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INTRO INTO NUMBER 16 OF AEMR

This issue, Number 16, is entirely dedicated to the main goal of the journal.

Since we had the opportunity to meet with the publisher and some reviewers (September 2025), we are clearly aiming for a better balance between articles and review essays to ensure wider dissemination. However, we will not compromise on strictly addressing copyright and authorship issues, which are crucial to the journal's responsibilities.

The 16th issue of AEMR explores Chinese history from various perspectives, examining how biographical information is collected (Rees, Helen), how certain musical instruments facilitated the exchange (Zeng He [曾河] and Loo Fung Chiat [卢芳洁]; Zhang Yu [张宇] and Camellia Siti Maya Mohamed Razali; Nguyễn Thế Truỳền; Juan Sebastián Correa Cáceres; Jähnichen, Gisa; Xiao Qinbei [肖沁蓓]) of knowledge along the ancient Silk Road. These efforts include knowledge on specific genres as described by Ryskulov Kuanysh Toktarbaevich [Рыскулов Куаныш Токтарбаевич], Gulnar Alpeissova Tuуakbaуevna [Гульнар Альпеисова Туякбаевна], Акпарова Галия Толегоновна [Акпарова Галия Толегоновна], and Nurtaza Raushan Sabyrzhanovna [Нұртаза Раушан Сабыржановна], current media issues as shown in the contribution of Rajesh Kumar Yadav [राजेश कुमार यादव], Richa Mishra [ऋचा मिश्रा], and Avinash Kumar [अविनाश कुमार], and how copyright challenges are addressed and managed creatively during political turbulence (Setiawan, Aris, Zulkarnain Mistortoify, and Fijar Sugma Timur Yuddan; de Alwis, Medha).

While reading this issue, everyone should remember the beginnings of any academic studies and beyond. Exploring these articles will bring joy and new insights. We promise.

AEMR



ASIAN-EUROPEAN MUSIC RESEARCH JOURNAL (AEMR)

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

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To all authors:

Many thanks! Without your help we could not get so far!

Please, recommend this journal and the author's guidelines as described in the last three paragraphs of this issue.

FROM ORAL HISTORY TO DOCUMENTARY FILM TO BIOGRAPHICAL MONOGRAPH: THREE STAGES IN TELLING A MUSICAL LIFE STORY

Helen Rees¹

Abstract

In August 2008, I undertook a 36-hour oral history with renowned Shanghai-based bamboo flute master Dai Shuhong (b.1937), with whom I had studied since 1987. His almost photographic memory and skills as a raconteur opened up for me not only the story of a remarkable life lived at a time of rapid musical transformation in socialist China's most cosmopolitan city, but also an unprecedentedly granular view-from-the-ground of how major aesthetic, social, pedagogical and policy changes came about, and what it was like as an individual musician to witness, experience, and contribute to them. My path to writing a biographical monograph based on our oral history took a detour when a filmmaker colleague, inspired by the oral history, proposed a documentary on Dai's life. We filmed for two weeks in September 2016, and the film, *Playing the Flute in Shanghai: The Musical Life of Dai Shuhong*, was completed in 2019. This article describes how the originally unanticipated film project transformed the in-progress monograph, in particular how photovoice techniques, emphasis on the visual, and creative ways of capturing interviews and conversations created new types of firsthand materials and fresh ways of conceptualizing the entire book project.

Keywords

China, Chinese music history, flute playing, Dai Shuhong, biographical methods

INTRODUCTION

In September 1987, I arrived at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music as a British Council postgraduate exchange student. Information on Chinese music had been sparse in England, so I eagerly signed up for classes on Chinese music history alongside one-on-one lessons on my main instrument, the bamboo transverse flute dizi. The lecture class on Chinese musical history provided a survey from pre-historical times to the twentieth century, delineating major developments while dwelling briefly on such luminaries as Nie Er ([聂耳], 1912–1935), composer of today's national anthem, and Xian Xinghai ([冼星海], 1905–1945), composer of the patriotic *Yellow River Cantata* (黄河大合唱).² Several other academic classes offered an excellent grounding in traditional vocal and instrumental genres, with much attention paid to musical analysis. There were also occasional opportunities to hear rare historical recordings and thus learn how aesthetics, tuning systems, and performance techniques had changed over time.

Unofficially and imperceptibly, however, I began to learn another type of musical history, one that came primarily during my dizi lessons and on visits to the home of my kind, hospitable dizi teacher, Dai Shuhong (戴树红老师). This was a history composed of a myriad personal memories, of beguiling anecdotes that gradually, one by one, added layers of flesh onto the bare historical bones learned in class. These were stories that introduced me to the personalities, social networks, and institutions overlooked by the grand narratives of the textbooks, yet which formed the bedrock of quotidian human experience. And I could not have had a better instructor in this than Dai.³

¹ Helen Rees, currently working at UCLA as a Professor of Ethnomusicology, has been active in the Chinese music research scene since the late 1980s. She has published widely on Chinese traditional music and cooperated on numerous CD projects. She can be reached by email for further information: hrees@ucla.edu.

² I still retain the original mimeographed textbook for the period from prehistory to 1949, liberally marked up for both content and language learning purposes (Dai Jiafang, n.d.). Nie Er's career is described on pages 55–57, Xian Xinghai's on pages 64–68.

³ In what follows, I adopt the Western custom of omitting the honorific *laoshi* (teacher) that should be applied in Chinese after the surname, although it feels uncomfortably disrespectful to do so.

Born in 1937 in the small city of Taizhou (泰州), 230 kilometres northwest of Shanghai, in 1956 Dai Shuhong had been swept from life as a factory worker and amateur musician into the first dedicated Chinese musical instrument cohort at the Shanghai Conservatory; he worked for the next six decades as a professional performer and teacher of the transverse and end-blown bamboo flutes (dizi and xiao), primarily at the Shanghai Conservatory and its attached middle school, and experienced firsthand the seismic shifts in cultural and musical life in China's most cosmopolitan city (Dai Shuhong, 2008a). By the 1980s, Dai had become one of the most renowned xiao players of his generation, developing particular skill in the delicate art of accompanying the elegant seven-string zither qin, and performing and recording with many of China's top qin artists (Figure 1);⁴ he also sank thousands of hours into learning qin himself, becoming deeply knowledgeable about qin culture. A gifted raconteur with an almost photographic memory, Dai entertained and educated me for years with his inexhaustible fund of stories about every conceivable aspect of musical life in China since the 1940s—tales that interrogated and refined the broad-brush narrative I had learned in academic lectures. Moreover, his vast personal collection of historical photographs added a unique visual angle, inviting me to immerse myself in scenes I could otherwise barely have imagined.



Figure 1: Dai Shuhong (xiao) and Dai Wei (qin), Shanghai, September 2016. Photo by the author, Helen Rees.

Twenty years into our friendship, inspired by Bell Yung's vivid and touching biography of his famous qin teacher Tsar Teh-yun ([蔡德允], 1905–2007) (Yung, 2008),⁵ I approached Dai to ask whether he would consent to our collaborating on writing his life story, to which he enthusiastically agreed. The question, then, was how to go about it.

Yung had developed a technique that accommodated the frailties of a woman already in her nineties by the time he began to document her life, a project that had started quite informally:

During those early sessions, in which we chatted about her life, I would rush home and jot down from memory as much as possible on my computer. Later, when I decided to document her life properly and to place all the stories in their correct sequence for the sake of coherency, . . . I would bring my laptop computer and start telling the stories back to her by reading my notes. She would then correct or elaborate on some details, or move tangentially to other stories, at which point I would frantically click away at the keyboard. In this way I wove the stories

⁴ For an admiring assessment of Dai's xiao style by another fine bamboo flute artist, see Zhang Weiliang 2011:324. Dai became especially famous for his qin-xiao partnership with legendary qin player Zhang Ziqian ([张子谦], 1899–1991). He has performed and recorded extensively with several other major qin musicians, including Lin Youren ([林友仁], 1938–2013), Gong Yi ([龚一], 1941–), and his own daughter, Dai Wei ([戴微], 1971–). The qin tradition is widely discussed in both Chinese- and Western-language sources (see Yung, 1997:1–6 for a clear English-language introduction). By contrast, the qin-xiao duo tradition has attracted minimal scholarly attention (see Lin Chen & Chen Chen, 2022 for an excellent overview).

⁵ This romanisation of Tsar's name is the one she herself used, and that is used in all English-language writing about her (e.g., Yung, 2008). The pinyin romanisation of the Mandarin pronunciation of her name would be Cai Deyun.

together into a narrative that formed a larger picture. Later, I relied very much on her son George to fill in with details and factual information (ibid.:15).

This method worked well with a very elderly subject of a retiring nature who might have been uncomfortable with audio or video recording of formal interviews, but it had the disadvantage of constructing the narrative purely in the third person, with Tsar's own voice heard directly only through her poems and other writings. In the literature on Chinese music, I had recently come across Xiao Mei's essay *Three Women in Chinese Music: Traditional and Contemporary* (2000), in which she artfully deploys extensive direct quotes from interviews with renowned researcher Cao Anhe ([曹安和], 1905–2004) and two famous erhu (two-string fiddle) performers, Min Huifen ([闵惠芬], 1945–2014) and Song Fei ([宋飞], 1969–), allowing each interviewee to express herself in her own words and thus communicate more directly to the reader—something I felt would work especially well for Dai, with his lively delivery and extraordinary eye for detail.⁶ I proposed, therefore, that we structure our joint venture around an extensive videotaped oral history that would take us from Dai's birth to the present day. Once again, he happily assented. We both assumed we would move directly from the oral history to a monograph, but in the end that did not happen; instead, we took an unexpected but most productive detour.

STAGE ONE: ORAL HISTORY

On the morning of 4th August 2008, I set up the video camera in the living room of the Dais' Shanghai flat, and we sat down for the first hour of the oral history interview. Dai had resisted my suggestion that we rough out a written timeline of his life to provide a mnemonic anchoring dates and major events, instead sitting quietly for half an hour in order to marshal his thoughts before we began. Over the course of ten days, finishing on the evening of 13 August, the night before I had to return to Los Angeles, we recorded thirty-six hours of interviews. The first thirty-two covered his life up to 2008 (Dai Shuhong, 2008a), while the last four, recorded between the evenings of 12 and 13 August, dealt with one of his favourite topics, the history and technique of the endblown flute xiao and its role accompanying the qin zither (Dai Shuhong, 2008b). During his stay in Los Angeles in January 2009, we recorded eleven more hours that discussed his many students, his dizi teacher Jin Zuli ([金祖礼], 1906–2000), and his two visits to England in 2000 and 2008—the second for a high-profile concert tour with qin player Gong Yi [龚一], which featured a meeting with then-Prince Charles (Dai Shuhong, 2009). In subsequent years we filled in a few gaps.

Collaborating on Dai's oral history was an eye-opener even for me as his long-time student, accustomed as I was to his extraordinary memory and powers of visual recall. Before each session, he would sit quietly to gather his thoughts and, in some cases, check names in an address book before speaking continuously for two or more hours at a time. Re-reading the transcripts of our interviews, I am constantly struck both by the organization and clarity of his narrative and by how little I say, beyond the occasional expression of surprise or agreement, or a few requests for minor elucidation. We kept a notebook on the table for him to write down characters for personal and place names, dialectal expressions, and any vocabulary I was unfamiliar with; he also used it to draw diagrams, for example of temple layouts. This proved invaluable for transcribing the interviews and writing the book. Dai's visual recall and talent for vivid description drew me in immediately to his world; for example, the oral history begins with a systematic, detailed, and utterly beguiling description of Tai-zhou in the 1940s—its rivers, bridges, boats, streets, houses, temples, commercial activities, and musical life, all interwoven with the larger narrative of war, inflation and poverty that characterised the era. By the time we got to Dai's own story, I could vividly picture the world of his childhood and almost see the scenes play out in front of me. The decision to base his life story on the oral history and to present it in the first person, getting as close as possible in English to the clarity, elegance, and rhythm of his oral delivery, was entirely vindicated. It took several years to complete the word-by-

⁶ Outside the field of Chinese music, a major inspiration for this approach was the autobiography of Navajo Blessingway singer Ólta'í Tsoh (Mitchell, 1978), although that project had to be accomplished via interpreters, which would not be the case here. Both Yung (2008:15) and the interviewers in the Ólta'í Tsoh project (Mitchell, 1978:2–9) explain their methodology in meticulous detail. This is often not the case with life stories, where one may be left wondering how the information was elicited and how much it was elaborated on by the interviewer/editor, especially when it is presented in the first person (see, for example, comments by Rulan Chao Pian (1985:9–10) prefacing her translation of the autobiography of Peking drum singer Zhang Cui Feng [张翠凤]).

word transcription of the many hours of interviews and to undertake the necessary historical and contextual research, but by 2015 I was ready to write the book.⁷ At that point, however, our project took its lengthy unplanned detour.

STAGE TWO: THE FILM

The detour originated over lunch at UCLA with my colleague Aparna Sharma, a professional documentary filmmaker and film scholar, who listened to my tales of the oral history with increasing fascination and finally asked, “Do you think Mr. Dai would be interested in making a documentary film about his life?” The answer was a resounding “yes” on the part of the entire Dai family, and the bulk of the filming took place in Shanghai over two weeks in September 2016, with a few extra scenes shot in January and April 2017. From the outset, it was a collaborative endeavour: Dai, Aparna and I discussed what to include and how to film it, participants watched each scene immediately after it was shot to check the content and offer comments, and feedback elicited during three rough cut screenings from almost thirty participants and family members strongly shaped the final product (Rees & Sharma, 2024). Titled *Playing the Flute in Shanghai: The Musical Life of Dai Shuhong* / 沪上箫声：戴树红先生的音乐人生, the 84-minute Chinese-language film was premiered at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in March 2018, drawing an enthusiastic audience of over two hundred people, some of whom had come from over two hundred kilometres away. The following year it won the Biographical Documentary Award (优秀人物传记奖) at the First Chinese Music Ethnographic Film Festival (第一届华语音乐影像志展映), held at the Shanghai Grand Theatre, and in 2021 it was distributed as a DVD by the Dutch company Pan Records, with English subtitles (Figure 2; *ibid.*).

