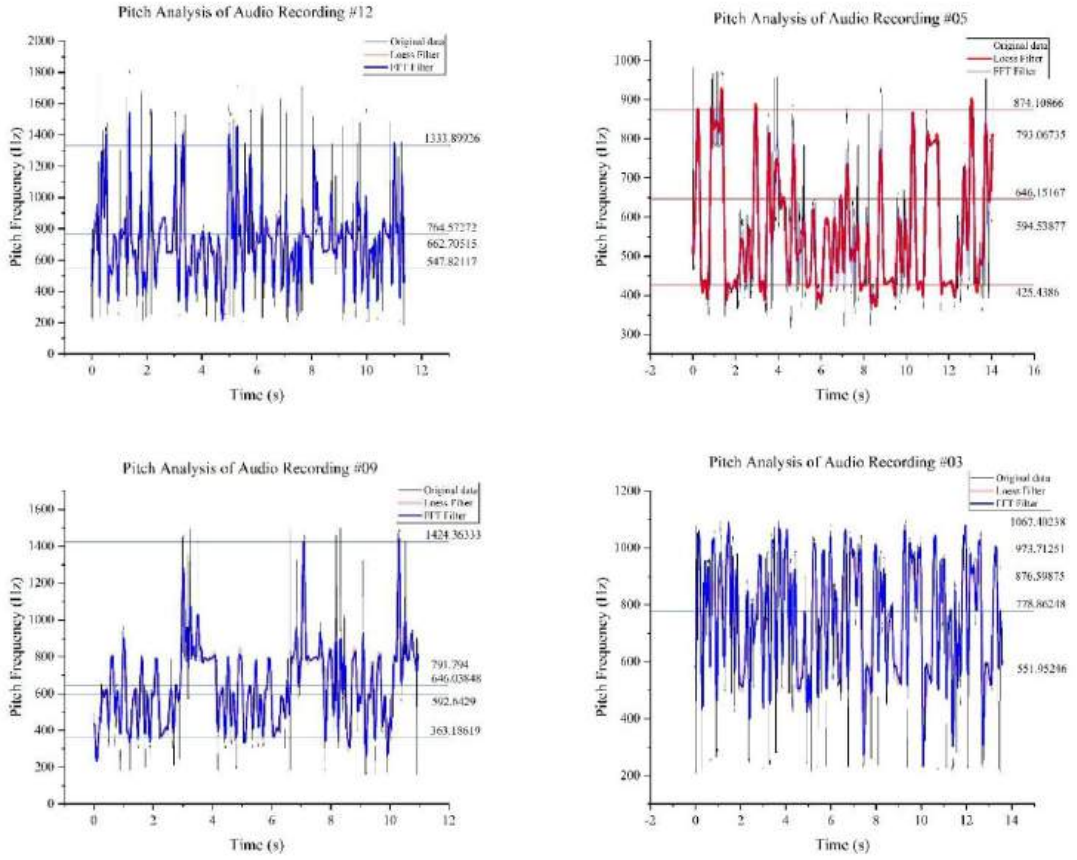

Figure 9a-d: Graphical analysis of a few audio recordings is shown in these figures. A point of note here is that merely observing the graphs are not enough to decide which song goes into which group, listening to the song itself while following the graph is important as it allows to identify which songs have extra tones in the form of grace tones and which use those tones within the song itself. A clear example is recording #09, where, upon listening one get a clear picture as to the presence of a high-pitched grace tone, while in comparison to recording #05 one can hear three tones and an added grace tone.

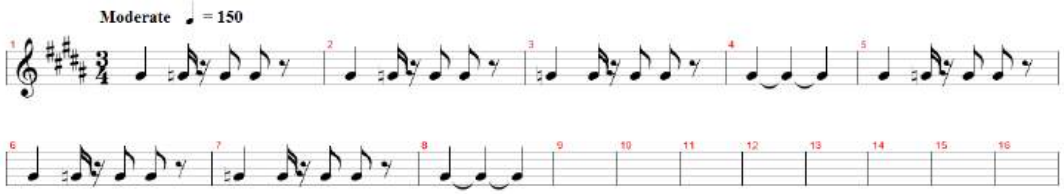

Figure 10: The try to transcribe a few bars of the rhythmic structure.

CONCLUSIONS

This study focuses on three main aims regarding the music of the *Dambāna Ādivāsi* community of Sri Lanka. The first is in identifying the sociocultural practices and the role music plays in these traditions. Within this study it was observed that the music of the *Ādivāsi* community can mainly be classified as that used in rituals (such as *Yādini*), lullabies, and other songs that feature the themes of the simplistic and environmentally connected lifestyles that they had. These songs were then examined from an ethnomusicological perspective, qualitatively first and then quantitatively through analysis methods. Within the course of this research, the development and introduction of a new way to analyze audio recordings of indigenous music was also approached. In both analysis methods, it was seen that the music of the *Veddas* is indeed a form of prehistoric music. Furthermore, descriptions of the intervals between the notes heard in a number of audio recordings of these songs were also included in this study.

This holds significance as the music of *Veddas* has rarely been discussed in a quantitative aspect, that gap being fulfilled in this research. Further analysis of audio recordings obtained in contemporary times would be of importance, as the degree to which the music of the *Ādivāsi* community has changed or been influenced by external sources can be measured. These can be considered as a conservation effort, and it is a rather striking time to conserve the tremendous culture of the *Ādivāsi* community of Sri Lanka.

REMARKS

All depictions are made by the authors, the use of their own software, or reprinted with permission.

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ANOTHER VIEW ON KHMU FLUTE SONGS IN MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Gisa Jähnichen[1]

Abstract

Khmu Flute Songs in Mainland Southeast Asia were already part of deeper investigations, which are reviewed here, yet some new points appeared since then. Updated re-readings need to be undertaken much more often in recent times. This paper is based on it and represents a small personal study of available materials won over time during manifold fieldwork experiences in Laos among Khmu people. It will shed light on the social construction of archaic societal structures and their transformation into the recent working units. Taking Khmu Flute Songs as an indicator for the presence of traditional power, these songs are re-investigated from a historical viewpoint. Special emphasis is also given to the individualization of knowledge and the unification of their streamed applications on another level. This small-scale study may contribute to the body of knowledge on musical practice as an indicator and result of social changes in the history of humankind.

Keywords

Khmu tot and pi, Southeast Asia, music production, songs, ethnomusicologists

INTRODUCTION

Khmu people, also named Kammu or Khkmuu or Khmou, were widely investigated from all sides, mainly in Laos and particularly the Khmu Yuan, the people Damrong Tayanin (1994) described in his North European exile. His writing from memory is an important piece to study from the viewpoint of a single person and a source of endless questions (Jenny, 2016). It is a typical "in-the-past-was-everything-better-piece" without being definite about what past and where it was meant to be right. This attitude, to make everything back in the late 19th or early 20th century being the norm, and all current issues being "abnormally modern," is more dangerous for the sustainability of a community than the wild collecting of anything "old." Recordings, that was already been said many times (Tessier, 2012), do not become more valid through age. Also, researchers have a problem with this insight. Field work is essential from any angle and not only through being personally in a remote area for a longer period of time, de facto collecting interesting appearances that can later be put on any stage. The wide acceptance of ethnomusicology in the1970s, which should not be forgotten, is the development of stage industries and the attraction of cultural festivals (Sapiro, 2016) for completely unrelated advertisements. Economists among the ethnomusicologists may have their own take on that and are often hidden under the name "popular music researchers." The cultural industry became a massive source of applicable demands and topics for cultural research, that was, facing the limited academic resources, a field of many outstanding projects and preservation efforts (Jayakody, 2008; Tessier, 2012; Sapiro, 2016). Economically successful communities are being praised in many regards, while those with economically unsuccessful outcomes regarding their "performance qualities" and "-willingness" are obviously less interesting. Khmu flute songs, as they

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are already part of CD albums produced in Oudomxay, are not to be brought on stage as they are part of a long history in Khmu communities and not made for any entertainment.