Informed as it was by the oral history, the documentary naturally took on a life of its own, driven by the profound differences between static footage generated by a video camera placed on a tripod to capture interviews that would later form the basis for a monograph; and the creatively conceived, dynamically shot, and dialogically edited film designed as an aesthetic end in itself for presentation to an audience.⁸

For me as a researcher accustomed to the linear logic of academic prose, in which sound recordings, still photographs, and “research film” appeared largely in supporting roles,⁹ it was a new experience to grapple with an avowedly subjective medium in which the moving image dominates and shapes the way information is juxtaposed and narratives are formed. Thanks to their sensory qualities, documentaries, suggests film scholar Bill Nichols, “possess an expressive power that equals or exceeds [that of] the printed word” (2017:73); this is achieved in part through “play[ing] with time, place, and context, manipulating reality using a diffuse audiovisual language” (Ballengee, 2024:187). It soon became evident to me that our documentary enterprise not only entailed a qualitatively different way of telling Dai’s compelling life story and sharing his world, but also offered a potent means for gathering new information for the monograph.

Playing the Flute in Shanghai consists of twenty-two scenes (plus the title scene and closing credits), only one of which exceeds seven minutes in length.¹⁰ Following an opening voice-over in which I

⁷ It is not unusual nowadays for oral histories to be documented solely by audio recording and logs, but I knew that for the project I had in mind, it was essential to have word-by-word transcripts of the thirty-six hours of interviews from 2008, and for parts of the 2009 and later materials. Most of the transcription was completed with great care by Wang Pingping [王乒乓], then a student at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, with several undertaken by Dai’s daughter, Dai Wei [戴微]; my US-based colleagues and friends Chi Li [李琦], Guangming Li [李光明], and Da Lin [林达]; and myself. I then read through and annotated the hundreds of transcribed pages to create a detailed bilingual log to guide my structuring and writing of the book.

⁸ Leonardo D’Amico, in his magisterial survey of the use of film in ethnomusicology, usefully emphasizes the difference between “research film”, “a gathering of audiovisual data collected with a...camcorder during fieldwork, with the purpose of being used as...data for research”, and documentary film, an “edited product” that is a “structured work made for presentation to an audience” (2020:41).

⁹ My primary encounter up to this point with the foregrounding of a non-textual medium lay in the numerous ethnographic CDs on which I had collaborated since 1995 with musicians and scholars from southwest China. Here the audio recordings were of course paramount, with text and photographs as supporting elements (Rees 2020). While very different from documentary film, these projects had given me experience of prioritizing a non-textual component, making the switch to film easier.

¹⁰ Here I define a scene as a self-contained segment of the film based in a single locale. Thus, for example, one four-minute scene that starts at 00:16:41 shows Dai walking down Huaihai Road into a qin studio, climbing the stairs, and giving qin lessons to two different

walk down a Shanghai street and explain the goals of the film, the scenes intertwine five informal performances, one of which is rare archival footage from 1984, showcasing Dai's partnership with renowned qin player Zhang Ziqian ([张子谦], 1899–1991); three lessons (in one of which Dai teaches the xiao, while in the other two he teaches qin); five photovoice segments, in which photograph albums elicit spontaneous conversations and reminiscences; four interviews; and one informal chat between Dai and two of his 1950s classmates reminiscing about their student days. These focal scenes are placed so that one leads organically into the next, often linked via street scenes and shots of the visual culture of Dai's home (photographs and calligraphy displayed on the walls and sideboards, for example). Furthermore, eleven of the scenes take place in Dai's small study (Figure 3), providing a locational anchor to which the film repeatedly returns.¹¹

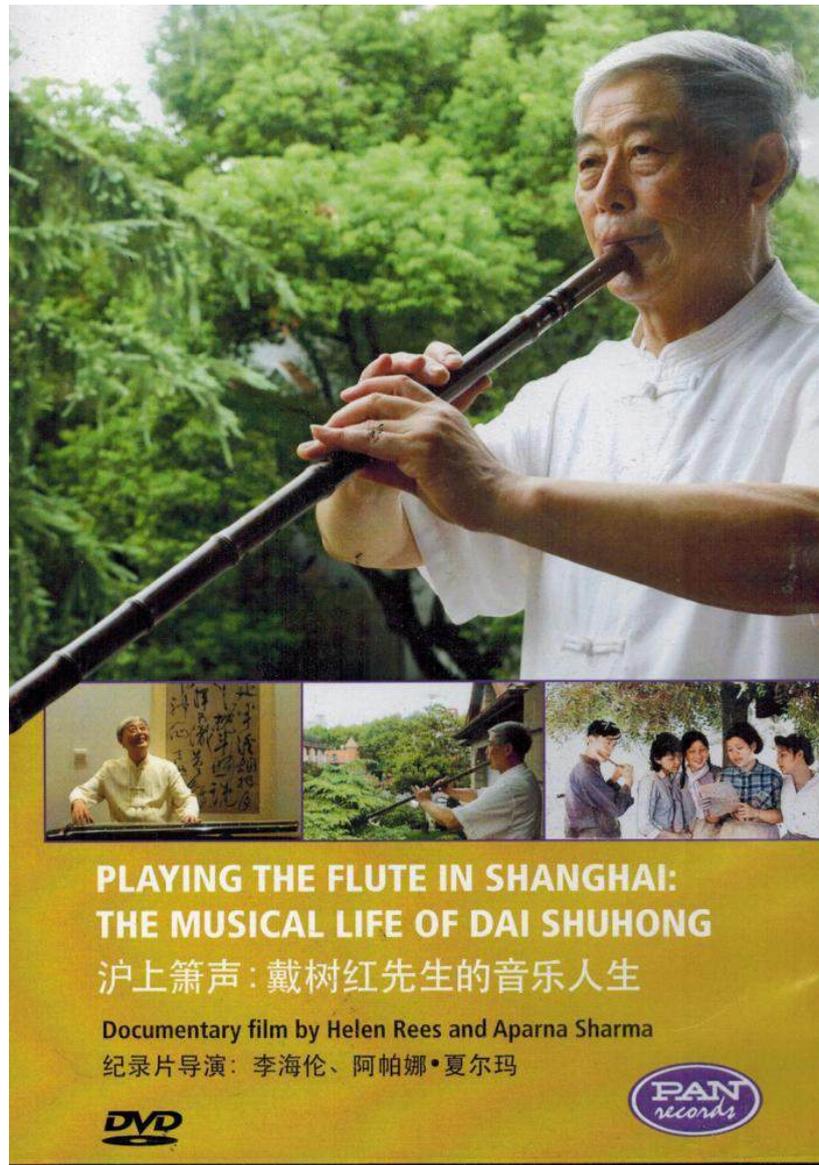


Figure 2: Cover of DVD for film *Playing the Flute in Shanghai*. Pan Records, Leiden, 2021. Used by permission given by the owner of the film company, Bernard Kleikamp.

Unlike the oral history, the film does not move chronologically through Dai's life story; instead, it allows themes to develop naturally, juxtaposing different types of scenes to illuminate a topic. Thus,

adult students in an interior room. (Timings are given as in the DVD version of the film listed under Audio-Visual Sources.) The longest scene is the last, incorporating an interview with Dai's daughter, Dai Wei, and a duo performance of a short qin piece (with her on qin and her father on xiao). With its length (7'27'') and the calm, long-drawn-out phrases of the piece, this scene has the effect of bringing the film gently down towards its conclusion.

¹¹ For more extensive discussion of different scenes and the editing process see Rees & Sharma, 2024. An important characteristic of the film is that, aside from my brief opening walk through the backstreets of Shanghai to Dai's tower block on Huashan Road, there is no voice-over: everything after that unfolds through the voices of the participants.

for example, one of the scenes most enthusiastically received by qin and xiao aficionados, the archival footage from 1984 of Zhang Ziqian and Dai performing the iconic piece *Wild Geese Landing on the Sandbank* (平沙落雁) on qin and xiao (00:32:43–00:39:19), is preceded by a photovoice segment in which Dai describes the Shanghai qin world of the early 1960s (with Zhang Ziqian visible in one of the photos); it is followed by a photovoice segment in which Dai tells of his own learning of the qin under Zhang’s guidance from 1980 on. That in turn leads into Dai’s performance on qin during our 2016 shoot of the piece *Spring Dawn* (春晓吟), which becomes the background music to a shot of his applying his elegant brush calligraphy to a favourite Tang poem, *Early Spring* (早春). He comments that this poem by Han Yu ([韩愈], 768–824) is one he often thinks of when playing this piece (Rees & Sharma, 2024:176–177).

Creative editing subtly underlines the close connection in traditional literatus culture among poetry, calligraphy, and the qin, and Dai’s interest in all these arts. That connection has been commented on in many textual publications (e.g., Yung, 2008), but Nichols is right that the viewer’s audiovisual experience of this is far more powerful than any linguistic exposition is likely to be. And indeed it was achieved by “manipulating reality” (Ballengee, 2024:187), since obviously Dai could not be simultaneously playing the qin and doing calligraphy, although both activities did occur on the same night. Yet if the editing manipulated objective time, it pointed to another kind of reality—the conceptual linking of musical piece and poem. The second-longest scene in the film (00:41:45–00:48:32), this became the climax of a multi-scene segment revolving around Dai’s experience of the qin. It proved extremely popular with the qin enthusiasts among our viewers, who told us how much they liked the juxtaposition of music and calligraphy. Placed exactly half-way through the film, the scene also serves a structural role, bookending this facet of Dai’s musical life before a pivot to stories about other musical genres.



Figure 3: The interior of Dai Shuhong’s home study, Shanghai, September 2016. Film still from *Playing the Flute in Shanghai*.

My colleague Aparna Sharma makes an important point about the type of knowledge documentary film can provide:

Film is a sensory medium, and the knowledge it offers is distinct from written analysis. As an audiovisual medium, film can render a viewer present to the worlds it depicts, in a quite immediate way. A film sequence can reflect a whole setting, the placement of people and objects within it, their spatial and symbolic relationships, the actions they perform in it, the aural atmosphere of that setting, and its ambient and specific sounds like speech or music (Rees & Sharma, 2024:163).

It is that “whole setting”, with the simultaneous visual and audio input, that offers a more multidimensional sense of the world Dai inhabits than can be obtained from the oral history alone—even as the oral history does of course provide an infinitely greater wealth of data and detail over its forty-plus hours than the film can over eighty-four minutes.

Thus, it is only from the film that one can get a visceral sense of the “social aesthetics” of Dai’s community and environment (MacDougall, 2006:98)—the “culturally patterned sensory experience” of his study and the qin studios he visits, the generally subdued colour schemes of décor and clothing, the ubiquitous presence of a culture of tea-drinking, and the body language of social interactions. His small study is notable for the brown wooden furniture, the shelves of books and musical scores, the many brown and black qin hanging from the bookshelves, the numerous long brown bamboo xiao, and, prominently placed on the windowsill, a kettle and tea set, alongside a splendid yellow orchid, a rare dash of bright colour in the room—an aesthetic ambience that a written text and still photos can only hint at. Similarly, it is the film that reminds us of the extraneous sounds the oral history and monograph don’t touch upon that nevertheless fill out the auditory environment—the noise of the traffic far below Dai’s flat as he plays the xiao on a balcony in the title scene, the birdsong audible in the 1984 footage, and the deafening cicadas that provide the backdrop to the evening stroll he and his wife take around the grounds of their tower block just before the final scene.

STAGE THREE: THE MONOGRAPH

The final stage of the biographical project, an English-language monograph, is currently in progress, with completion of the manuscript anticipated in 2026. Titled *Playing the Flute in Shanghai: The Life of Dai Shuhong*, it adapts the title of the film to suit its broader subject matter. After an introduction outlining the research methods and the broader Chinese historical and musical context, Dai’s life story, based primarily on the oral history and told in his own voice, constitutes the first five chapters of the book. The oral history materials are supplemented by historical photographs, photovoice and other segments from the film, other interviews and social media exchanges, and numerous further primary and secondary sources. These include publications of and about the Jinyu Qin Society (今虞琴社), in which Dai has participated for over sixty years, eventually becoming the chairperson; publications of and about the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, with which he has been associated since 1956; biographies of other musicians with whom he is connected; commercial and online audio and video recordings;¹² musical scores and pedagogical materials for dizi, xiao, and qin; my own recordings of lessons over the years; newspaper articles, concert programmes, blog postings, and other ephemera; county gazetteers and online historical sources for his hometown of Taizhou; scholarly publications on relevant musical genres and instruments; and publications that illuminate the broader musical and social history of China since the early 20th century.

Chapter six, which analyzes Dai’s unique xiao performance style and compares it with that of other renowned xiao specialists, relies on audio recordings, performances and interviews in the film, other interviews, the oral history, and secondary sources. In particular, it focuses on the 1984 archival footage of Dai’s performance with Zhang Ziqian of *Wild Geese Landing on the Sandbank*. The video allows for a note-by-note analysis of their performance of the piece, in which one can see the minute hand movements of the qin player and thus appreciate all the more Dai’s skill in imitating the subtle, almost inaudible ornaments that characterize the genre. Chapter seven highlights Dai’s pedagogical style. It is based on lessons and interviews in the film, other interviews, and my recordings of xiao lessons with him over the years. Chapter eight discusses the audio-visual elements of Dai’s world and how the interrelation of the audio, textual, and visual elements in that world has contributed to the overall biographical project. These chapters are told in my voice. The book that results will be accompanied by a website that provides readers with the entire film, selected excerpts of the oral history video tapes, and links to online sources. I am aiming for the two of us to be listed as co-authors.¹³

¹² Online platforms have of course opened up a treasure trove of historical recordings. Rare footage from 1960 of Dai’s accompaniment on dizi of Tibetan singer Tseten Dolma appears on the Chinese platform Bilibili: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1wT411x7j7/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.3, last accessed 6th November 2025. Several recordings of his ensemble performances with qin players are also available, for example Gong Yi: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1jT4y1u7D6/>, last accessed 6th November 2025.