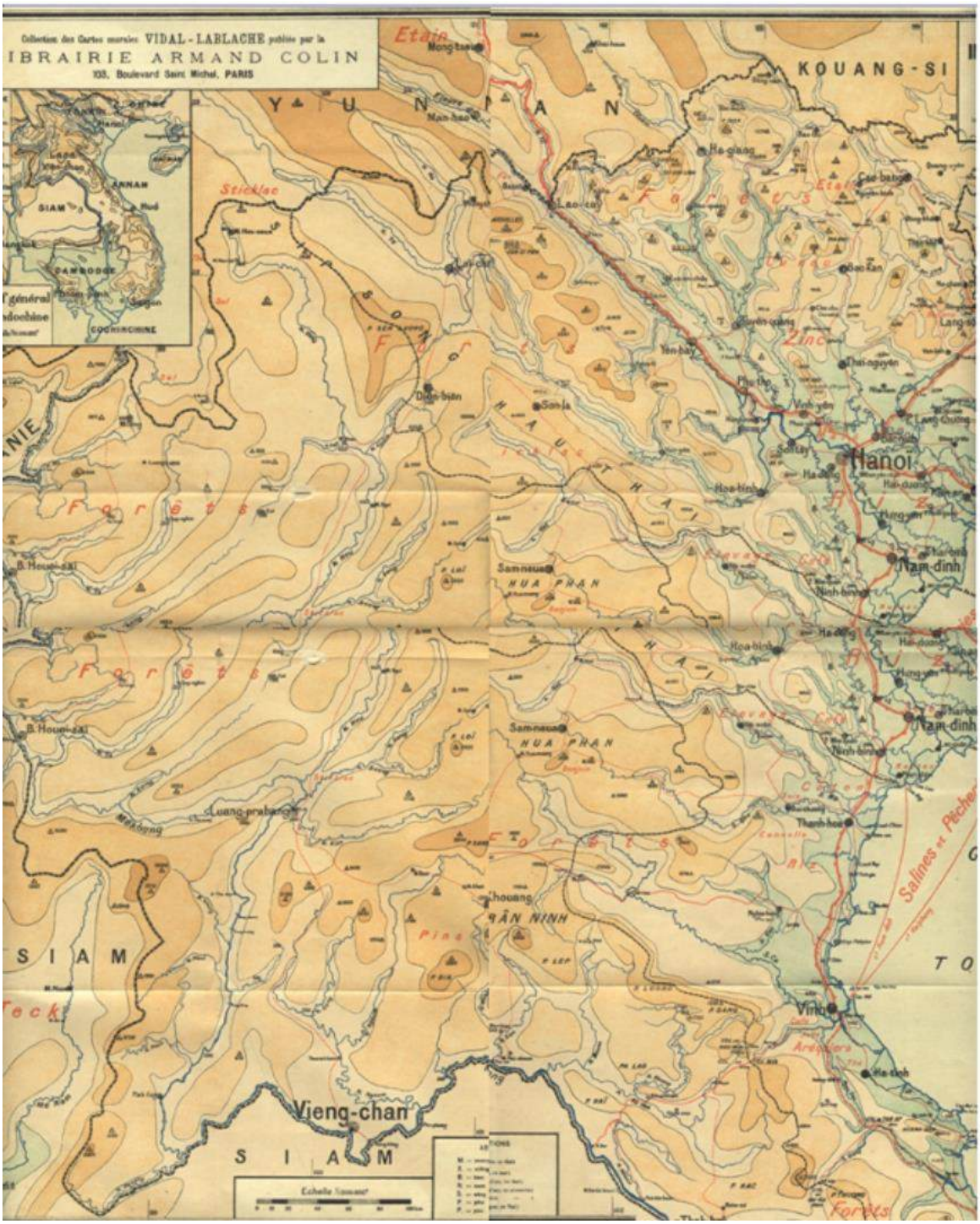

Figure 1a: This once folded map in the public domain since 1983 was taken from: LABLACHE publiée par la Librairie Armand Colin, 103, Boulevard Saint Michel, Paris, 1932. Copyright: Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication since 1999.

It shows the main territories of the Khmu living in Laos and Northern Vietnam. It was this openness that attracted researchers. The Khmu territories are reflected in general through maps, Figures 1a or 1b in the Southeast Asian mainland.

This static view on things is a bit outdated (Stolz, 2021; Evrard, 2007) in times of technology changes and an easier flow of information and people through various contemporary transport means.

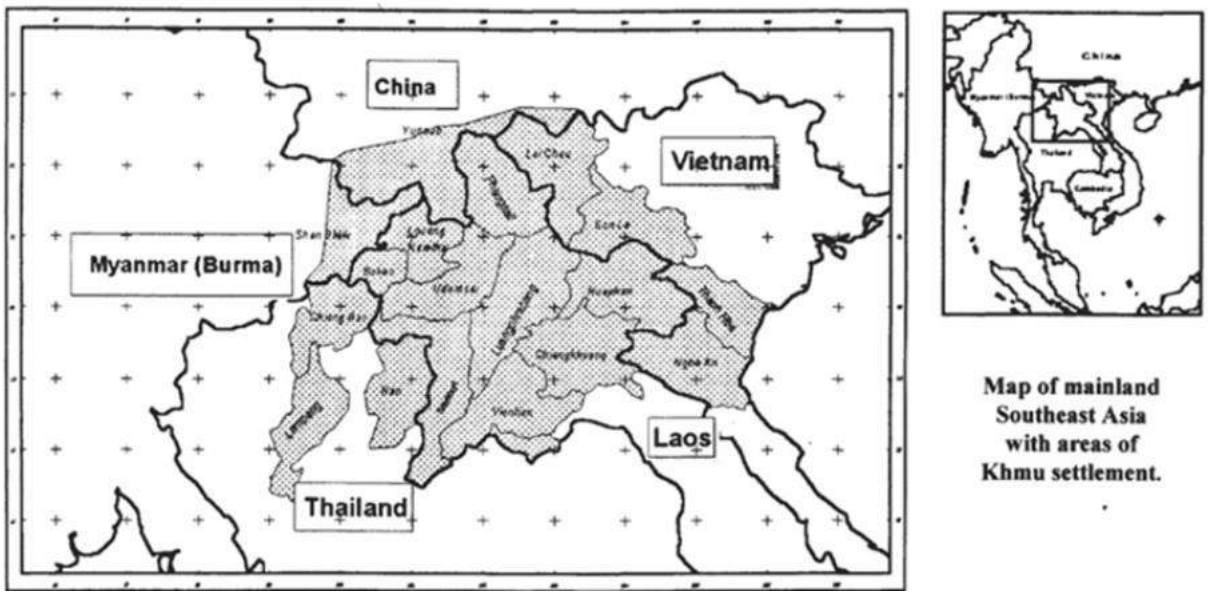

Figure 1b (map with provinces and Southeast Asian mainland in comparison): This less aged map of mainland Southeast Asia shows areas of Khmu settlements. Living areas of the Khmu in Vietnam do not reach the coastline, as indicated here through the inclusion of whole provinces. The misunderstanding of differences in basic rights among people according to their state involvement is probably a modern invention. (The picture is in the public domain since 2024, Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.)

Ownership of Music Tools in Relatively Closed Communities

Among the Khmu Yuan, as Damrong Tayanin (1994, Figure 2; Jenny, 2016) describes, musical instruments belong to the village and are commonly accessible in the people's homes. This observation applies to most of the Khmu villages in Northern Laos and Vietnam, as they seem to be relatively closed. Not many communities can state this fact. The most significant musical instruments include the mouth organ with all its diverse parts, especially the small metal tongues that have to be inserted into the bamboo tubes; a long wooden drum; a side-blown horn and an end-blown horn; a kettle gong, which is in times of danger and war hidden in the forest because it is a costly item, a large knobbed, a smaller knobbed gong; and cymbals. Flutes, clarinets, and mouth harps belong to individuals and are not lent out to anyone.

Owned by the entire village

- Mouth organs of Lao origin with their inserted metal tongues
- Long drums made of wood
- Side-blown horns
- End-blown horns
- Kettle gongs
- Large knobbed gongs
- Small knobbed gongs

- Cymbals, sing
- Sets of new instruments taken over from other people as gifts or means to accompany modern songs (other people's songs played through new media)

Owned by an individual or a family

- Flutes/pi/tot
- Clarinets/pi/tot
- Mouth harps/mouth drums/toen

Figure 2: Ownership of musical instruments according to Damrong Tayanin (1994). Here printed with permission and put into order by the author (Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication).

The scheme shows clearly that wind instruments belong to individually owned musical instruments. They do not allow for community practices unless the players agree. It also shows in consequence that the players were following the advice of the elderly when having been convinced of the need to create an imperative event. They were factually owned by the community. This mutual ownership may, in this case, be at the core of community music. However, players do not represent the entire community. They cannot be representatives of their community or their region. Too many of them travel to many places in search of purchasing studies or in order to find a job or housing. People of one village do not stay there long enough to completely identify beyond their own will, simply because they are not convinced of the need to do so. That is something often forgotten in descriptions of the glorified past. The mouth harps, which might fall under the idiophones when following the von Hornbostel and Sachs (1914) scheme of sound production (a simple tongue that sounds of itself being amplified in pitch using the mouth as a modifiable cavity), are here very individually owned. They are only used for courting and exchange with close relatives. This is crucial when borrowing musical instruments, as players will not take the instrument back and use it after another person has used it already. These wind instruments can be the subject of arguments.

In similar contexts of the Southern Lao provinces, there are communities in Sekong that made strict differences in the age of those musical tools for many decades. New instruments were considered "strange" and not used for any serious ceremonies already in the 1960s. These tools were only played while having state parades or guests from other villages who needed to be entertained in a specific way (Jähnichen, 2016). What happens now with AI sound-generating tools is beyond any imagination.

Flute songs (also named pheng pi or toem tot) are songs played mainly during waiting times and day watches in the paddy fields by elderly women who transfer short sayings inserted into the flute song by their voices. The flute songs' insertions don't always follow the scheme of missing pitches, as those pitches could be easily produced, as experiments have shown. It is just a possibility to put voices in. Over time, it became a specialty of carefully playing elderly women to use flute songs to entertain and to teach at the same time (Jähnichen, 2011). Uay Phan hardly remembered the periods of time when she was willing to play the Khmu flute, which she may have called pi or tot. The girl I videorecorded in 1984 with the help of the former Music Institute in Hanoi, and this girl stayed without a name in later documents, was briefed not to play any text-relevant songs. Her insertions were short and not understandable even by language-knowers of her own community. What united her playing with her followers was the relative length of the instrument. It is easy to recognize that the finger holes are far from the blowing hole positioned. The length of the flute is to let the standing air column sound lower and not to need much air, as if singing in the tube. She also shows the same posture as Uay Phan

in Figure 3a and practiced this playing in her elder years. Here she only imitated the playing. While imitating, she additionally covered her mouth. This was not due to a differentiated understanding of the sung insertions, but the habit of her not showing her mouth. The mouth covering will possibly change or decline entirely when sitting in front of any girls to be taught.

Figures 3a, 3b, and 3c: Uay Phan (left figure, 3a) and Quang Thi Vinh (middle figure, 3b) each performing a flute song. The hand position implies that Quang Thi Vinh adopted playing techniques of the Vietnamese sáo trúc after introducing the Western sáo ngang (traverse flute). Uay Phan plays the flute in a way that allows her to rest the upper part of the flute on her shoulder while singing. The same as the Khmu girl recorded on video (right figure, 3c) by myself at the end of November 1984 in Moc Chau, Vietnam. (Copyright by the author: Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.)

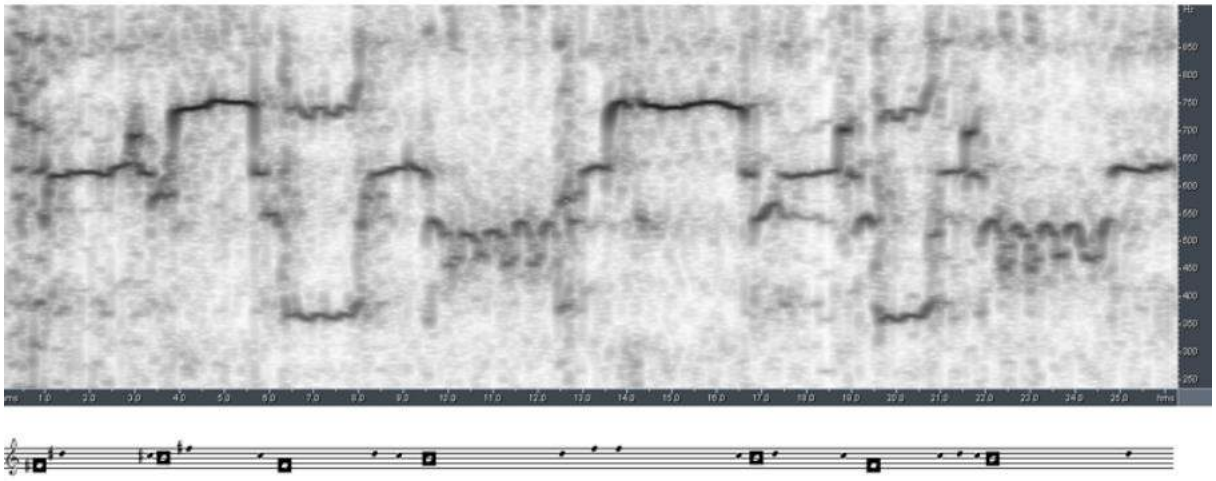

Figure 4: The flute song section shown in this figure is with reduced speed taken from recording ATML601. Flute and voice are clearly distinguishable in a spectrogram generated through AdobeAudio (CoolEditPro). The notation below the spectrogram marks the vocal insertions. (All depictions printed with permission. Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.)

The Loss of Power

I wrote some time ago:

> …a shaman, who needs a few days of preparation, chicken offerings and complicated rituals, cannot win against the common television knowledge of Aspirin or Panadol. Even agrarian and educational expertise can be quickly substituted by television magazines and serials from all over the world. The young generation growing up in these times of radical changes is convinced about the universality of cultural knowledge. An Australian farmer knows better than the grandfather which fertilizer fits to the soil and a French fashion designer knows better than grandmother how to dress up attractively. As a result, long-held differentiated gender roles in the village are converted to the global shallowness of information didactics. These didactics point toward global consumer behaviour. How do flute song playing women teach, perform, and entertain young girls? (Jähnichen, 2011: 144–145)

With the loss of their social position gained through their superior knowledge of specific proceedings, these women have lost a big part of their power in the village. Hence, they give up playing and teaching their daughters and relatives. Alternatives are not available, although they might be possible in terms of turning general knowledge control through elder people into knowledge of locally rooted specialties that cannot be provided by any other means. This is the point where ethnomusicologists may see a chance to turn the interest of the elderly toward stage performances in front of anonymous crowds, where the best rows are often blocked for "state officers" and random guests. Therefore, the art of constructing such a complex, beautifully interwoven melodic music using flute and voice is naturally dying out, simply by not attending to it anymore. I continued,

> "Although we can still listen to it facilitated by modern media, the meaning of the music and especially the meaning of its performers will not return" (Jähnichen, 2011: 145).

That was written in the mood of the 2010s. It might not be up to ethnomusicologists to decide about regrets or encouragements, although as is often experienced, this kind of regretting among ethnomusicologists is widely seen (Craig & Dubois, 2010). Multiple articles in this regard operate with dying cultural values as a source of needing themselves to come for rescue (Figures 3a, 3b, 4, and 5). Actually, that might be the point of becoming ethnomusicologists, who are obviously only there to put up show elements for the sake of industrial marketing. And in that the blocked rows' occupiers might be interested in. This thought is new and questions the usefulness of work in general. It would be too short-sighted, if ethnomusicologists really did not do any other things like carefully analyzing and generously uplifting those communities' values.

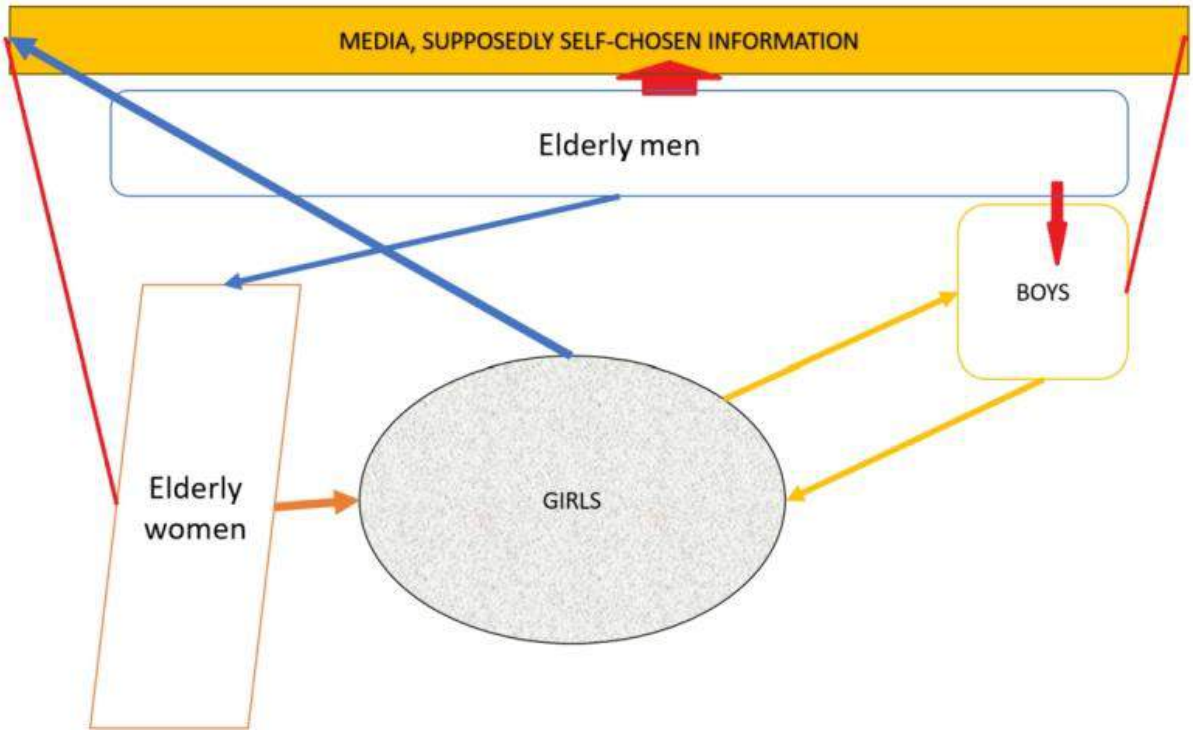

Figure 5: This scheme shows the current conflict of steady comparison in the transmission of cultural experience. (Scheme by the author, Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.)