¹³ Since Dai does not read English, a family member is reading each chapter to him in Chinese translation as it is finished, for him to approve and insert any changes he wants.

WHAT THE ORAL HISTORY BRINGS TO THE BIOGRAPHICAL MONOGRAPH

As noted at the beginning of this article, it was through the years of listening to Dai's personal recollections that I began to see the nuances absent from what one might term the "master narrative" of musical history presented in formal textbooks, and to appreciate their importance for understanding quotidian musical experience and agency among individuals and groups at all levels. An oral history account of the last eighty-plus years provides an invaluable sense of community and of local and national networks—of who knew whom, or corresponded with whom, or worked with which institutions. It often fills in factual gaps, bringing to the fore small but significant events and actions that are left out of broad-brush narratives but may explain puzzling anomalies or new departures. It also offers an insider-guided "feel" for events, aesthetic trends, and social developments (both musical and non-musical), and an understanding of how the speaker remembers and reflects on these later in life. This is still more the case where the resulting life story is told in the first person. An oral history approach is especially adept at illuminating the experiences and views of people who haven't become household names, whose lives, actions, thoughts, and enthusiasms constitute the tapestry of social life, yet who are frequently passed over in conventional publications on an era, a locale, a genre, or a superstar artist (Thompson & Bornat, 2017:186).

Furthermore, the style of information delivery is unique in oral history, and that in itself also conveys extra meaning. As pioneering oral historian Luigi Portelli (1991:47) emphasizes, "The tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing", and of course this is still more the case with a videorecorded oral history, in which gesture and body language contribute to the message being conveyed. An awareness of this certainly informs my decisions as to how to translate and put across the feel of certain phrasings and emphases in the first five chapters, but also drove the decision to place selected portions of the oral history tapes approved by Dai onto the website accompanying the book, so that at least some unfiltered original oral history material is accessible, documenting Dai's lively, performative delivery.

WHAT THE DOCUMENTARY FILM BRINGS TO THE BIOGRAPHICAL MONOGRAPH

As touched on above, the biggest single contribution of the documentary film to my re-envisioning of the monograph has been my increased awareness of the visual and sensorily multi-dimensional aspects of the world being described. Film emphasizes the sense of space and place, together with colour, texture, and small gestures—those things that tend to get lost in conventional textual biography. In the first five chapters, that has caused me to pay greater attention than I might have done before to the vivid visual pictures and soundscapes conjured up by Dai's almost photographic recall and storytelling skills. This awareness has also led to the creation of the eighth chapter, which was not originally planned when the project was conceived as a simple progression from oral history to monograph.

Specific techniques used in the shooting also opened up fresh approaches to biographical and historical writing. In particular, the four photovoice segments conducted with Dai placed historical photographs front and centre, prompting a flood of memories some of which replicated what is in the oral history, while others added new material and nuance, such as the detailed account of visits to his family by renowned Tibetan singer Tseten Dolma [才旦卓玛], whom he often accompanied on the transverse dizi flute, and who gave his toddler son a toy car in the early 1970s, a gift captured in a charming photo.¹⁴ The photovoice segment with two adult amateur students, who chat while looking over a book of photographs from a trip Dai and several of his students took to a temple in Wuxi, solved one of the most intractable problems of the monograph: how to elicit commentary naturally from his students on Dai's teaching and the sense of community he builds, without simply asking leading questions in a formal interview setting. A similarly natural effect was achieved as Dai talked in a relaxed fashion with his two 1950s classmates while sitting in front of their old dormitory at the

¹⁴ This research technique has been surprisingly little used in ethnomusicological writing until recently, but seems especially appropriate to biographies. A pioneering example occurs in the biography of Trinidadian band leader Roy Cape (Guilbault & Cape, 2014).

Shanghai Conservatory—a setting that inevitably brought to the fore anecdotes of their shared experience sixty years previously, which added new details to the one-person retelling of the era in the oral history.

Perhaps most unexpected was an insight that grew out of the discipline required in documentary film: it is both time-limited and sensitive to rhythm, so that in editing, one must pay close attention to the rhythm of speech, movement, and gesture. This alerted me to how energetically rhythmic Dai's speech patterns and movements are, something demonstrated especially clearly in the scene in which he recalls encouraging his young dizi students to learn from the inimitable grasp of rhythm exhibited by Peking opera percussionists. In this scene, he not only orally mimics the percussion patterns to perfection while physically imitating the playing motions, but also uses decisively rhythmic hand gestures to emphasize his point, finishing the scene with an energetic nod that stays “in rhythm” with the rest of the utterance (01:04:47–01:05:57). This minute of footage provoked an epiphany: I realized that the speech and gestural rhythms chime with Dai's subtle sense of timing in his highly distinctive flute style, in which breath and fingering are used in rhythmically creative ways that, try as I might, I have never fully managed to emulate.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The oral history and the documentary film each bring unique materials and insights to this biographical project. Each has had a part to play in my goal of crafting an English translation of Dai's words that evokes the visual and aural—and, where appropriate, other senses too—as much as his own vivid recall does. Indeed, the visual and the aural play a central role in the project, rather than being peripheral or merely illustrative, and the ultimate package of book+film+website aims to present a holistic sense of Dai's life and world that goes far beyond an academic text. From my collaboration on the film, I have also come to view the monograph as benefitting from an approach that borrows from the fluid creativity of film editing, inviting a more conscious and imaginative melding of content and aesthetics.

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THE GAME OF ORNAMENTATION: AN ANALYSIS OF A GUQIN PLAYER'S VIBRATO TECHNIQUE

Zeng He [曾河] and Loo Fung Chiat [卢芳洁]¹

Abstract

In the performance of the guqin, the vibrato technique executed by the left hand is a vital component of its playing system. This research utilizes performance footage and corresponding scores of six Guqin pieces by the renowned guqin player Yu Shaoze (喻绍泽, 1903–1988) as its data set, with the performer's physical actions serving as the central observational perspective. The holistic embodied practice of Yu Shaoze's vibrato techniques is investigated by combining the observation and description of Yu Shaoze's bodily movements with a comparative analysis of the differences between the score and the actual performance. Furthermore, this research attempts to analyze the formation of the performer's vibrato techniques through the correspondence between “concept and behavior,” aiming to reveal the diversity of individual performers in vibrato practice and to provide a valuable reference case for future studies.

Keywords

guqin; guqin performance; vibrato technique, Yu Shaoze

BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUE AND CURRENT RESEARCH STATUS

The vibrato technique executed by the left hand is an essential component in guqin performance. This action is referred to by guqin players as yinao. Originally, yin (吟) and nao (猱) were two of the most frequently used vibrato techniques. Later, these techniques have come to represent the vibrato action as a whole. Historical records of the vibrato technique date back to the Tang Dynasty (618–907). This subtle vibrato skill, which involves varying amplitudes and frequencies after the initial sound is produced, plays a role in sound embellishment, emotional depiction, and stylistic expression in the guqin tradition. Xu Shangying (徐上瀛, 1582–1662), a renowned guqin master active in the 17th century, once commented: “Half of the lively charm of the tones lies in yiniao. If they are not applied, the artistic conception of the guqin piece would be greatly diminished, losing all its lively and vivid charm.” (Xu Shangying [徐上瀛], 2013:129). It can be said that the vibrato technique is a daily skill for every guqin performer.

Compared to the extensive practice by guqin players, there is currently limited specialized research on the vibrato techniques of the guqin. Existing studies can be categorized into three types based on the nature of the research data: literature-based research, sound-based research, and participant-observation-based research. Scholars such as Ding (Ding Chengyun [丁承运], 1984), and Wu Ye (Wu Ye [吴叶], 2016) have adopted a philological approach, tracing the meanings, classifications, and effects of the vibrato techniques from historical texts. On the contrary, Zhang Mengdan (Zhang Mengdan [张梦丹], 2016) and Zhang Xin (Zhang Xin [张欣], 2023) focus their research on sound. Zhang Mengdan (Zhang Mengdan [张梦丹], 2016) compared the differences between the notation of vibrato fingerings in a guqin piece performed by guqin player Wu Jinglue ([吴景略] 1907–1987) and his actual performance, revealing the flexibility of these techniques in practice. Meanwhile, Zhang Xin (Zhang Xin [张欣], 2023) concentrated on visualizing the sounds produced by vibrato actions to discuss the diversity of vibrato techniques among different guqin players. Additionally, in performance studies of guqin players using participant-observation methods, vibrato techniques are occasionally mentioned

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as part of the performance, such as in the works of Xiao Xiao (Xiao Xiao [肖霄], 2019) and Li Juan (Li Juan [李娟], 2012), but they have not been explored in detail.

However, current research on the vibrato technique faces challenges in three main areas: Firstly, the essence of vibrato lies in physical movement, which serves as the origin of sound production. Therefore, the observation and description of behavior should hold a priority position in the study of vibrato techniques. Existing research predominantly focuses on sound and documentation as the object of analysis, and studies explicitly centered on performance behavior as the primary focus have yet to emerge. This limitation restricts the depth of discussion on vibrato techniques. Secondly, due to the confinement of research materials to the dimension of sound, the current literature primarily concentrates on descriptive methods for the acoustic patterns of vibrato techniques. There is a lack of exploration into the holistic performance habits of players regarding vibrato, which hinders a comprehensive understanding of the technique. Thirdly, existing research faces issues in the choice of descriptive language, a problem particularly common among researchers with a professional background in guqin performance. The absence of a clear definition of the relationship between the conceptual framework of vibrato symbols and their practical application has led to a linguistic dilemma where insider perspectives are used to explain insider phenomena. This significantly impacts the academic accessibility and shareability of the research.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, DATA, AND METHODS

In 1980, American ethnomusicologists Bell Yung and Joseph S.C. Lam visited Chengdu and recorded a substantial number of performance videos for a local guqin player named Yu Shaoze (1903–1988). The existence of these recordings made Yu one of the musicians of his era with the most preserved performance footage. As a prominent artist active in the 20th century, Yu Shaoze was integrated into the official music education system after the establishment of the P.R.C. in the 1950s. He became the founding director of the guqin programs at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music and the Xi'an Conservatory of Music, holding a significant position in the field. Unlike contemporary players with professional performance backgrounds, Yu Shaoze's early guqin learning and musical life followed traditional paths, imbuing his performance with a distinctly traditional quality. Additionally, he is widely recognized as the most representative player of the local Shu School (蜀派) of guqin music. Therefore, an examination of Yu Shaoze's performance practice contributes to a deeper understanding of the diversity of embodied experience in the performance of individual guqin artists.

The objective of this study is to explore Yu Shaoze's holistic vibrato habits through the observation and description of his guqin performance videos, specifically focusing on how he implements these techniques in his playing. The term holistic is based on the hypothesis that a guqin player, through long-term practice across multiple pieces, develops a complete set of vibrato habits and applies them to all pieces. Cheng Gongliang [成公亮] (1940–2015), an eminent guqin player and composer, pointed out that vibrato techniques extend beyond the notated symbols in guqin scores and are widely employed in practice. Therefore, learning vibrato techniques requires both listening to recordings and directly observing the teacher's performance. Additionally, the detailed execution of vibrato techniques is richer than their definitions, and one should not be confined by rigid concepts (Cheng Gongliang [成公亮], 2009). Cheng Gongliang's comments highlight two key points: firstly, performance and notation are not synchronized, as guqin players exhibit interpretative flexibility in practice, a characteristic of the framework of guqin notation, within which the performer's vibrato techniques unfold; secondly, the symbols for vibrato are continually redefined in practice by individual performers. Thus, the fundamental approach of this study is to avoid categorizing the left-hand vibrato movements observed in the performance recordings under existing conventional fingering concepts. Instead, the observations are explicitly divided into two parts: movements and symbols. Movements refer to the various left-hand finger oscillations observable at the visual level in the performance recordings, while symbols refer to the specialized notational symbols in the original scores that indicate the execution of vibrato techniques. By carefully analyzing the interaction between the two, the study aims to ultimately understand Yu Shaoze's holistic vibrato practice. The specific research questions are of two parts:

1. When the research data enters the visual dimension, are there vibrato movements that are imperceptible at the auditory level but observable visually?
2. How does Yu Shaoze respond to the vibrato symbols in the scores during his performance and why?

Regarding the research data, Yu Shaoze detailed in a late-life manuscript a repertoire of guqin pieces he frequently performed since his youth. Among the recordings made by Bell Yung and Joseph S.C. Lam, six pieces are included in his personal repertoire, which constitute the analytical subjects of this study (Figure 1). All guqin scores referenced in this study are from the Tianwenge Qin Manual (天闻阁琴谱), published in 1876, which was also the score Yu Shaoze used during his guqin studies. These scores were provided by Zeng Chengwei, Yu Shaoze's grandson and student, who is a professor of guqin at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music.

Piece name	Duration	Video format	Frame rate	Resolution	Audio sampling rate
<i>Taoyuanchunye</i> (桃园春夜)	00:04:29	MP4	29.97 fps/s	1280X720	44.100 kHz
<i>Qiushui</i> (秋水)	00:07:43	MP4	30.00 fps/s	720x480	44.100 kHz
<i>Gaoshan</i> (高山)	00:07:01	MP4	30.00 fps/s	720x480	44.100 kHz
<i>Liushui</i> (流水)	00:09:16	MP4	30.00 fps/s	720x480	44.100 kHz
<i>Zuiyuwanchang</i> (醉渔晚唱)	00:04:27	MP4	30.00 fps/s	720x480	44.100 kHz
<i>Chunshantingdujuan</i> (春山听杜鹃)	00:08:53	MP4	30.00 fps/s	720x480	44.100 kHz

Figure 1: List and technical parameters of the six videos. Scheme by the authors.