Out of recordings that were recorded by myself in Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand as well as in some accessible collections with sufficient descriptions, 76 % were vocal expressions or performances of which approximately a half was accompanied by a six-, seven-, or eight-foot mouth organ (Jähnichen, 2013). More about mouth organs can be found in various local articles

written in English, Lao, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, and Burmese. Out of the named songs, two songs were accompanied by a larger ensemble, one traditional with mouth organ, long conical drum, a percussive wooden pole, and small cymbals, and one modernized ensemble with mouth organ, a self-made plucked spike lute, and a guitar. For more data, the Archives of Traditional Music in Laos (ATML) at the National Library of Laos can be consulted. The loss of power is real, yet temporary. Elderly women will still be held in high regard (Jayakody, 2008), and they will be asked for their help and opinion, as the most experienced in at least a while, when the use of advanced technological tools will be a rather common issue. All these technological devices or possibilities also grow out of their narrowness and fear-mongering appearance. It will be possibly normal to communicate via the internet and to let hard-working monotonic issues be done by AI machines.

What Can Be Added after Re-examining Previous Studies

Being a Khmu, the respective overarching society changed rapidly. Local settlements no longer the main role as well as language relationships. The often-quoted 'past' is simply not 'the past' anymore. The "past" that appears as 'the olden days' are glorified moments of sudden insights (Goudineau & Bouté, 2022). Precise studies avoid generalizations in this regard. Being a Khmu is again reduced to language knowledge, not without being a contradictory issue, as many items are only known by hearsay.

The young generation always exists in each time period. Luckily. Its impact might get smaller. Unluckily, complaints of the lack of any younger generation's interest are actually complaints about one's own insufficient studies and offers to learn from the elderly.

For example, telescope clarinet playing boys try to play flute songs, changing the meaning for all involved persons. They make fun of the elderly women and of the learning girls, young boys are as arrogant as they appear in each time period before. There is no difference in eras.

"Nowaday" is in this regard "everyday." Youngsters may need that overconfidence in order to find their place in a differently abled and gendered society. The whole family construction does not apply in the same way as before. The transformation of all attributes over time will change their personalities and make everyone compatible with current needs, whether it happens in a controlled way or not. It is not necessary to regret the decline of 'old musical wisdom.' Although many things can be rescued thanks to advanced levels of technological involvement, yet the use of wisdom is strongly limited through permanently changing conditions.

Power structures will surely re-establish due to the higher social competence of the elderly. The eldest generation is making a technological impact less dominant or not reaching out into all domains of anyone's personal life. The mastering of new tools is probably far faster than thought. Elderly women can make use of their experiences while learning to distinguish good from bad news, creative adaptations from re-inventions they have known already for a longer time, or the abuse of young scholarly works for the sake of power manipulations in decisive circles of hiring and firing that come through the use of technologically advanced tools, when these tools miss out a guiding instance like an editor, a librarian, or any governmental body. The elderly will still keep learning soon that these tools will be needed everywhere.

Teaching in a gendered way will be framed by globally accepted patterns, which might include religious differences as justifications (Stolz, 2021). That may include changing nationalities or other wars against other beings with varying orientations.

What Can Be Learned from That? – Conclusion

The performer's ideas are tremendously significant. They are not just coming from a nameless informant. It is not simply a person of a 'tribe,' representing the 'tribe's take on specific things,' (Goudineau & Bouté, 2022) but a personality that deserves the same rights as any observer. Those performers are the people of interest in ethnographic studies. They have to be taken seriously and at least integrated into reference lists. Using them in acknowledgments is fine, but a bit too reduced. Most of the offered ideas stem from their joint efforts. So, a mention of the interview would always be in place. The tools of transmission such as TV, broadcasting on radio, or the use of social media on smartphones contribute to the general shallowness just temporarily. Very quickly, people will learn to distinguish between different sources. In the future, there will be no need for filters and no need for controlling instances such as library boards or internet police at all. People, the former folk and their descendants, will quickly find out by themselves from where and how facts are getting into the worldwide web. The performers of any action, may it be music, dance, or visual arts, have to trust in the upcoming technology. That might also be a reason for researchers to quickly adopt these tools, derived from the upcoming technology. People will drive the further development of tools by testing their use. They will definitely be a part of the history with them. Researchers are not merely busy with reflecting and predicting using the most advanced technology already.

On the other hand, it should become clearer than ever that the current powers of necessary shallowness cannot replace the limited power of self-produced expressions based on local experiences. This power is mainly a kind of self-empowering strength and has nothing to do with self-centered thinking. Self-centered shaming is often applied to supposedly biased expressions of young scholars. Yet, it is clear that these younger scholars do more good than bad with their bias. Local experiences are much longer-lasting than the authority of any mobile device instruction, given by a competent person who is known from face-to-face. These place-bound facts and assurances support the belief that inborn qualities play a role in competencies, which is a typical fallacy. That also signals that online instructions have to be of higher quality. Diversity as wished for is established on another level than merely on language distinctions. At the moment, many ethnic schemes are still only based on language use, as this reduction seems appropriate in many regards. However, that is not nearly sufficient as well as established "folk"-ideas that only apply to people in clearly not only geographically different societies, which were already obsolete through economic changes and a step-by-step integration into the national state industrialization. The folk is not the folk of an undefined glorified past where "the folk" could not write or read or conceptualize any kind of music or dance as being ritually rooted, at least not in that rural, oral, undefined shape. The "folk," as being nominally glorified, is probably in power yet without the attitude of being something better, deserving high-class specialties. When talking about Khmu, which were also often called Kammu, at least in Laos (Tayanin, 1994), who live in a number of states with different systems and various overarching structures, this discrepancy is covered by an anonymous culturalism that has to be deeply understood and dismantled through serious studies of all details, also details regarding some non-musical appearances without getting to the typical fallacy to take a community familiarity or language proficiency for representativeness or proof of insider knowledge. The latest case of Khmu flute songs shows the rapid decline of local wisdom and representativeness.

That might all lead to stop neocolonial descriptions, such as not including informants in the reference lists or mentioning them simply by name and their relationships to the object in focus,

as elaborated earlier (Jähnichen, 2016) and to start true analyses through the repertoire of the humanities' methods, of which sharp and unavoidably always subjectively biased observations are one central part. The denial of subjectivity is in no case helpful, as already Bourdieu (1993) commented in his *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, carefully edited by Randal Johnson. It takes away the responsibilities and the possibilities to learn of being an individual who is at least responsible for oneself and one's own doings.

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REVIEW OF THE 48TH WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TRADITIONS OF MUSIC AND DANCE

Yang Bo [杨波][1]

Abstract

The International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance (ICTMD) is a global scholarly organization dedicated to the study, documentation, and promotion of music and dance traditions worldwide. Originally founded in 1947 as the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), it was renamed in 2023 to reflect its commitment to both music and dance research. ICTMD fosters interdisciplinary collaboration among ethnomusicologists, dance scholars, and practitioners through conferences, study groups, and publications, supporting the study, practice, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of diverse music and dance traditions across cultures. The 48th ICTMD World Conference was held in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, from 9 to 15 January 2025, bringing together scholars, performers, and practitioners from diverse backgrounds to explore global perspectives on music and dance. Notably, this marked the first time the ICTMD World Conference was hosted in New Zealand. Organized by Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington, and Te Kōkī, the New Zealand School of Music, the conference aimed to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, showcase new research, and strengthen connections between academia and performing arts communities.

Keywords

ICTMD, Wellington conference, themes, performances, reviewing

THE CONFERENCE THEMES

The conference themes generated extensive discussion and engagement, with over a thousand submissions covering the following topics:

a) Indigenous Peoples' Music and Dance
b) Environment, Place, Displacement, and Relocation
c) Translation, Inclusivity, and Reception
d) Dance, Movement, Gesture, and Embodiment
e) Technologies of Sound, Music, Movement, and Dance
f) Alternative Approaches and Methods in Research, Education, and Knowledge Dissemination
g) New Research

As both a presenter and a volunteer, I had the privilege of welcoming 522 scholars and practitioners to Wellington, alongside 258 online participants, bringing the total number of registered attendees to 780, and with participants from some 85 countries. With the inclusion of performers and additional contributors, the overall engagement in the conference exceeded 800 participants. More importantly, I was grateful for the opportunity to learn from scholars worldwide, exchanging ideas and perspectives with individuals from diverse backgrounds. The experience was both enriching and inspiring, reinforcing the significance of cross-cultural kōrero (talk, discussion, meeting) in the study of music and dance.

The conference opened with New Zealand's Indigenous Māori kapa haka (performing arts) and joyful Samoan music and dance, followed by the powerful keynote address given by Jerome Kavanagh and Ruiha Turner, titled *Oro Atua Wānanga Rongoā Puoro: Reviving Ancestral*

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Sound Practices in Modern Times. The keynote set the tone for the conference by emphasizing the importance of reviving and preserving ancestral sound practices in contemporary contexts. Kavanagh and Turner, both experts in Māori music and taonga pūoro (Māori musical instruments), discussed how ancestral sound practices are not merely historical artifacts but living, breathing elements of cultural identity. They highlighted the role of sound in healing, community building, and cultural transmission, leaving a lasting impression on participants.

The conference was artfully conceived and meticulously orchestrated, offering participants not only the opportunity to present their research and engage in scholarly discourse but also a diverse array of interactive activities. These encompassed Study Group meetings, workshops, and film screenings, alongside a vibrant program of music and dance performances, fostering both academic exchange and artistic engagement. In the following, I wish to convey my reflections on the conference from my point as both a participant and a volunteer.

Conference Sessions: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Music and Dance

The conference's sessions and topics showed remarkable diversity in terms of geographic focus, subject areas, and methodologies. The conference included sessions on Indigenous music and dance, gender and politics, and technology and innovation, reflecting a commitment to addressing contemporary issues in music and dance studies. The emphasis on cross-cultural collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches also highlighted the importance of diverse perspectives for understanding the complexity of global music and dance practices. The following four categories do not encompass all the topics discussed at the conference; instead, they highlight the ones that left a strong impression on me, and I would like to share my thoughts on them.

Regional Music and Dance Studies

The conference showcases a strong emphasis on regional and cultural diversity, highlighting music and dance practices across various geographical and social contexts. Sessions explore Asian music, such as *Ceremonial Music and Narrative Song in East Asia* and *Concepts, Posture & Safeguarding in China & Malaysia*. African music and dance are also well represented with panels such as *Musics in Africa* and *Music and Dance Education in Africa*. Additionally, Indigenous music and dance traditions receive significant attention through sessions such as *Indigenous Music and Dance in Changing Contexts* and *Indigenous Voices and Song Collections*. Other regions, including the Pacific, Latin America, and the Balkans, are explored through topics such as *Pacific Music Practices*, *Music and Dance Research in Papua New Guinea*, *Music and Dance in Chile and Brazil*, and *Imagining Diasporic Balkan Communities through Dance*.

Themes of Ritual, Identity, and Heritage

The conference extensively explores the intersections of ritual, identity, and heritage in music and dance, reflecting on cultural practices, historical transformations, and community connections. Topics such as *Ritual and Performance* and *Music, Water, and Ritual* examined the role of ritual in shaping musical traditions, while *Tensions and Entanglements in Chinese Music and Poetry* and *Music, Memory, and Identity* delved into the ways music expresses personal and collective identity. Heritage preservation is a key concern, with sessions such as *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage* and *Decolonizing, Deconstructing and Dismantling Hegemonic Music Narratives* addressing efforts to sustain and reinterpret musical legacies.

Music, Technology, and Innovation

The conference also explored the relationship between music, technology, and innovation,

showcasing how advancements in digital tools, media, and sound technologies influence musical practices and research. Sessions such as *Global Musics, Dance, and Technology* and *Sounds and Technologies* explore how technology affects performance, dissemination, and reception. Topics such as *Digital Musicologies* and *Archives and Digital Technologies* examined the role of digital archives and data preservation in safeguarding musical heritage. Additionally, *The Role of Technologies in Keeping Communities Vital* and *Music, Dance, Communities, and Technologies* addressed how technology fosters cultural sustainability and community engagement. These discussions underscored the vital role of technology in researching, disseminating, and preserving music and dance.

Gender, Politics, and Empowerment

This section of the conference delves into the intersections of gender, power, and performance within music and dance. This section explored how music and dance serve as platforms for expressing and challenging gender identities and political ideologies. Topics include the role of women and queer voices in performance, the empowerment through artistic expression, and the political dimensions of music and dance in contexts of resistance and inclusion. For example, sessions such as *Women, Gender, Voices* examined the representation of women in music and dance, while *Queer-feminist Troubles in the Field* addressed the challenges and opportunities of queer-feminist approaches in performance. Other topics, such as *Bodies, Gender, Empowerment* and *Ideologies of Resistance and Inclusion*, highlighted how music and dance can be tools for social change, challenging dominant narratives and fostering inclusivity.

This conference also provided a range of Study Groups that facilitated knowledge exchange among participants, benefiting early career scholars like me. Covering diverse regions and themes—such as Indigenous music, musical instruments, and applied ethnomusicology—these discussions explored traditions, methodologies, and interdisciplinary approaches. Key topics included safeguarding intangible heritage, social inclusion, and the impact of technology on music research. Most importantly, established scholars openly shared their expertise, fostering collaboration and deeper understanding.

In addition to the above, two plenary sessions were also significant in emphasizing the themes and aims of the conference. These plenary sessions examined the essential role of Indigenous music, arts, and language in education, cultural revitalization, and well-being. *Learning & Sharing Indigenous Knowledge: Music, Language & Arts* brought together scholars and community-based researchers to explore how creative practices support decolonization, equitable education, and cultural sustainability, emphasizing the deep connections between artistic expression, language revitalization, and Indigenous knowledge systems. *Healing, Health & Wellbeing: Indigenous Perspectives on Music & Dance* extended these discussions, focusing on music and dance as pathways to healing and holistic well-being. Speakers shared stories of learning, transmission, and resilience, underscoring how Indigenous practices foster cultural resurgence and address the impact of colonialism. Both sessions reaffirmed the power of music and dance as vital expressions of Indigenous identity, community, and holistic wellness.

Performance: Music and Dance Feast

One of the most memorable highlights of the conference was the series of music and dance performances that captivated the audience with their diversity and cultural richness. Each evening, participants gathered to experience magnificent performances from artists representing different cultures. Among them, three performances stood out for their artistic excellence and profound impact.

The opening concert set the stage with an outstanding performance by six Chinese music performers from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. The musicians showcased the beauty of traditional Chinese instruments with remarkable technical prowess. The program

featured a delicate balance of tranquil and exhilarating pieces, drawing the audience into the essence of Chinese musical heritage. The two full ensemble pieces, in particular, elevated the concert to its climax, celebrating the successful opening of the ICTMD 2025 conference.

The second evening introduced an unforgettable performance that came from the Mi'kmaw Delegation (Graham Marshall, Austin Christmas, and Leim Joe) of Cape Breton. Accompanied solely by drums, their powerful vocals conveyed deep emotion and energy through rhythm and melody. A particularly moving moment occurred when Māori performer Jerome Kavanagh joined them, playing taonga pūoro to create a seamless musical bridge between two distant cultures. This collaboration fully demonstrated the cohesiveness of music and left a lasting impression on the audience.

Another mesmerizing performance of music and dance was presented by the First Nations Australian Delegation. Led by Rupert Manmurulu in collaboration with Dr. Reuben Brown, the Inyjalarrku "Mermaid" singers and dancers from Goulburn Island in Arnhem Land performed Australian Indigenous songs and dances from diverse regions and traditions. With characteristic instrumentation—percussion and the didgeridoo—their performance was profoundly moving. The intensity of the performers' expressions and the characteristic and representative dance movements offered important insights into dance from Australia. Complementing this, Warlpiri women from the Tanami Desert (in collaboration with Dr. Georgia Curran) and Mayi singers and dancers from central New South Wales brought their own regional dance forms, embodying cultural heritage through each rhythmic movement. Even without understanding the lyrics, the audience was immersed in the profound emotional depth of these First Nations traditions. As an ethnomusicologist, I was also impressed by the dedication and hands-on research approach demonstrated by Dr. Brown and Dr. Curran.

Beyond these standout performances, the festival continued to offer a wealth of musical and cultural experiences. The Javanese dance segment, performed by the Triadhika Productions delegation from Jakarta and Gamelan Padhang Moncar from Victoria University of Wellington, enchanted the audience with graceful movements and subtle orchestration. A large-scale performance by Mekar Bhuana and involving many ICTMD members showcased the vibrant traditions of Balinese music and dance.

Adding to the diversity, Professor Randy Lee and Professor Welson Tremura delivered an exhilarating Brazilian-focused performance, featuring trumpet melodies and dynamic guitar rhythms. Meanwhile, Professor Kim Cunio and Heather Lee from the New Zealand School of Music presented a performance taken from the Bhagavad Gita, enveloping the audience in an ethereal and meditative musical experience.

The conference also featured a range of workshops and film screenings that provided attendees with opportunities for additional modes of research engagement. The conference workshops offered immersive, hands-on experiences across diverse musical and cultural traditions. Participants engaged in interactive sessions such as guqin playing (China), Angklung music (Indonesia), Balinese dance and gamelan, and Maskandi guitar, deepening their appreciation of global performance practices. Workshops also explored Indigenous traditions, for instance, Mi'kmaw songs, dances, and language. These workshops fostered cross-cultural exchange and deeper engagement with music, dance, and research methodologies. The film screenings showcased a diverse array of musical and cultural narratives from around the world. Documentaries explored Indigenous traditions, ritual performances, and music's role in cultural revival.

In conclusion, the 48th ICTMD World Conference in Wellington was a resounding success, bringing together a global community of scholars, performers, and practitioners to engage in a rich exchange of ideas and performances. The diverse range of sessions, workshops, and performances allowed for a comprehensive exploration of music and dance traditions from around the world, with an emphasis on cross-cultural dialogue, innovation, and community engagement. Special congratulations are due to the chair of local arrangements, Brian Diettrich,

and the programme co-chairs, Marcia Ostashewski and Kirsty Gillespie, whose leadership and dedication were key in ensuring the smooth organization and execution of this impactful event.

As an ethnomusicologist, presenter, and volunteer, I had the invaluable opportunity to immerse myself in this global learning experience, gaining new insights from experts in the field and participating in meaningful discussions. This conference not only deepened my understanding of global music and dance practices but also expanded my appreciation for their role in cultural identity, social change, and community healing.