FINDINGS

SPONTANEOUS SUBTLE VIBRATO (SSV)

In Yu Shaoze's performances, there is a widespread use of a spontaneously formed vibrato technique that does not directly embellish the sound. The specific form of this technique involves the finger making slight side-to-side movements around a fixed fret position as the note is being played. The amplitude of these movements is narrow, sometimes consisting only of the action itself without producing an audible tremolo. The term spontaneous is used because these vibrato actions occur without any indications in the corresponding score. Furthermore, there is no specific term for this phenomenon in the existing terms for vibrato. For convenience, this technique will temporarily be referred to in this section as spontaneous subtle vibrato (SSV). The SSV serves three main purposes:

1. Mitigating the impact force during lateral sliding movements
2. Intonation improvement
3. Adjusting the finger's pressing angle on the string

These three functions often act simultaneously.

MITIGATING IMPACT AT THE END OF LATERAL SLIDING

In Yu Shaoze's performances, SSV is most frequently used to reduce the impact at the end of lateral sliding movements. When Yu Shaoze's left hand moves from one point to another along the string (mostly in a right-to-left direction), he sometimes continues with SSV at the destination point. The goal is to disperse the impact force that occurs when the hand suddenly stops moving. Without this adjustment, Yu Shaoze would have to tense his upper left arm to suppress shaking, which could lead to issues with pitch accuracy.

Observations of Yu Shaoze’s performance videos reveal that this form of SSV, aimed at avoiding fatigue and improving physical comfort, is more commonly applied during the technique known as *zhuxia* (注下). *Zhuxia* involves the right hand plucking the string, while the left hand slides from right to left. Since the force required for lateral movement increases proportionally with the distance, the occurrence of SSV is closely related to the distance involved in the *zhuxia*. Four examples of Yu Shaoze’s handling of *zhuxia* in *Qiushui* are provided in Figure 3. The data show that SSV appears when the sliding distance exceeds a certain value. However, it is absent when the distance is less than 6 cm.

Examples	Moving Distance	The Appearance of SSV
	6 cm	No
	5 cm	No
	18.7 cm	Yes
	12.2 cm	Yes

Figure 2: Table of the occurrence of SSV in *Qiushui*.

INTONATION IMPROVEMENT

Next, under specific conditions, improving intonation is the second function of SSV. The trigger for this technique is related to the way notes are connected, and it is more commonly seen in non-sliding connections. Non-sliding connections refer to transitions between two notes that do not involve sliding along the same string with the left hand but instead involve a change in strings and positions on the fretboard. In terms of intonation control, such connections cannot rely on sliding to anticipate or adjust intonation, necessitating the use of vibrato as a transitional technique to mask potential intonation issues. In *Qiushui*04’55’’² (Example 1), the fingering marked in the box demonstrates the application of SSV. This occurs because, at this point, the transition is made from the sixth string to the fifth string.

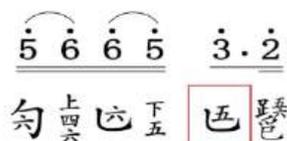


Figure 3: As example 1 named in the text: *Qiushui* at 04’55’’; Notation and recording are in the public domain.

FINGER POSTURE ADJUSTMENT

The third function of subtle vibrato is to adjust finger posture. As shown in *Qiushui* 03’23’’ (Example 2), subtle vibrato appears again in the red box. This is because, when playing the first two notes (in the green box), Yu employed the one finger for multiple strings technique, which refers to the method

² *Qiushui* 04’55’’ refers to the specific performance segment at the 04’55’’ of the *Qiushui* performance video.

of using the thumb to press down on two strings simultaneously. However, this compromised hand position made it difficult to smoothly execute the subsequent continuous leftward slide (in the yellow box). Therefore, in the red box, Yu chose to reset the angles of his fingers, allowing him to continue performing the leftward slide smoothly. As a result, the subtle vibrato in this instance serves a dual purpose: adjusting the micro-positioning of the fingers and fine-tuning the intonation.

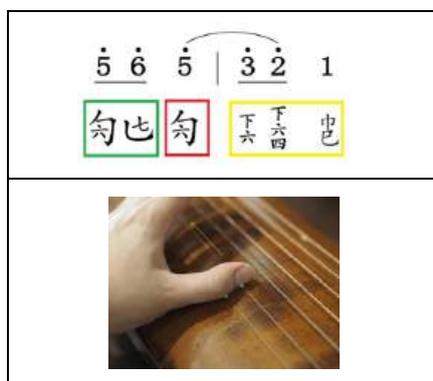


Figure 4: A example 2 named in the text. It shows *Qiushui* at 03'23"; Notation and recording in the public domain.

It is undeniable that the presence of SSV may occasionally cause a slight tremolo. However, the performer's intent is not to embellish these sounds but rather to achieve the aforementioned three functions, with such fluctuations being incidental effects.

Within the guqin community, Yu Shaoze's SSV is often equated with the vibrato technique known as *yin* because both involve subtle finger movements from a visual perspective. However, the internal mechanisms of SSV and *yin* are fundamentally different. Apart from the fact that there are no specific notation symbols corresponding to SSV in the score, *yin* itself is not a vibrato technique Yu uses to embellish sound.

A comparison of Yu's performance of *Yangchun* and his handwritten score reveals that in almost every section where the score explicitly marks *yin*, Yu does not execute it in his performance. This suggests that even though he retained these vibrato markings in his handwritten score, possibly due to the influence of canonical texts, he ultimately adhered to his own performance habits during actual play.

DIVERSE RESPONSES TO VIBRATO NOTATIONS IN PERFORMANCE

This section will explore how Yu Shaoze responds to the vibrato notations in the guqin scores during his performances. Unlike Western classical music, in the realm of guqin music, the performer is not a mere tool to execute the composer's intentions based on the notation. Most ancient guqin pieces that have been preserved since the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420–589) are anonymous. Some pieces even associate the composer with ancient historical figures to lend the music artistic credibility. There is no original, authoritative interpretation of guqin music; each recorded piece represents only the opinion of the person who transcribed it. Other performers, when facing the score, are allowed to interpret the music flexibly based on their own understanding.

In this context, various vibrato techniques appearing in guqin music are not necessarily strictly followed by later performers. And the interpretation of vibrato notations allows the performer to interpret and express them according to their own understanding, which in turn creates space for variation in vibrato techniques. Moreover, *Jianzipu* lacks a systematic time-value notation system. Therefore, the design of rhythm becomes an essential step for guqin players. As a result, the guqin score serves as a framework for interpretation rather than a strict operational procedure. This characteristic—where everyone can equally provide flexible interpretations and record them—has led to the development of multiple related 'families' of guqin scores. For example, *Pingshaluoyan* (Flat Sand and Falling Wild Goose) developed more than 50 documented versions of the score before 1949.

Much like the concept of 'families' in biology or botany, specific vibrato techniques are not single techniques but rather categories encompassing a variety of methods. Within these categories, there

are numerous derived types. Since the Tang Dynasty, guqin scores have documented dozens of derived vibrato techniques under the headings of yin and nao. These derived fingerings are often named using descriptive prefixes, such as feiyin (飞吟 flying vibrato), changyin (长吟 long vibrato), and duanyin (短吟 short vibrato). These variations represent the composers' or performers' efforts to personalize and refine vibrato as a nuanced element of guqin expression.

Yu Shaoze's vibrato techniques also unfold under this flexible musician–score relationship. A guqin player's preference for specific types of vibrato techniques is largely shaped by the version of the score they are using. The six pieces analyzed in this chapter all come from the Tianwenge Qin Manual. The following tables show all five types of vibrato notations, performance instructions (Figure 5), and their derived notations (Figure 6) found in these six pieces. These variations represent the performers' efforts to personalize and refine vibrato as a nuanced element of guqin expression. By comparing the performance videos of these six pieces with the original scores, it can be seen that Yu Shaoze responded to the vibrato notations in four ways: 1) omission, 2) execution, 3) substitution, and 4) addition. The types of responses do not correspond to specific vibrato techniques; in other words, each vibrato technique can appear in different pieces or sections with any of the aforementioned responses. This will be explained in detail subsequently.

Fingerings	The Performing Instructions in the <i>Tianwengeqinpu</i>
Yin (吟)	To produce sound by pressing the string, the finger should move back and forth at the position where it is placed, within a range of three to four <i>fen</i> ³ (分). Begin with larger movements, gradually becoming smaller. Perform four to five turns with each cycle of motion, and finally return to a steady vibrato to end at the original position. (按弦以取音, 在指所按之位往来摇动, 上下不出三四分, 先大而后小。一转一收约四五余转, 仍用定吟方收本位而止。)
Nao (猱)	The finger moves back and forth at the pressed position, exceeding the original position by about five to six <i>fen</i> . The motion is more intense and rapid than <i>yin</i> . (指于按处往来摇动, 约过本位五六分, 大于吟而多急烈。)
Zhuang (撞)	To produce sound by pressing and plucking, the finger swiftly pulls above the designated <i>fen</i> and quickly returns to the original position to produce a single note, which is called <i>Zhuang</i> . Its speed is like lightning—if swift, it results in one sound; if slower, it produces two sounds. (按弹得声, 用指急绰分数之上, 疾归本位取出一声曰撞。其速如电, 速则成一, 迟则二声也。)
Dou (逗)	The method of immediately following an upward slide with a downward slide to the designated position is called Dou. (借以上之声迎而注下以当本位之声为逗。)
Huan (唤)	If the <i>zhuang</i> is performed more slowly, linking upward and downward movements, the sound should follow the motion of the finger. Achieving a light, smooth, and lively connection is considered ideal. (如撞音放缓, 联上联下, 音随指走, 取轻松联活则佳焉)

Figure 5: Table (in the test named as 3) of the types of vibrato techniques involved in the six pieces and the performance instructions recorded in the Tianwen Qin Manual. Scheme by the authors.

Basic Fingerings	Derived Fingerings
Yin (吟)	alternating yin (且吟), small yin (小吟), slow yin (缓吟), micro yin (细吟), flying yin (飞吟), long yin (长吟), double yin (双吟), steady yin (定吟), rapid yin (急吟), large yin (大吟), passing yin (过吟).
Nao 猱	slide down nao (散注猱)、large nao (大猱)、long nao (长猱)、rapid nao (急猱)
Zhuang 撞	next zhuang (次撞)、slow zhuang (缓撞)、large zhuang (大撞)、rapid zhuang (急撞)
Dou 逗	shift dou (换逗)
Huan 唤	No derived fingerings

Figure 6: Table of the types of derived fingerings involved in the six pieces. Scheme by the authors.

³ Guqin players divide the length between one hui (徽 marker) and the next into ten equal parts, with each part referred to as one fen (分).

OMISSION OF VIBRATO NOTATIONS

In Yu's performances, numerous *yin* and *nao* records in the score are absent. This omission relates to his approach to rhythm design. As shown on the first page of *Qiushui* (Figure 7), the vertically arranged score contains three categories of notation, distinguished by two font sizes. The larger font size represents Category A notation (marked in red), which corresponds to sounds produced by plucking the strings with the right hand, either combined with left-hand pressing or by right-hand plucking alone. The smaller font size represents Category B (marked in a light grey box) and Category C (marked in a middle grey) notations, which indicate horizontal movements of the left hand along the strings and left-hand vibrato techniques, respectively.

Both Category A and Category B notations have a relatively stable pitch and duration in auditory perception, while Category C does not. This alternation between left-hand and right-hand movements, along with the two-tier font arrangement of *jianzipu*, provides performers with a sense of cyclical rhythm. Yu's habitual sense of rhythm is influenced by this layout. In his performances, Yu tends to complete a Category A notation or an A+B+C sequence within one or two quarter-note durations. Figure 8 compares Yu's performance with the original score, revealing that he often integrates movements into fixed rhythmic patterns. Consequently, a significant number of Category C notations, including *yin* and *nao*, and their derivative forms (marked in red), are excluded from his rhythmic arrangements. This tendency to overlook elements that do not participate in rhythmic structuring is a widespread characteristic of Yu's performances.

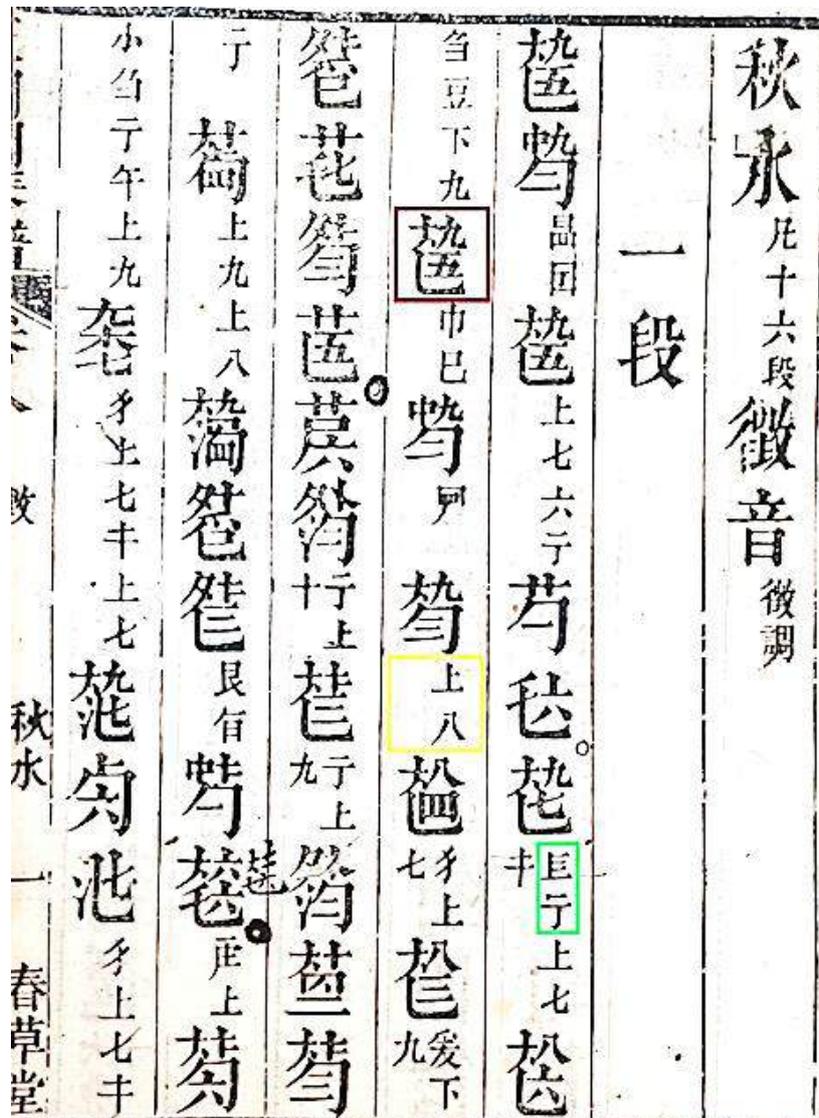


Figure 7: The first page of *Qiushui*. Text and notation in the public domain.