Looking ahead, I eagerly anticipate joining the ICTMD World Conference again in 2027, when it will be held in Santiago, Chile. The experience in Wellington has truly been enriching, and I am excited to continue contributing to and learning from this incredible international community.

TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE LIGHT OF MUSEUM INTERPRETATION

Alla Bayramova [Алла Байрамова][1]

Abstract

How to explain Azerbaijani traditional music, especially musical instruments, to museum visitors, be they children or adult amateurs, musicians or researchers, locals or foreigners? This article shares the experience of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan in a multilayered approach to interpreting musical instruments, focusing on those that were common in the Muslim world in the Middle Ages and have largely disappeared. Reconstructed by Professor Majnun Kerimov, they have taken their place in the museum's exposition and in the concert practice of the museum's Ensemble of Ancient Eastern Musical Instruments.

Keywords

Folklore, replicas of medieval musical instruments, State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan, Majnun Kerimov, museum visitors.

INTRODUCTION

The Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan is sometimes called the Museum of Musical Instruments, which we are unhappy about, as it does not reflect the full content of the museum. Musical instruments, we think, are available to all peoples, even those at a primitive stage of tribal development, but some may not have a richness of traditional music, a developed school of composition, outstanding achievements in genres of musical theatre, a well-established and proven system of musical education, and advanced musicology. Therefore, combining the above, the museum is called the Museum of Musical Culture. Of course, the pearls of the collections are Azerbaijani folk musical instruments and everything related to the musical folklore of Azerbaijan.

Museum interpretation of musical folklore differs not only by its characteristic museum visibility but also by the fact that it gives an opportunity to listen, touch, and interact with the museum content, which is not the case at concerts or conferences devoted to folklore. Moreover, the interpretation should be different.

Usually, books, reference books, encyclopaedias, atlases of musical instruments, conference papers, and the like are addressed to specific age groups (e.g., colouring books for the very young or a children's encyclopaedia for schoolchildren), as well as to people with different levels of musical knowledge: those visitors who have no musical literacy, music lovers, pupils of music schools, students of music universities, professional musicians, scientists, organologists, music historians, acoustic specialists, restorers, and the like. Children and amateurs do not attend scientific musicology conferences, but the doors of the museum are open to everyone. Therefore, the museum is obliged to satisfy all visitors with its multilevel interpretation of museum collections.

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ACTIVITIES REGARDING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Let us consider this on the example of the interpretation of Azerbaijani traditional musical instruments, with a special focus on instruments of the Middle Ages.

Children in the museum are shown the instruments' names, shown how to play them on video and live, and allowed to touch the instruments that are specially prepared for this purpose, but not registered in the main collection, such as specimens of the tar, the kamancha, the gaval, and the saz. They are also photographed with them in traditional costumes, to dance to the music and to colour pictures on musical themes, reproducing images of the exhibits in the museum.

For those who are older, we also suggest solving easy crossword puzzles about traditional musical instruments in different languages (Figures 1a and 1b).

Figure 1a and 1b. The museum's products for children. (a) An example of crossword puzzles on traditional musical instruments (in Azerbaijani); (b) drawing notebook with images based on museum collections (in particular, on the cover is a sketch for Kara Karaev's ballet *The Seven Beauties* by Natalia Kirillova).

Museum guides inform them that the basis of the museum's collection of musical instruments was the collection of instruments of the artist Ahmedkhan Bakikhanov (1892–1973), which included 23 Azerbaijani folk instruments of the 19th and 20th centuries. At present, the collection of traditional musical instruments totals 335 units, of which 222 units are Azerbaijani. Tour guides pay attention to which instruments are used by Azerbaijani ashiqs and which instruments are the most characteristic for mugham performance, and they talk about the traditional finishing of Azerbaijani musical instruments. The oldest museum instrument dates back to the 18th century – a clay gosha-nagara (double drum) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Gosha-nagara, 18th century. (Photograph by courtesy of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan.)

KERIMOV AND HIS WORK

The musical culture and instrumentation of Azerbaijan in the previous centuries were characterized by their diversity, as evidenced by numerous sources. Therefore, the story would be extremely scarce if the museum interpretation were limited to the last two or three centuries only. Therefore, starting from the late 1980s, the museum began to acquire replicas of disappeared, forgotten musical instruments, which were widespread in the Middle Ages in a wide area of the Muslim East and eventually disappeared everywhere or were preserved somewhere, but not in Azerbaijan. These instruments have been recreated and are on display in the museum.

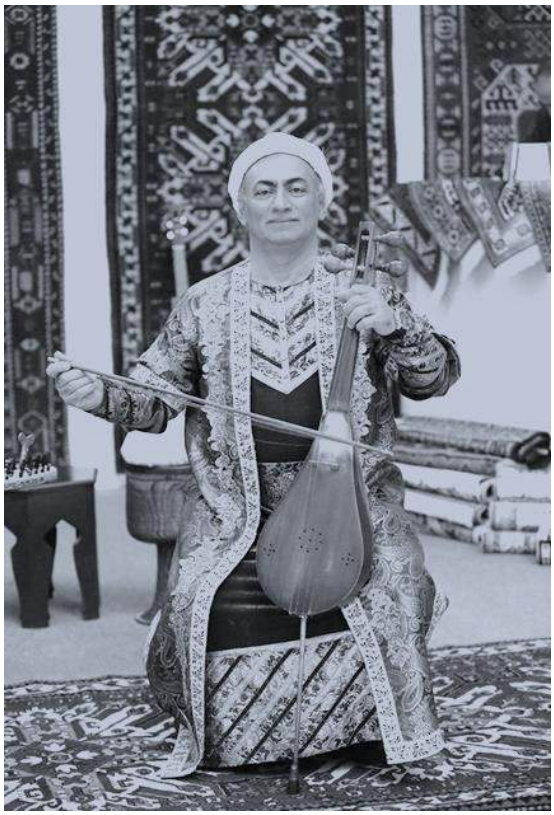
It is more advanced to explain that the author of these replicas was Majnun Kerimov (Figure 3), a teacher of the tar class at Children's Music School No. 3 in Baku, who began work on their restoration in 1975.

Figure 3: Majnun Kerimov (1945–2013), Prof. Dr. habil. in Arts, the People's Artist of Azerbaijan, working on creating the nuskhe (2009).

In 1976, his first instrument, the chang, appeared [Kerimov 2009]. A total of 10 musical instruments were recreated between 1976 and 2010:

- chang, a harp-like musical instrument played by both men and women;
- chagane, a bowed instrument;
- rubab, a plucked instrument;
- rud, a plucked instrument;
- chogur, plucked instrument;
- barbad, plucked instrument;
- Shirvan tanbur, plucked instrument;
- qopuz, plucked instrument;
- nuskhe, a stringed percussion instrument invented by Safiaddin Urmevi; and
- santur, a string percussion instrument, which has not survived in Azerbaijan (Figures 3 and 7).

4a



4b

Figure 4a and b: (a) The chagane (a spike lute) made by Kerimov, 1982; (b) Munis Sharifov, the People's artist of Azerbaijan, the head and concertmaster of the Museum Ensemble of Old Oriental Musical Instruments since 2013, is the only chagane performer.

Figure 5: Barbad made by Kerimov, 1980.

Figure 6: Rubab made by Kerimov, 1984.

In his work, Kerimov relied on the data drawn from four types of sources given as follows:

- Eastern medieval book miniatures, known in English as Islamic miniatures, from 13th to 18th centuries, which depicted musical instruments in abundance;
- treatises by medieval Azerbaijani musicologists Safiaddin Urmevi (1217–1294) and Abdulkadir Maraghi (1353–1437);
- testimonies of foreign travellers; and
- works of Azerbaijani medieval literature (e.g., the epic "Kitabi Dede Gorgud," poetry of the Middle Ages).

Having recreated the above-mentioned instruments, Kerimov returned them to musical practice, having created in 1988 an amateur ensemble playing them, which since 1996 has been functioning as the Ensemble of Ancient Oriental Instruments of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan, which consists of 13 instrumentalists and two singers (Figure 7).

Figure7: The Museum Ensemble of Old Oriental Musical Instruments.

There are 23 recreated instruments in the museum, as they were made by Kerimov in two or three copies, so that they could be demonstrated in the main exposition and at the Permanent Exhibition of Folk Instruments (one of the branches of the museum, located in the former flat of Bakikhanov), as well as used in the ensemble, which can be listened to directly at rehearsals in the museum twice a week and at concerts.

In interpreting these instruments, we use the iconography of musical instruments, showing visitors' reproductions of miniatures and enlarged fragments of them that depict musicians.

THE HARP CHANG

The most sophisticated and interesting explanation for the visitors, musicologists, musical instrument makers, and art historians is that the iconography of musical instruments makes it possible to note both their identity with the existing museum replicas and obvious differences, for example, in instruments such as the chang, the only harp-shaped instrument in Azerbaijani folklore. The three chang replicas (Figure 8) made by Majnun Kerimov, who became the head of the Laboratory for Restoration and Improvement of Musical Instruments of the Baku Music Academy, Doctor of Art History, Professor, and creator of the Museum Ensemble of Ancient Musical Instruments, the People's Artist of Azerbaijan, differ from the instrument on oriental miniatures by two important characteristic details:

1) the absence of a strut characteristic of the Muslim harp;

2) the presence of a crossbar in the body of the harp.

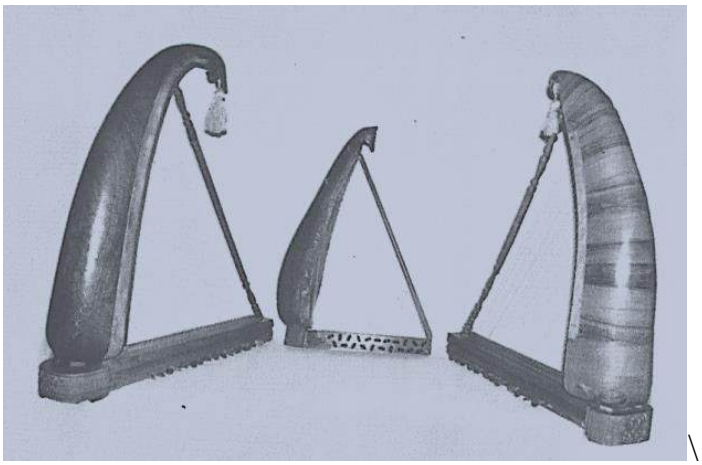


Figure 8: The chang replicas by Majnun Kerimov, 1976–1978.

DISCUSSED DIFFERENCES

Here are comments on these differences.

1) World iconography of harp-like instruments shows that unlike Egyptian, Greek, Japanese, Chinese, and other harps, the chang, common in the Muslim Middle Ages, had a support (foot, suckle, or strut). In China, as researcher Li Mei from the Music Research Institute, Chinese National Academy of Arts, Beijing, noted, along with the traditional Chinese harps, another harp, considered to originate from Persia, was widespread in the Chinese Western regions (in Chinese called 西域, Xiyü):

Li Mei says that there are musicians in sitting, standing, marching, and even flying positions. The musician represented on the 7th-century wooden box, inserted the socle of the harp under his belt, and plays it while walking. Such practicality of the instrument might have been the reason for its wide dissemination and longevity (Li Mei, 2014).

In this and other pictures of such a harp, presented by Li Mei in her article, we can indeed recognize "a socle," a shortened strut (Figure 9a–b).

9a

9b

Figure 9a and b: (a) Harp depicted in the Mogao grotto no. 255 (8th century), Dunhuang, Gansu province; (b) drawing of the scene on the painted casket found at Subashi near Kuqa, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China (7th century). Provided by courtesy of Tokyo, National Museum (東京国立博物館), TC577 (Li Mei, 2014).

The chang's strut could be straight or curved. Medieval Islamic miniatures abound with such evidence, as well as depictions of two positions for playing this instrument (Figure 10a and b), of which the second one, the less common one, seems to be rather awkward. Nevertheless, it is present in a number of examples of the art of miniature painting, characterized by the precision of the details. With the help of a maquette produced by the museum, visitors to the museum can try both positions of an authentic chang with a prop when playing it themselves.

10a 10b

Figure 10a and b: Two positions of performance on the chang derived from Islamic book miniatures.

2) While some folklore harps and modern harps have such a detail as a column or a front strut, the chang had no such detail, as evidenced by its numerous pictures. By the way, in Turkey, masters of musical instruments make and use modern changs without this support.

The above-mentioned discrepancies with the authentic chang are also present in all copies of chang replicas made in recent years by engineer Mammadali Mammadov, head of the Laboratory of Musical Instruments of the Azerbaijan National Conservatory, who, in his work on the restoration and improvement of ancient musical instruments, was inspired by the works of Kerimov. Despite the fact that we have been publishing the results of our research on the historical chang for the last 10 years (Bayramova 2021, 2020, 2014), until now, Azerbaijani musical instrument makers have not made chang as close to the original as possible. We can only hope that in the future, the Scientific Laboratory of the Baku Music Academy, where Professor Majnun Kerimov, the "discoverer" of the chang, worked earlier, or the laboratory of the Azerbaijan National Conservatory will realize this fact.

A similar diversified approach is applied in the interpretation of other spheres of folklore, such as ashiq creativity, mugham, folk songs, and dances, as well as composers' creativity, for example, expressed in jazz.

Remark

All depictions are either owned by the respective museum and provided by courtesy, made by the author, or since long time in the public domain.

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REVIEWING ENSEMBLE FORMS IN KAZAKH MUSIC-MAKING

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Abstract

For the first time this review examines the evolution of ensemble forms in Kazakh traditional musical performance from the 20th to the 21st century, transitioning from monophonic to polyphonic textures. The historical prerequisites for the emergence of collective music-making in Kazakhstan are analyzed, beginning with the early Kazakh traditional instrumental ensembles of the 1930s and continuing to the present day. Particular attention is paid to the outstanding figures of Kazakh musical art, such as Akhmet Zhubanov and Bolat Sarybayev, who made significant contributions to the development of ensemble and orchestral performance forms. A distinct section of this study focuses on the transformation of instrumental composition and repertoire of ensembles, as well as their functional features. As a specific musical example demonstrating the synthesis of tradition and innovation has been chosen the analysis of the *kyui* "Qairan Elim" by Bauyrzhan Aktaev performed by *Astana Sazy*—the State Ensemble of Kazakh Traditional Instruments. This study highlights the profound significance of Kazakh traditional ensembles as a universal performance genre that reflects the unparalleled richness of Kazakhstan's national musical heritage.

Keywords

Folk ensemble, traditional music, ethnomusicology, cultural heritage. kuy [күй]

INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan, officially the Republic of Kazakhstan, is a state in Central Asia. It has a wide ethno-cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. Kazakhstan is officially a democratic, secular, unitary, constitutional republic. Its terrain includes plains, steppes, taiga, mountains, and deserts. Kazakhstan has a population of about 20 million people estimated for 2023, and its territory is about 2.7 million square kilometers, making it the ninth largest state in the world in terms of territory and 62nd in terms of population.

Figure 1: Map of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

It is known that Kazakh traditional music is monodic in nature (Keteganova & Nusupova, 2015). Kazakh traditional music has distinctive features that are not typical for both European

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and Eastern cultures. And yet, some exceptional features of Kazakh traditional music made it possible to master and join new performing forms in a relatively short period of time.

Background

The first experience of musical professionalization of the European type in Kazakhstan initiated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many scholars, such as Erzakovitch, Pallas, Vinogradov, Vyzgo, Belyaev, Zataevitch, Vertkov, Aravin, and Zhubanov, among others, paid serious attention to identifying the common and distinctive features of Kazakh traditional national culture in these terms.

Historically, since the beginning of the last century, cultural and political reforms have impacted many vocal textures in the Western European sense into the musical fabric of the Kazakh people. In this connection, the soundscape began to change from monody to a multivoiced texture.

Scholars such as Shakhnazarova, Yelemanova, Mukhambetova, Amanov, and Nedlina noted that the Western (European) model of professional composer music in Eastern cultures was mastered increasingly, yet still very fruitfully.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the peculiarities of the development of the ensemble music-making forms of Kazakh traditional music from monodic thinking to polyphonic on the example of performance practices. It is commonly known that in traditional Kazakh culture historically there was no collective music-making. All musical heritage was solo performance—song, instrumental, and epic performance, although sometimes there were numerous competitions of contested forms—aytys[2] (competition of improvisational poets), kuy[3] tartys (competition of kuyshi-performers), in which take part zhyrau[4] (folk poet and singer in Kazakh poetry), zhyrshy [5] (Kazakh folk singer-storyteller), poet-improvisers, kuyshi (performer of kuys), but all of them performed sequentially, one after another. And only in the 20th century, a new joint form of performing art began to appear. In this regard, ensemble performance is considered, which appeared in Kazakhstan in the first half of the 20th century as the most organic form of transition to multi-voice texture ensemble.

The Contributions of Zhubanov and Sarybayev to the Development of Performances of Kazakh Traditional Music

Since the 1930s, Kazakhstan has seen significant developments in musical professionalism, particularly in the creation of new musical genres and forms including ensemble, chamber, choral music, opera, symphony, and ballet. One of the outstanding figures in organizing collective music-making on traditionally Kazakh instruments was the musicologist, composer, and conductor Zhubanov (1906–1968). Initially, in Almaty, at the Musical and Dramatic Technical School (now Almaty Musical College named after P. I. Tchaikovsky) there was a dombyra ensemble consisting of eleven musicians (Kozybayev, 1983). Later, in 1934, the ensemble was renamed by Zhubanov as the ensemble named after "KazTsIK".[6] Now it has

[2] A musical competition of Kazakh poets performing impromptu songs on a common topic.

[3] The Kazakh word "kuy" has several meanings. The first means "mood, state." The second meaning of the word "kuy" is a genre of Kazakh instrumental music. In traditional music, there were and are still kuys for all groups of instruments—chordophones, aerophons, membranophones, and idiophones.