Original score	Yu Shaoze's performance
	$\overset{\frown}{6 \dot{1}}$ 大九 上七 七 六
	$\overset{\frown}{3 \ 5}$ 大九 上七 七 四
	$\overset{\frown}{6 \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}$ 大九 二七 七 七
	$\underline{2 \ 3 \ 5}$ 甸 五 上七 中
	$1 \ \underline{6 \ 5}$ 高 下 也
	$5 \ \overset{\frown}{\underline{6 \ 1 \ 6}} \ 5 \ 5$ 飘 飘 佳 台 飘 甚

Figure 8: Table of examples with omission of vibrato notations. Scheme by the authors.

THE EXECUTION, ADDITION, AND SUBSTITUTION OF NAO (猱)

Yu Shaoze's application of nao demonstrates the greatest diversity. The performing instructions for nao in the Tianwenge Qin Manual are filled with ambiguities and omissions:

The finger moves back and forth at the pressed position, exceeding the original position by about five to six fen. The motion is more intense and rapid than *yin*. [指于按处往来摇动，约过本位五六分，大于

吟而多急烈] (Tang, 1876:46). Additionally, there is considerable flexibility in how users of the score interpret the descriptions of body movements. For example, should the motion be centered around the pressed string or should the pressed string serve as the start and end point of the motion? Should the motion swing left to right or right to left? How many times should the motion be repeated? These unresolved yet critical details compel the performer to redefine the technique through practice.

In Yu's performance, the *nao* he executes is always embedded in a fixed rhythmic pattern and finger connection. The following Yu-style *nao* example (Example 4) is taken from the first section of *Gaoshan*. The specific execution is as follows: After obtaining the fundamental pitch, he uses it as both the starting and ending point to swing noticeably to the right twice in rhythm. In terms of duration, the *nao* and the preceding action together occupy one and a half quarter notes, aligning with the following *yan* (掩), resulting in a total of two quarter notes, and each swing takes a half quarter note. This kind of formalized treatment of *nao* appears in all six pieces.

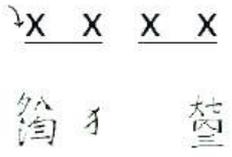
Original Score	Yu's Performance
	

Figure 9: As example 4 appearing in the text; Yu Shaoze-style *nao* in *Gaoshan*. Scheme, notation and recording in the public domain.

Whenever a *nao* is preceded by a pressed string note and followed by a *yan* (a finger transition from the ring finger to the thumb), Yu will always play the *nao* in this fixed manner and rhythm. This specific finger connection forms the triggering condition for the Yu-style *nao*.” Conversely, in another example (Example 5) from the first section of *Gaoshan*, even though the *changnao* (长揉 long *nao*), which theoretically should last longer than the regular *nao*, follows, Yu Shaoze omits it in actual performance because the subsequent note is not a *yan* but an open string played by the right hand.

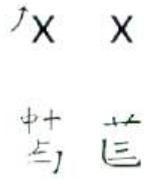
Original Score	Yu's Performance
	

Figure 10: As example 5 appearing in the text; Yu Shaoze-style *nao* in *Gaoshan*. Scheme, notation and recording in the public domain.

It is worth noting that Yu Shaoze's formalized handling of *nao* produced a generalization effect in his performances. In some instances (Example 6) where the notation does not indicate *nao* or even lacks vibrato notations, Yu reflexively replaced or added them as “Yu-style *nao*” due to the similarity in finger connections. And he also applied habitual treatment to the rhythm.

Substitution		
Addition		

Figure 11: As example 6 appearing in the text; Yu Shaoze-style as substitution and addition of nao. Scheme, notation and recording in the public domain. The.

YU SHAOZE'S PERFORMANCE OF ZHUANG (撞) AND HUAN (唤)

In the performance instructions of the Tianwenge Qin Manual, *zhuang* is described as having two variations: a faster version with two movements and a slower version with one movement:

To produce sound by pressing and plucking, the finger swiftly pulls above the designated fen and quickly returns to the original position to produce a single tone, which is called *Zhuang*. Its speed is like lightning—if swift, it results in one sound; if slower, it produces two sounds. [按彈得聲，用指急綽分數之上，疾歸本位取出一聲曰撞。其速如電，速則成一聲，遲則二聲也] (Tang, 1876: 48)

However, Yu unified this technique in his performance as a single movement, referred to as a “single-*zhuang*,” which, in terms of duration, occupies one quarter note together with the fundamental tone. The technique *huan* only appears in two qin pieces, *Chunshantingdujuan* and *Qiushui*, both of which are excerpted from the *Chuncaotang Qin Manual* (春草堂琴譜) published in Hangzhou in 1744. This technique may have been more popular in the *Wu* region. According to the Tianwenge Qin Manual, *huan* is described as a vibrato technique similar to *zhuang* but with a slower speed. However, when comparing the scores of these two pieces with Yu's actual performance, the theoretical speed difference between *huan* and *zhuang* is not reflected in Yu's playing. Therefore, it can be concluded that Yu replaced *huan* with the single-*zhuang* in his performance.

By analyzing the four fingering techniques—*nao*, *zhuang*, *dou*, and *huan*—aside from *yin*, it becomes clear that these four techniques are essentially variations of the same movement—a single rightward swing of the left thumb or ring finger. While the duration of each swing remains roughly constant, the specific operation details of *nao*, *zhuang*, *dou*, and *huan* are redefined by adjusting the time of swings and their timing during performance (Figure 12). After obtaining the fundamental tone, a single rightward swing produces *zhuang* and replaces *huan*, with the fundamental tone and one swing lasting one quarter note. When the tone is obtained, adding one more rightward swing creates *nao*, with a total duration of 1.5 quarter notes. A rightward swing simultaneous with the sound results in *dou*, with a total duration of half a quarter note. In summary, although from a textual perspective the concepts of vibrato techniques are described in a detailed and diverse manner, in Yu Shaoze's practice, it is clear that these techniques are based on a simple principle: all the vibrato are defined and addressed through a particular basic technique. Just as the Chinese saying goes, that all changes adhere to the same root.

Basic movement	The specific performance procedure	The corresponding notation in the original score
A Single Rightward Rapid Swing	Execute once after obtaining the fundamental tone	<i>zhuang</i> (撞)
	Execute twice after obtaining the fundamental tone	<i>nao</i> (猱)
	Execute once after obtaining the fundamental tone	<i>huan</i> (唤)
	Execute once simultaneously with obtaining the fundamental tone	<i>dou</i> (逗)

Figure 12: Table showing specific performance procedure for four kinds of vibrato techniques, created by both authors.

SUMMARY

In summary, Yu Shaoze's left-hand vibrato techniques can be divided into two parts based on their purpose. The first is the subtle vibrato spontaneously used during performance. This type of vibrato does not create perceptible fluctuations in the sound but instead allows the performer's body to maintain a relatively comfortable playing experience during specific fingering transitions through slight tremors, while also improving pitch accuracy. In the traditional sense of vibrato techniques used to produce sound, Yu Shaoze chose to respond to and redefine the four common vibrato techniques, namely, *nao* (揉), *zhuang* (撞), *dou* (逗), and *huan* (喚), found in pieces by adjusting the frequency and timing of a fixed “basic motion.” However, the prerequisite for the application of Yu's vibrato techniques is that they must conform to the rhythmic structure. A significant number of vibrato notations are selectively ignored by Yu because they cannot be integrated into a fixed rhythmic pattern. Additionally, vibrato fingerings derived from *nao*, *zhuang*, and *dou* do not appear in Yu's performances, indicating his disinterest in handling these complex fingerings. This simplified response to the original vibrato notations in the scores constitutes the uniqueness of Yu Shaoze's vibrato techniques.

THE CAUSES OF YU SHAOZE'S VIBRATO TECHNIQUE

Through the analysis in the previous section, Yu Shaoze presented a case of practical strategy that significantly deviates from texts. However, what are the causes of such a strategy? Unfortunately, Yu did not leave behind any self-technical analysis materials during his lifetime, which has made it challenging to explain the origins of his techniques. Nevertheless, thanks to other types of materials left by Yu, such as notes, interviews, and recollections from his students, this study attempts to provide a reasonable explanation for his performance practice from the perspective of the “concept–behavior” relationship. By analyzing and reconstructing historical materials, Yu's notes, interviews, and peer evaluations from insiders, the conclusion of this study is that Yu's vibrato technique is a technical response to his music school identification based on his apprenticeship and regional background, as well as the stylistic pursuit it represents. Below is a detailed explanation of this conclusion.

Unlike some musicians in music history who were only posthumously recognized as representatives of a particular stylistic school, Yu Shaoze maintained a clear identification with his school throughout his life. This recognition stemmed from two key factors: his regional roots and explicit lineage. In 1984, at the age of 81, Yu Shaoze wrote a personal retrospective of his artistic career:

My teacher was my uncle, Liao Wenfu, who studied under Ye Wanzhen. Ye Wanzhen was the daughter of Ye Jiefu, a prized disciple of Zhang Kongshan, the founding master of *Shu* school guqin. Thus, the style I play is *Shu* school (Yu Shaoze, personal note, n.d).

In Yu Shaoze's understanding, *Shu* school guqin originated with Zhang Kongshan, a Taoist who began this tradition in the latter half of the 19th century. However, the guqin had been popular in the *Shu* region much earlier. Historically, *Shu* (蜀) refers to a large basin located in southwest China, roughly corresponding to the present-day Sichuan province. The earliest description of Sichuan guqin styles comes from Zhao Yeli (563–639) during the early Tang dynasty. Comparing the styles of Sichuan and Wu regions (modern southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang), Zhao Yeli noted:

Guqin in Wu region is delicate and graceful, like the broad flow of the Yangtze River, continuous and gentle, with the elegance of a nobleman. guqin in *Shu* region, on the other hand, is urgent and swift, like turbulent waves and roaring thunder, embodying heroic brilliance in the moment (according to Zhu Changwen, 2010:98).

Several centuries later, another notable account came from Yelü Chucai (1190–1244), a highly Sinitized Khitan politician. Serving as Grand Chancellor under Ögedei Khan (1186–1241), Yelü described *Shu* guqin in a preface to a late-life poem:

In my youth, I was deeply devoted to the guqin, first learning from Mi Dayong, whose style was serene and elegant, forming its own school. I loved the grandeur of nature, as reflected in the abrupt and vigorous style of *Shu* music, which was a delight to the ear (Yelü Chucai, 1986:240).

By the late 19th century, an 1878 guqin manual, *Xishao Pavilion Qin Manual*, described Sichuan guqin as embodying a “vigorous and ancient” style. Despite spanning over a millennium, these three accounts consistently portray Sichuan guqin as having dynamic, powerful, and unpretentious qualities

shaped by the region's natural environment and enduring over time. Master Zhang Kongshan, the founder of the Sichuan guqin tradition in the 19th century, remains an enigmatic figure, with only scattered details about his life. He is known to have lived in Qingcheng Mountain, west of Chengdu—a site filled with Taoist temples—where he practiced Taoism while teaching guqin. In 1864, Zhang and his students compiled a guqin manual, *Baipingzhai Qin Manual*. Its preface features a contemporary gentleman's appraisal:

During the *Daoguang* and *Xianfeng* reigns, Zhang Kongshan, a Taoist from Qingcheng, emerged in Sichuan with powerful and harmonious techniques and a bold, majestic style, sweeping away the weaknesses of softness, monotony, and triviality. He established his own school, rivaling those of Yushan School and *Guangling* School. Widely esteemed, he attracted many followers, reviving the *Shu* region guqin tradition (Gu Yucheng, 2015:6).

As Zhang's successor, Yu Shaoze inherited his teacher Liao Wenfu's perspectives while aligning with the traditional aesthetics of Sichuan guqin. Yu described the Sichuan style as:

The *Shu* style is robust and powerful, lively and smooth, quick yet not chaotic, slow yet not sluggish. There is a mnemonic with twelve characters: steady (穩), strong (健), precise (准), smooth (圓), harmonious (和), fluid (暢), noble (高), antique (古), pure (潔), divine (神), marvelous (妙), and metamorphic (化). These twelve qualities can only be achieved through diligent practice (Yu Shaoze, personal interview, n.d.).

Among these twelve-character mnemonics, the first six, namely, steady (穩), strong (健), precise (准), smooth (圓), harmonious (和), and fluid (暢), pertain to the technical and aesthetic levels. The next three, namely, noble (高), antique (古), and pure (潔), belong to the moral level, while the final three, namely, divine (神), marvelous (妙), and metamorphic (化), represent the transcendent level. Together, they form a comprehensive discourse on skill-art-dao in Chinese art. But, is Yu's self-description of his musical aesthetics faithfully embodied in his performances? Insiders' peer evaluation about him can serve as valuable corroborative evidence. Published in 2013, *Oral History of Qin Players in Shu* is a collective interview compilation featuring senior guqin players from Chengdu, all of whom had some connection with Yu Shaoze (Yang Xiao [杨晓], ed., 2013). In their shared recollections, Yu's performance style can be summarized in three characteristics: steady and dignified, concise and fluid, and vigorous and rustic. This demonstrates that Yu Shaoze was a person who harmonized knowledge and practice.

By synthesizing Yu Shaoze's personal statements and peer evaluations, it is not difficult to see that simplicity, fluidity, and steadiness constitute the core of his stylistic pursuit. His vibrato techniques unfold within this context. Firstly, by adjusting the frequency and timing of the execution of “basic techniques,” Yu has redefined in practice several major vibrato techniques involved in the original score *nao* (揉), *zhuang* (撞), *dou* (逗), and *huan* (喚). In this process, the vibrato techniques *zhuang* and *huan*, which have similar playing methods, are unified into a fixed style. At the same time, derivative fingerings derived from these four vibrato techniques, such as long *nao*, rapid *nao*, and large *nao* derived from *nao*, are not distinguished in Yu Shaoze's performances. This habit of “simplified handling” indicates that Yu Shaoze is not keen on meticulously sculpting individual tones, reflecting his preference for a simple and unadorned style.

Secondly, Yu Shaoze's pursuit of fluidity is reflected in his particular emphasis on the regularity and clarity of rhythm. Therefore, his vibrato movements always unfold within a clear rhythmic framework, striving to avoid disrupting the proportional relationship of the rhythm due to the time consumed by vibrato actions. For example, if he believes that the vibrato symbols in the score cannot be integrated into a fixed rhythmic pattern, he would rather omit them. This approach also explains why Yu chooses to ignore complex derivative fingerings, as their introduction might pose challenges in rhythmic integration, affecting the overall fluidity. This “insertion-style application” of vibrato techniques avoids the appearance of long-duration static sounds within phrases, ensuring that his music remains dynamic at all times.

As another important part of his vibrato technique system, spontaneous micro-vibrato corresponds to the pursuit of steadiness. Steadiness can be understood on two levels: firstly, as the accurate expression of more fundamental musical elements such as pitch, and secondly, as maintaining a composed physical state. The three functions demonstrated by SSV (spontaneous micro-vibrato), namely, dissipating impact, enhancing pitch accuracy, and adjusting finger angles, provide technical support for this “steadiness.”

RETURNING TO THE PHENOMENA THEMSELVES AND SETTING OUT AGAIN

Yu Shaoze's vibrato technique practice offers us two significant insights. Firstly, individual Guqin players, even when faced with this art form's rich textual tradition, still need to engage in a form of "embodied experience construction" that maintains a considerable difference from classical textual interpretations, but remains coherent within individual practice. Yu's technique exemplifies this phenomenon. On the other hand, this personalized construction has never been re-conceptualized into new terms but subtly enacted repeatedly in his daily musical life. Secondly, while the recognition of the vibrato technique's importance in contemporary guqin musical life appears to be an unquestioned "common knowledge," Yu Shaoze's practice prompts us to reconsider this assumption. Although the terminological variety and interpretation of vibrato notation in guqin score from the Tang Dynasty onward is vast, this does not imply that all players have devoted equal enthusiasm to it. Even, the emphasis on vibrato's functional importance, as seen in Xu Shangying's argument, primarily represents a localized (late Ming Dynasty Yangtze River Delta) aesthetic experience and artistic declaration. The case of Yu Shaoze serves as a reminder that a performance tradition, which does not intend to expend creativity and aesthetic judgment on elaborate and diverse vibrato techniques, is not non-existent, which constitutes the second insight Yu Shaoze provides. The phenomenon demonstrated that in the study of guqin performance, even the discussion of micro-level elements such as vibrato techniques can significantly refresh our understanding. Therefore, exploring the boundaries and diversity of more macro-level, holistic guqin performance practices should undoubtedly become a key focus of future research in this field.

In addition, Mantle Hood's theory of bi-musicality remains highly significant in the research process, particularly in the field of guqin performance. Effective discussions must be grounded in the researcher's long-term insider experience. However, this approach also faces challenges: phenomena that are self-evident to players but crucial to academic research may be overlooked, and the conceptual framework bridging ancient terms and living practices might be inadvertently neglected. Therefore, adopting a deliberate "defamiliarization" perspective to step outside conventional thinking and then return to the music-making event itself may yield more exciting research outcomes.

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APPENDIX: PHOTO



Figure 13: Photo of Yu Shaoze (喻绍泽, 1903–1988). This photo was taken in 1982 in Chengdu and was provided by Prof. Zeng Chengwei (born in 1958), the grandson of Yu Shaoze. Reprinted with permission.

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION OF GUZHENG IN MALAYSIAN CHINESE COMMUNITIES: A SYSTEMATIC-INFORMED INTEGRATION

Zhang Yu [张宇] and Camellia Siti Maya Mohamed Razali¹

Abstract

This study aims to systematically sort out the existing research results on the development of the guzheng in the Chinese society of Malaysia and respond to the current problem of insufficient theoretical integration in the construction of ethnic identity and the inheritance of music culture in this field. As a traditional musical instrument with both historical and cultural symbolism, the guzheng is not only a carrier of artistic practice in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia but also increasingly a medium for the expression of ethnic identity and cultural negotiation. Therefore, clarifying the dissemination path, educational mechanism, and social function of the guzheng in Malaysia is of great significance for understanding how overseas Chinese music can be continued and recreated in the local context.

This study employed a systematic-informed integration methodology (Toronto & Remington, 2020), which combines the transparency of systematic with the thematic induction of an integration. Eight representative studies were selected from the literature between 2000 and 2024 for analysis. The research content mainly revolves around four aspects: historical development, teaching practice, cultural identity, and intergenerational inheritance and interaction. The results show that the guzheng in Malaysia has gradually transformed from the early family inheritance to institutionalized teaching in schools and communities and has strengthened identity recognition and intergenerational cultural continuity in the Chinese community. However, most of the current related research focuses on the Chinese community and is mostly qualitative analysis, lacking in-depth discussion on the participation of other ethnic groups, the process of learner identity change, and localized teaching content.

This study not only outlines the overall knowledge landscape of guzheng research in Malaysia but also clearly points out that in the future, teaching experiments, questionnaires, and ethnic comparative studies can be used to promote the sustainable development of guzheng in any Southeast Asian society and expand the theoretical discussion space of ethnomusicology on culturality, cross-cultural communication, and formal educational practice.

Keywords

Malaysian guzheng, cultural identity, Chinese community, intergenerational inheritance, music transmission

INTRODUCTION

As one of the representative instruments of traditional Chinese music culture, the guzheng has gradually spread to Southeast Asia since the beginning of the 20th century with the migration of Chinese immigrants. In the Chinese community in Malaysia, the guzheng was mainly used in traditional rituals and festivals in the early days, such as the Yulan Festival of the Teochew community, the Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations, and the sacrificial ceremonies of temples and ancestral halls (Cai Yuwen [蔡宇文], 2022; Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔], 2010). Literature records show that the guzheng initially

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played the role of accompaniment in these rituals and was not the focus of the musical performance (Zhai Yuan [翟源], 2013; Zhou Yun [周耘], 2000).

However, after entering the second half of the 20th century, the role of the guzheng in Malaysia has undergone a significant change, from traditional ritual music to an important part of community cultural activities and the formal education system. This improvement in status is mainly reflected in the fact that about 60 Chinese independent schools and many national secondary schools across the country have Chinese orchestras with guzheng sections, which have become the main platform for cultivating guzheng talents (Cai Yuwen [蔡宇文], 2022; The Guzheng Academy [马来西亚古筝学院], 2022). In addition, various music competitions in Malaysia (such as the various national and regional Chinese music competitions) have set up special guzheng categories, highlighting the core position of guzheng in local Chinese music education.

When exploring the development of the guzheng in the Malaysian Chinese community, several core concepts are particularly critical. Firstly, ‘cultural transmission’ refers to the process of cultural knowledge, skills, and values continuing between generations (Assmann, 2011). Secondly, ‘localization’ refers to the integration of foreign cultural elements with local culture and the gradual formation of new cultural characteristics. In addition, ‘cultural identity’ refers to the understanding and cognition of an individual or group of their own cultural background in social interaction and cultural practice. By clearly defining these terms, this chapter will establish a theoretical foundation for a deeper understanding of the cultural context of the Malaysian guzheng.

In recent years, although the study of Malaysian guzheng has gradually attracted academic attention, the existing research results are still very limited and fragmented. Some studies have initially focused on historical development, teaching practice, and cultural identity expression. For example, Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔] (2010) explored the spread of the Chinese guzheng in Malaysia, and Cai Yuwen [蔡宇文] (2022) focused on the relationship between guzheng teaching practice and Chinese cultural heritage. In addition, related academic activities (such as the Malaysian Guzheng Art Festival, which has been held for many consecutive sessions) also provide opportunities for academic exchanges and discussions. However, most of these results are case studies or overview articles, lacking more in-depth theoretical analysis and systematic integration.

This lack of literature and dispersion has obviously limited an in-depth understanding of the status of the development of the Malaysian guzheng. Specifically, the current literature has not yet explored the following issues in depth: Has Malaysia formed a unique local guzheng performance style or repertoire? How are the differences in guzheng participation among different ethnic groups and genders reflected? What is the role of the guzheng in a multicultural society, especially how does it play a role in cross-ethnic music exchanges? The research gaps on these issues are mainly due to the lack of literature and data, which seriously restricts the ability to further research and cultural policy formulation.

In summary, the status of guzheng research in Malaysia can be summarized as having just started, and the results are sporadic but of great significance. Some existing studies have revealed the basic context and status of the development of the guzheng in Malaysia, such as education promotion, performance activities, and Chinese cultural significance. However, overall, these results have limited coverage, are independent of each other, and have not yet formed a systematic and in-depth research system. There are differences in research focus and viewpoints among the existing literature: some focus on music education practice, some focus on historical heritage narratives, and some emphasize cultural identity significance, each of which lacks dialogue. This scattered state not only makes the overall picture unclear but also leads to inconsistent conclusions or biased perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out and compare the existing results and explore the connections and differences between them, find common points, and analyze contradictions. Clarifying such research status and problems in the introduction helps to highlight the research value of this article, that is, by integrating and commenting on existing literature, clarifying the development context of guzheng research in Malaysia, identifying the shortcomings of current research, and then pointing out the direction for subsequent in-depth research. Based on this, this paper will conduct a comprehensive review of the research results related to the Malaysian guzheng, sort out its context, evaluate its contributions and limitations, and lay the foundation for a comprehensive understanding of this cultural phenomenon.

To address these questions, this study adopts a systematic-informed integration approach (Toronto & Remington, 2020), which combines the transparency of systematic with the thematic synthesis of an integration.

METHODS

This study employed a systematic-informed integration approach (Toronto & Remington, 2020). Unlike strict systematic reviews, which typically require comprehensive coverage of a large literature base, this study acknowledges the limited number of relevant articles on Malaysian guzheng research ($n = 8$). Therefore, this study is not a strict systematic review but rather a hybrid approach that combines the transparency and search standards of a systematic review with the thematic synthesis and critical analysis of an integration. This approach is particularly suitable for emerging fields with limited research but an urgent need for theoretical integration. It maintains methodological clarity and standardization while revealing research patterns, scholarly gaps, and theoretical implications within a limited literature base.

QUESTIONS AND PURPOSE

Building on the integration methodology proposed by Toronto and Remington (2020), this study raises two main questions: (1) What is the status of Malaysian guzheng research? (2) What are the main limitations and shortcomings of existing research? By clarifying the above research questions, this review aims to systematically review and integrate the current relevant research results on Malaysian guzheng, identify the limitations and research gaps in the research, and provide clear directions and a basis for future research.

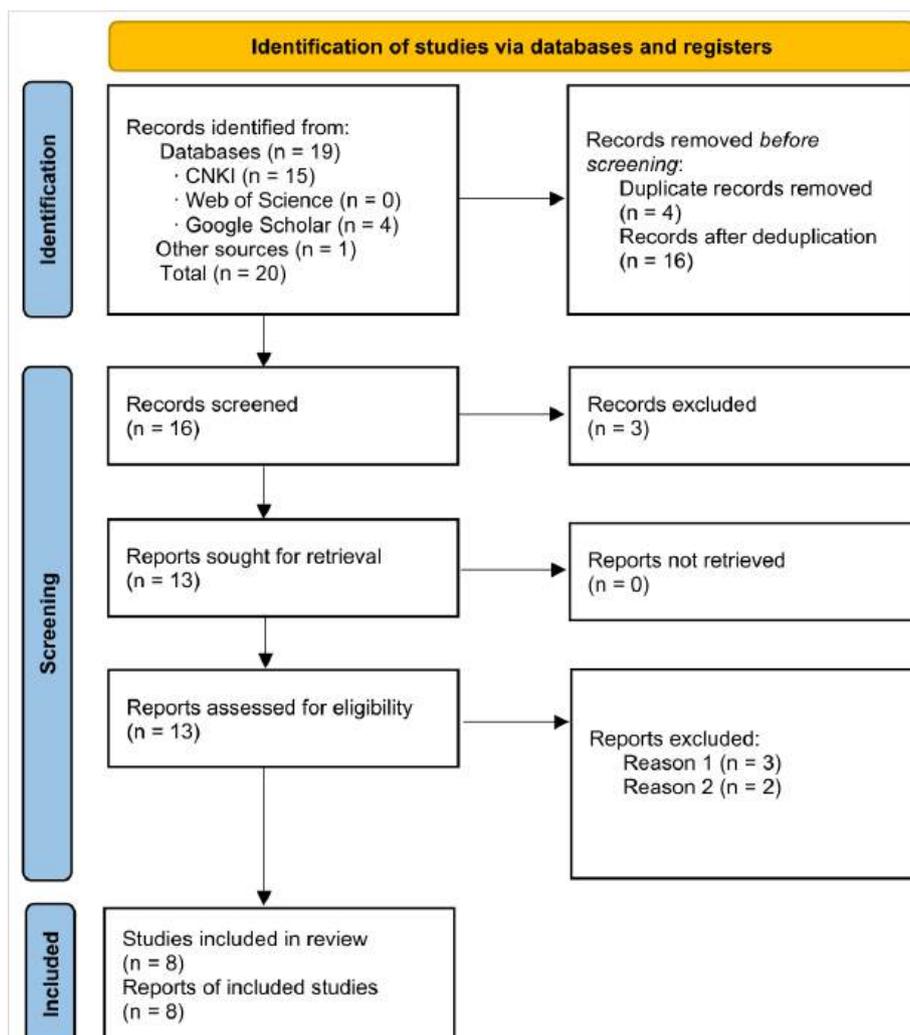


Figure 1: PRISMA flow chart of the literature screening process as drafted by the authors.