[4] Zhyrau is not only a performer, but also an author of musical-poetical pieces.

[5] Unlike akyn and zhyraum, zhyrshy is a performer, not a creator of popular pieces.

[6] The Kazakh Central Executive Committee (KazTsIK) was the organ of state power during the period of Soviet rule in Kazakhstan. It was responsible for directing and managing a number of important issues in the republic, such as conducting elections, approving laws and policies, and coordinating the activities of state bodies.

grown up to 81 musicians and is called "The Kazakh State Academic Orchestra of Folk Instruments" named after Kurmangazy. In 2022, due to its wide-established popularity, the Orchestra received the status of "National".

So, slowly but surely, the ensemble forms of Kazakh traditional instruments acquired more specific forms. The decisive role in this process was played by the Kazakh scholar, organologist, and public figure Sarybayev (1927–1984) (Shakarim, 2013). Based on his own creative and research activity, Sarybayev had shown the possible diversity of forms of performance on Kazakh folk instruments. Since ensemble performance did not exist in the Kazakh music tradition in the past, it was Sarybayev who became the founder of the new repertoire and forms of Kazakh folk ensembles' performance.

Along with the inclusion of new instruments in the ensemble, changes were introduced in the interpretation of the original melody of the kuy. For example, a long melody from a folk kuy was first performed only on the sybyzgy—a wind musical instrument. Later, when new instruments such as the sherter (a three-stringed plucked instrument) and the kyl-kobyz (a two-stringed bowed instrument) were added to the ensemble, the extended melodies began to be played alternately on each of these instruments.

In parallel with the formation of ensemble music-making, there was work related to the modification of Kazakh folk instruments, as a result of which by 1972 the ensemble "Otyrar Sazy" grew up to 20 people.

As Sarybayev noted: "In order to expand the ensemble tradition we perform kuy 'Boken zhargak' ('Antelope skin cape') (*sybyzgy*—B.S. and *dombyra*—K. Akhmediyarov). It was more difficult to reinforce the joint performance on *sybyzgy* and *kyl-kobyz*. And only in 1969, when Daulet Myktybayev and I, imbued with interest in the work of folklore ensemble, managed to execute a duet of *sybyzgy* and *kyl-kobyz*…" (Sarbayev, 1978: 172-173).

Sarybayev's incredible intuitive vision and unique scholarship, aiming to "determine and scientifically substantiate all that is the identity of the Kazakh orchestra," and to introduce "all kinds of Kazakh musical instruments, preserving their timbre and performance traditions," expressed in his monograph, brought well-deserved results (Sarybayev, 1978).

Therefore, thanks to the creative cooperation of Akhmet Zhubanov and Bolat Sarybayev, two types of collective music-making on traditional music instruments—ensemble and orchestral—have bloomed in Kazakhstan.

The Orchestral and Ensemble Forms of Kazakh Music Performance: Similarities and Differences

If we compare special features of these two forms in Kazakhstan, as a rule, orchestras, as large music bodies that combine different families of instruments, are sponsored by state institutions and exist on the basis of state philharmonic, concert, and educational organizations. A modern orchestra of Kazakh folk instruments has up to 100 members.

Kazakh folk instrument ensembles, in contrast, have often formed independently and are characterized by greater mobility. They have developed through various forms of music-making and performance, sometimes integrating traditional musical instruments with modern musical culture.

Broadly speaking, two types of Kazakh traditional ensembles are prevalent in the Republic today. These can be categorized as stable and mobile formations. The first type evolves over time with the support of state institutions, while the second type is more flexible, forming spontaneously to accommodate significant social events. The latter is often marked by its adaptability and improvisational nature.

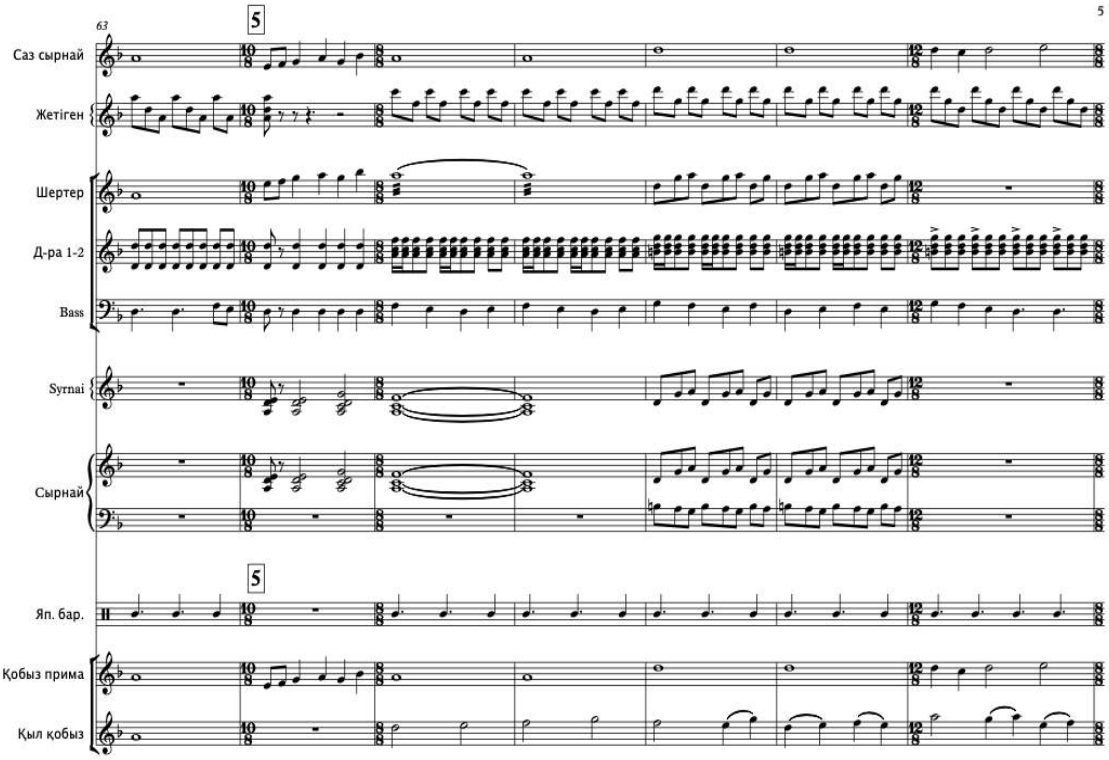

Figure 2: Part of the score of the kuy "Kairan Yelim", B. Aktayev. Printed with permission of the composer and the score publisher.

The first stable forms include those well-known ensembles that have an official status: "Murager" (founded in 1980), "Sazgen" (1981), "Folk Music Ensemble of the Presidential Orchestra of the Republic of Kazakhstan" (1992), "Ak Zhauyn" (1997), "Saryarka" (1998), "Arka Sazy" (2004), "Turan" (2008), "Astana Sazy" (2017), "Sarmad" (2017), "Korkyt" (2018), and others.

Stable forms follow a strictly fixed order of Kazakh traditional musical instruments, including the dombyra, sherter, prima-kobyz, kyl-kobyz, zhetigen, dangyra, shankobyz, and sybyzgy.

The repertoire of stable ensembles may include a diverse range of works, such as arrangements of Kazakh traditional music and folk songs, compositions by Kazakh composers, *popular* Russian and Western melodies, as well as pop songs, dance music, and film scores. These ensembles have an extensive repertoire. For example, in 2022, the "Astana Sazy" ensemble released an album titled ZAMAN, featuring 18 tracks from its regular repertoire.

As a representative example of the stable ensemble format described above, we present to the reader the contemporary Kazakh kuy *Kairan Yelim* [Oh, My People], composed by Bauyrzhan Aktayev specifically for the Kazakh State Folk Ensemble "Astana Sazy." The nine-page score consists of an introduction, development, and climax. However, when introducing his work to the ensemble, Aktayev encouraged musicians to adopt an improvisational approach to its performance. This unique perspective infused the piece with a dynamic, improvisatory character, blending elements of traditional Kazakh folk kuy with contemporary compositional techniques.

Unlike stable ensembles, mobile ensembles emerge spontaneously, forming in response to festive events that require groups of 3–13 musicians. They perform at various occasions, from official receptions to weddings, adapting to the event's setting, equipment, and budget. Their repertoire includes pop songs, Kazakh kuys, remakes, remixes, and other popular genres. A

typical lineup consists of 3–4 musicians playing dombyra, kobyz, accordion, and occasionally sherter or zhetigen.

Conclusion

Today in the 21st century, ensembles of Kazakh folk instruments have evolved into a dynamic model of transition toward polyphonic textural fabric. Their rich timbral diversity and expressive depth make them highly accessible to audiences, earning the attention of both listeners and scholars alike.

Collective forms of music-making first emerged in Kazakhstan in the early 20th century. Now, a century later, it is essential to reflect on the evolution of this tradition. The widespread popularity of Kazakh folk ensembles today, both domestically and internationally, underscores their cultural significance. These ensembles not only preserve and showcase the richness of traditional Kazakh music but also contribute to its ongoing development. Their growing influence highlights the need for further academic inquiry into their artistic, historical, and theoretical dimensions.

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