SYSTEMATICAL SEARCH AND SELECT LITERATURE

This study systematically selected three academic databases, namely, CNKI, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, for literature searches from 2000 to 2024. To ensure the comprehensiveness of the search, the search formula was used in the CNKI database: ‘guzheng AND (Malaysia OR Malaysian Chinese OR Cultural Identity OR Music Education OR Traditional Music OR Transmission)’; the search formula was used in the English databases (Web of Science, Google Scholar): ‘guzheng AND (Malaysia OR Malaysian Chinese OR Cultural Identity OR Music Education OR Traditional Music OR Transmission)’. The initial search yielded 20 records (CNKI: 15; Web of Science: 0; Google Scholar: 4; Other sources: 1). After removing 4 duplicates, 16 records remained. Following title and abstract screening, 3 records were excluded, leaving 13 for full-text assessment. Of these, 5 were further excluded (2 not related to the Malaysian guzheng and 3 lacking sufficient academic rigor). Ultimately, 8 studies were included in the review, consisting of peer-reviewed journal articles, master’s theses, doctoral theses, and one published book chapter. The inclusion of one published book chapter ensures that practice-oriented and contextual perspectives are also captured. The eight publications included in this study include journal articles, master's and doctoral dissertations, and a published book chapter to ensure the diversity and completeness of the data.

The detailed process of literature search and screening is shown in the PRISMA flow chart (Figure 1). Figure 1 clearly shows the entire screening process of literature from initial identification to final inclusion in the review.

QUALITY APPRAISAL

Considering the limited number of included research literature, this analysis did not use formal quality assessment tools such as CASP or Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) but instead used a narrative quality assessment method based on the recommendations of Toronto and Remington (2020). Each literature was recorded and evaluated in detail from the aspects of the suitability of the research design, the rigor of the methodology, the reliability of the data source, and the depth of the theoretical framework, and these factors were comprehensively considered during the analysis process to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS METHOD

In the data analysis and synthesis stage, the data used the constant comparison method for systematic thematic analysis and synthesis. The specific analysis process includes data reduction, data display, data comparison, and conclusion drawing and verification. This study uses a systematic literature data extraction and matrix analysis method to construct a multi-dimensional research comparison framework, which not only achieves a structured combining and comparison of existing literature but also reveals the heterogeneity of different studies in three dimensions: theoretical underpinnings, methodological approaches, and empirical findings. This analytical framework significantly improves the systematicity and analytical rigor of the literature review and provides a replicable analytical methodology for subsequent research.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF EXISTING STUDIES

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSMISSION

The development and spread of the guzheng in Malaysia are deeply influenced by the history of Chinese immigration. It is a typical case of the continuation and transformation of traditional Chinese guzheng music overseas. Among the eight included documents, at least four systematically involve the historical path and dissemination mechanism of the guzheng in Malaysia (Wang Xiyong [王惜盈], 2016; Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔], 2010; Zhai Yuan [翟源], 2013; Ren Yanran [任嫣蓓], 2024), which together depict the dissemination trajectory from ‘ethnic cultural transplantation’ to ‘local cultural rooting’.

Wang Xiyong [王惜盈] (2016) systematically sorted out the development of traditional Chinese guzheng music in Malaysia from the perspective of cultural communication and music sociology by combining literature analysis with field interviews. The study pointed out that before the 1950s, the guzheng was still rare in Malaysia and was mainly passed on in a small range through early Chinese clan associations, Teochew opera performances, or private school-style education; after entering the 1970s, with the gradual establishment of the Malaysian Chinese education system and the rise of Chinese music groups, the guzheng began to enter the public education system through primary and secondary schools, music centers, and other institutions, and its dissemination showed institutional and collective characteristics.

The study emphasized that ‘ritual dissemination based on group cultural identity’ was the key mechanism for the dissemination of early guzheng music (Wang Xiyong [王惜盈], 2016). However, the study also pointed out that there is currently a lack of detailed records of the specific roles played by early individual disseminators (such as folk artists and traveling guzheng players), which is still a gap in dissemination research.

Zhang Yunxiang’s [张云翔] (2010) master’s thesis used qualitative interviews and participant observation as methods and, from the perspective of music anthropology, traced the actual path of guzheng dissemination in Malaysian Chinese society. The study analyzes in detail the process of the guzheng’s gradual shift from ‘family-style private transmission’ to ‘systematic education in music colleges’ around the 1980s and reveals the interactive relationship between the three-layer communication mechanism of ‘master-apprentice relationship-group performance-social performance’ by visiting local performers, teachers, and guzheng groups. Zhang emphasized that although the structure of guzheng communication is constantly modernizing, the ‘blurring of school consciousness’ and ‘localization of traditional repertoire’ have also led to the gradual convergence of Malaysian guzheng’s appearance with China’s modern teaching system, weakening the original local differences (Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔], 2010). This view reveals the tension between ‘standardization’ and ‘locality’ in communication, which is a very valuable perspective in the study of Malaysian guzheng communication.

Zhai Yuan [翟源] (2013) put forward the three characteristics of guzheng in Malaysia in the form of a brief review: ‘unclear starting point of communication, fragmented path, and explicit results’. The article argues that although the frequent guzheng competitions, grading examinations and performances in recent years, have increased the ‘visibility’ of the guzheng, the compilation and genealogy of its early historical documents are still lagging behind (Zhai Yuan [翟源], 2013). Although the article is limited in length and does not provide empirical support in terms of methodology, it raises an important issue, namely, the lack of systematic construction of the literature level in the spread of the guzheng in Malaysia, which affects the cognition and narrative of its historical continuity.

Furthermore, Liu Haitao’s [刘海涛] (2022) research, through a case study, focuses on the artistic career of Malaysian zheng master Louis Chen. Louis Chen was not only the first representative figure to systematically promote Teochew zheng music in Malaysia, but his teaching and performance activities spanned China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Macau, Europe, and the United States, profoundly influencing the establishment of Chinese music education and its international dissemination. This research emphasizes the irreplaceable role of individual communicators in early transmission, providing concrete support for the macro-transmission process ‘from transplantation to localization’ (Liu Haitao [刘海涛], 2022).

In addition, Ren Yanran [任嫣苒] (2024) emphasized the ‘re-localization’ characteristics of the guzheng in Kuala Lumpur and Penang in her doctoral dissertation based on cultural geography and identity theory. She pointed out that guzheng music has transformed from the original ‘nostalgic instrument’ to a representative symbol of cultural vitality in the Chinese community and has assumed different cultural functions in different generations (Ren Yanran [任嫣苒], 2024). Through interviews with guzheng instructors and students in many primary and secondary schools in Penang, she further proposed that the three-dimensional structure of ‘space-generation-function’ helps to understand the dynamic mechanism of guzheng dissemination. This research perspective goes beyond the linear description of time and provides a richer spatial social analysis framework for the study of guzheng dissemination.

In summary, the development of Malaysian guzheng can be summarized into four stages: the initial ‘ritual input period’ (before the 1950s), the community-based ‘folk cultivation period’ (1970s–1980s), the ‘institutional expansion period’ of the school/examination system (1990s–2010s), and the current ‘local identity construction period’ for cross-cultural dissemination (2010s to present). Each study has a different focus in revealing the dissemination path: Wang Xiying [王惜盈] focuses on the cultural identity driving mechanism, Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔] focuses on teacher inheritance and institutional transformation, Ren Yanran [任嫣苒] emphasizes space and community interaction, and Zhai Yuan [翟源] calls for the systematic construction of dissemination historical materials. Liu Haitao [刘海涛] highlighted the important role of individual communicators through the case of Louis Chen. Although the existing literature is diverse and complementary, it still lacks in-depth exploration and genealogical reconstruction of early dissemination nodes (such as traveling guzheng players and Nanyang scholars), and the guzheng acceptance path of non-Han communities is rarely involved. These constitute the current shortcomings and future development potential of this topic.

PERFORMANCE AND TRANSMISSION

The performance and teaching practice of guzheng in Malaysia presents a dual development trajectory: on the one hand, it converges with the modern teaching system of mainland China in terms of professionalization and institutionalization, and on the other hand, it also reflects the diverse explorations of local educational institutions and individual teachers in teaching methods, local teaching materials, and student participation. Among the 8 included documents, 5 explicitly involve the teaching environment, curriculum setting, grading system, performance style, and education model of guzheng in Malaysia (Liang Yibin [梁毅彬], 2015; Cai Yuwen [蔡宇文], 2022; Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔], 2010; Wang Xiying [王惜盈], 2016; Ren Yanran [任嫣苒], 2024), providing rich first-hand investigation and field observation data.

Liang Yibin’s [梁毅彬] (2015) master’s thesis is one of the most systematic large-scale empirical studies at present. The author used a combination of questionnaire surveys, case interviews, and market analysis to investigate the distribution of guzheng teachers, student sources, teaching models, and market supply and demand in the Chinese region of Malaysia. Research shows that guzheng teaching in Malaysia is mainly concentrated in urban Chinese communities, such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Johor Bahru, and teaching institutions are mainly private music schools, community centers, and cram schools (Liang Yibin [梁毅彬], 2015). In terms of teaching content, more than 90% of teachers use guzheng grading textbooks published in mainland China (such as the China Conservatory of Music and the Central Conservatory of Music series), but teaching methods are highly diverse, including one-on-one teaching, group practice, workshop mode, etc. In addition, the study also pointed out that some teachers tend to teach ‘by rote’ due to limited resources, that is, teaching according to the progress of the textbook, ignoring the differences in students’ interests and abilities, resulting in students’ lack of performance, initiative, and musical expression. The study finally suggested the establishment of a localized guzheng education certification system to reduce the bottleneck of teachers’ professional development and the problem of uneven teaching quality.

Mok Vivien’s (2019) study further focused on the revival of the guzheng ensemble in the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor regions of Malaysia. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and participatory observation, the study summarized five thematic dimensions of the ensemble revival: motivation and vision, historical reinterpretation, authenticity, dissemination methods, and reconstruction and innovation. Mok Vivien pointed out that ensemble teaching not only enables guzheng to shift from individual teaching to group learning mode but also provides an important platform for cultural revival and community cohesion. She emphasized that ensemble practice is both a form of educational innovation and a process of cultural reconstruction, which enriches the spectrum of guzheng teaching models and breaks through the previous binary opposition of ‘examination-oriented’ and ‘master-apprentice inheritance’.

Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔] (2010) focused more on the field observation of ‘teacher–student relationship structure’ and ‘teaching process’. Through in-depth interviews with several senior local guzheng teachers and their students in Malaysia, Zhang pointed out that guzheng teaching in Malaysia is currently in a state of ‘intersection of two modes’: on the one hand, it continues the ‘traditional master-apprentice teaching’ and focuses on individual guidance and emotional integration; on the other hand,

it transitions to ‘hierarchical and institutionalized’ academic teaching, focusing on skill standards and performance results (Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔], 2010). The author specifically pointed out that although the grading system has promoted the popularization of the guzheng, it has also brought about the problem of ‘single performance purpose’—some students ignore music understanding and artistic expression to cope with exams. Zhang called for paying attention to the ‘cultural context behind the performance’ in teaching and improving the theoretical training of local teachers on music aesthetics and teaching strategies.

In Liang Yibin’s [梁毅彬] (2015) study, the in-depth analysis of teachers’ perspectives and teaching concepts was further supplemented. Through interviews with teachers from three independent secondary schools and four music education centers in Malaysia, this paper reveals that teachers generally face problems such as insufficient structuring of teaching content, uneven musical foundations of students, and misalignment of cultural context of teaching materials ((Liang Yibin [梁毅彬], 2015). The concept of ‘culturally adaptive teaching’ is proposed in the paper, which encourages teachers to adjust teaching strategies according to the language background and cultural cognition of local Malaysian students, such as improving teaching affinity through Malay folk song adaptation exercises and introducing life-oriented theme repertoires. This study particularly emphasizes the role of teachers as ‘cultural intermediaries’ in cross-cultural teaching environments, that is, they need to impart Chinese traditional culture and understand students’ identity construction in the Malaysian context. This study has a broad perspective and provides an important reference for the localization of guzheng teaching.

Wang Xiyong [王惜盈] (2016) placed guzheng teaching in the larger context of ‘public cultural participation’, arguing that guzheng teaching in Malaysia is not limited to the classroom but is gradually integrated into school clubs, art festival performances, community cultural promotion, and other scenes, forming a ‘music-education-community’ trinity communication ecology (Wang Xiyong [王惜盈], 2016). The article mentioned that many secondary school Chinese orchestras have listed the guzheng as a permanent part, and some schools have also carried out guzheng ensemble and duet competitions and local tours, further expanding students’ learning space. However, the author also pointed out that the current guzheng teaching activities are often dependent on the individual ability of teachers and resource allocation, lacking institutional support and policy promotion. For example, some non-Chinese schools have a wait-and-see attitude toward setting up guzheng courses, which restricts the ethnic diffusion of guzheng teaching.

Ren Yanran’s [任嫣苒] (2024) doctoral dissertation provides us with an analytical framework of ‘teaching ecology’ in a macro context. After conducting field research in many music institutions in Penang and Selangor, she pointed out that guzheng teaching in Malaysia has a triple tension of ‘institutional adaptation-teacher autonomy-student identity’ (Ren Yanran [任嫣苒], 2024). That is, teaching activities are not only subject to the curriculum and examination requirements of the school or institution but also rely on the teacher’s teaching strategy selection and personal expression. They are also affected by the students’ emotional projection of cultural identity and interest maintenance. Ren specifically pointed out that if the students’ ‘emotional connection mechanism’ is ignored, it is difficult to form a deep cultural identity even with standardized teaching processes. This analysis provides a multi-layer structural perspective for understanding the effectiveness of guzheng teaching.

Based on the above research, it can be seen that guzheng teaching in Malaysia presents the following characteristics:

1. The teaching system is highly dependent on the Chinese model in terms of system, and the teaching materials and grading system are mainly based on the mainland standard.
2. The teaching mode is diverse, ranging from one-to-one to ensemble groups, from private teaching to school courses.
3. The teacher has multiple roles, both as a performer and as a cultural transmitter.
4. The teaching concept is shifting from ‘technique-oriented’ to ‘cultural cognition-oriented’.

However, there are also many challenges: the professional development path of teachers is unclear; the teaching content lacks local cultural integration; students’ learning motivation is easily affected by exams; there is a lack of multilingual or multi-ethnic teaching experiments; and there is insufficient policy support and a systematic evaluation mechanism.

From an integrated perspective, the research under this theme provides multi-dimensional insights from practice to concept, from individuals to systems, and from teaching behavior to cultural implications, but it is still weak in the construction of localized teaching materials, the development of teaching evaluation tools, and the empirical research on the impact of ethnic cultural differences on teaching. Future research should combine cultural studies with educational theory to explore the dynamic relationship between ‘cultural understanding-skill training-identity formation’ in teaching interaction. Although the research is diverse, there is still a lack of quantitative surveys and cross-ethnic teaching cases, and mixed methods research should be combined in the future.

CULTURALITY AND GUZHENG PRACTICE

In the context of Malaysia’s diverse ethnic groups and historical immigration, the guzheng not only exists as a traditional Chinese musical instrument in performance practice but also is endowed with profound cultural identity and symbolic significance. Through playing and learning the guzheng, the Chinese community constantly constructs and reconfirms their ethnic belonging and cultural memory, forming an interactive relationship between music and identity. This section integrates the relevant research results on the guzheng and Chinese cultural identity in 8 papers, focusing on its functions and dilemmas in ethnic consciousness, identity construction, and cross-cultural expression. The structure follows the logic of ‘commonality extraction-difference analysis-theoretical sublimation’ in the integrated literature review.

In terms of research methods, most scholars adopt the qualitative research paradigm of field investigation (interview, observation) + literature analysis. Among them, Wang Xiying [王惜盈] (2016) proposed from the perspective of cultural sociology that the guzheng is an important symbolic instrument for the cultural heritage of the Malaysian Chinese community. She pointed out that guzheng performances frequently appear in the fields of strengthening ethnic symbols such as New Year celebrations, National Day performances, and inter-school art festivals. Its function has gone beyond the aesthetic level and has become a cultural means of symbolizing Chinese identity (Wang Xiying [王惜盈], 2016). This study emphasizes that the guzheng carries the dual symbols of ‘collective memory’ and ‘ritual performance’ and builds cultural continuity between generations. However, this study did not further examine the cultural identity transformation mechanism of individual learners, and the discussion on students’ subjective cognition was relatively weak.

Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔] (2010) analyzed guzheng learners’ understanding of ‘Chinese identity’ in daily teaching and performance practices through in-depth interviews and classroom observations. His research found that some young students established a ‘confirmed sense of cultural belonging’ through learning guzheng, especially gaining ‘cultural pride’ and a ‘sense of intergenerational continuity’ in the performances of the school’s Chinese orchestra. Zhang proposed that ‘...guzheng practice is not only a skill inheritance but also a cultural interpretation’, and he also revealed the constraints of instrumental learning on identity transformation: many students only regard guzheng as an ‘exam item’ or ‘a bonus item for admission’ and lack an understanding of its cultural origin (Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔], 2010). This challenges the effectiveness of the guzheng’s identity function in the educational field, suggesting that researchers need to pay attention to the tension between learners’ intrinsic motivation and cultural explanatory power.

Cai Yuwen’s [蔡宇文] (2022) research further expanded the mediating role of ‘teacher cultural awareness’ in identity construction. Through interviews with guzheng teachers, she pointed out that most local guzheng teachers in Malaysia have the consciousness of ‘cultural ambassadors’ and will guide students to understand the connotation of Chinese traditional culture in the teaching process, such as by explaining the background of the work, introducing the composer, or associating festival customs to enhance students’ cultural cognition (Cai Yuwen [蔡宇文], 2022). However, teachers’ cultural interpretation ability is closely related to their own training background. Teachers who have received higher music education or have visited China tend to focus on cultural teaching, while teachers who are only ‘skill-oriented’ often ignore cultural interpretation. This study provides a clear path to understanding the role of ‘teacher factors’ in the formation of cultural identity and also proposes that the teacher training system should include cultural content and teaching ethics modules.

Ren Yanran [任嫣苒] (2024) proposed the concept of ‘cultural soundscape’ in her doctoral research and examined the relationship between guzheng performance and cultural identity in the context of urban multiculturalism. Through observations of multiple venues in Kuala Lumpur and Penang (school halls, civic squares, and community halls), she found that guzheng performances often occur in the three-way structure of ‘festival-performance-ethnic cohesion’, which is a two-way expression of ‘external display-internal unity’ (Ren Yanran [任嫣苒], 2024). She emphasized that in the context of a multi-ethnic country, the guzheng is not only a tool for Malaysian Chinese to confirm their own cultural identity but also a ‘voice action’ for cultural negotiation and existence struggle with the mainstream society. This analysis helps to break through the one-way perspective of ‘guzheng = Chinese internal culture’ and prompts us to understand its strategic cultural role in a multiethnic country.

In the data integration analysis, we found that the above research presents two levels of cultural identity mechanisms:

1. The first level is the construction of ‘internal ethnic identity’: learning and playing guzheng becomes a symbolic practice for individuals to confirm that ‘I am Chinese’. This identity is repeated and solidified through music courses, festival performances, community organizations, and other scenes.
2. The second level is the construction of ‘external cultural expression’: the guzheng also enters official celebrations, cross-ethnic performances, international exchanges, and other platforms as a ‘bridge to showcase Chinese culture’, becoming a medium for identity negotiation.

This two-layer structure of the identity model has been confirmed by case studies such as Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔] (2010) and Wang Xiying [王惜盈](2016) and has also been theoretically sublimated in Ren Yanran’s [任嫣苒] (2024) urban cultural analysis. To visually synthesize the hierarchical structure of cultural identity in the practice of Malaysian guzheng, Table 1 summarizes the two main mechanisms and their theoretical support in related studies.

Level of Identity	Manifestations	Supporting Studies/Data Sources	Analytical Focus
Internal Ethnic Identity	Affirmation of ‘I am Chinese’ through guzheng learning Reinforced through school ensembles and community events	Zhang Yunxiang (2010) Wang Xiying (2016) Cai Yuwen (2022)	Personal cultural affiliation and symbolic daily practice
External Cultural Representation	Participation in national celebrations and Malaysia–China exchanges The guzheng as a visible marker of Chinese culture	Ren Yanran (2024) Wang Xiying (2016)	Strategic display of identity and intercultural communication

Figure 2: Table showing dual-level identity mechanisms in Malaysian guzheng practice and supporting literature.

However, the above studies still have several common blind spots:

1. Lack of multi-ethnic audience perspective: most of the current literature starts from Chinese learners and lacks empirical data on the cognition and acceptance of the guzheng by non-Chinese groups such as Malays and Indians.
2. Insufficient dynamic tracking of student identity changes: few studies have longitudinally tracked the changes in cultural attitudes of guzheng learners over a long period of time.
3. Absence of gender dimension analysis: it has not yet involved the emotional differences and expressions that may exist between male and female learners in the construction of cultural identity.

In summary, existing studies have well explained the cultural identity function of the guzheng in the Malaysian Chinese society, but to further deepen this issue, it is necessary to introduce a wider audience perspective, time dimension, and social variables so that our understanding of ‘how guzheng practice constructs cultural identity’ can move from local experience to a systematic analysis across groups and across time and space. Figure 2 illustrates the dual-level identity construction model derived from the reviewed studies, along with the three identified research gaps that inform future inquiry.

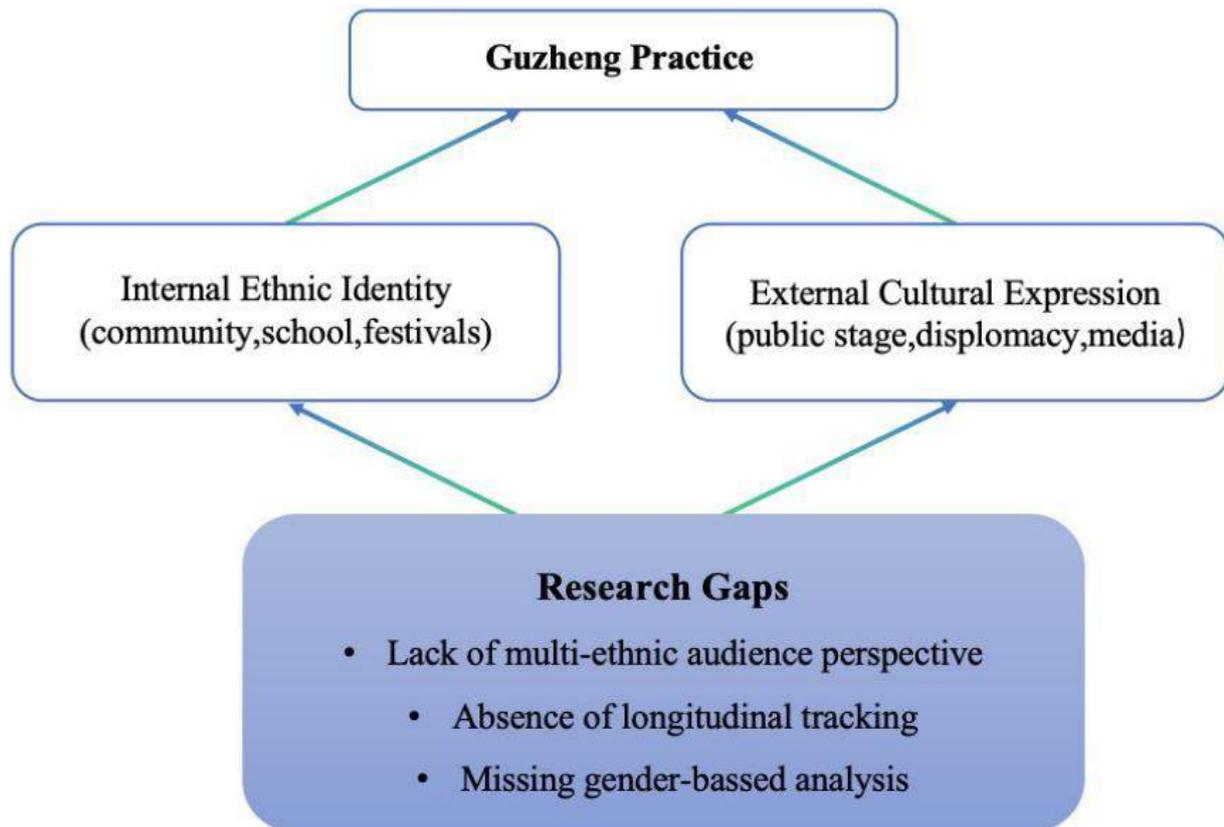


Figure 3: Dual identity framework in Malaysian guzheng practice as depicted by the authors.

SECTION SYNTHESIS AND FORWARD LINKAGE

Through the integrated analysis of existing literature, guzheng is not only a musical practice in Malaysia but also the core medium of a set of constructive cultural identity mechanisms. Current research shows that this identity construction has a two-layer structure: on the one hand, guzheng, as a cultural symbol within the ethnic group, repeatedly appears in school clubs, festival performances, and community activities, strengthening the collective sense of belonging of ‘I am Chinese’; on the other hand, it is also widely used in national celebrations, cross-cultural exchanges, and other occasions, becoming an important tool for Malaysian Chinese to express their cultural identity to the outside world. The above research reveals the close connection between ‘cultural practice-identity construction’ and provides a solid theoretical basis for understanding how music serves cultural reproduction.

However, existing research still has obvious deficiencies in terms of group scope, time span, and social dimensions; most of the literature focuses on Chinese learners, ignoring the cultural contact and acceptance paths of ethnic groups such as Malay and Indian; the change trajectory of individual cultural identity lacks longitudinal tracking; and the impact of variables such as gender and social class on identity formation is rarely discussed. Therefore, future research urgently needs to introduce a more cross-cutting and comparative research perspective to explore in depth how guzheng practice dynamically generates and negotiates cultural identity in Malaysia's multicultural society.

On this basis, we should also pay further attention to the transmission path and dissemination mechanism of cultural identity, especially how different generations can continue, transform, and even recreate their ethnic identity and cultural expression through guzheng practice. How do generations interact? How does the guzheng transcend generational and ethnic boundaries to become a cultural bond? This is the core topic that the next section will explore in depth.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION AND INTERACTION

The survival and development of the guzheng in Malaysia depend not only on its symbolic meaning and educational dissemination path within the Chinese society but also on how it completes cultural reproduction between different generations, as well as the process of cultural interaction, boundary negotiation, and value reconstruction in a multi-ethnic environment. This section integrates the empirical and theoretical research results of 8 papers on ‘how the guzheng is passed down from generation to generation’ and ‘how it is spread among ethnic groups’, focusing on its intertwined mechanisms at the institutional, individual, and cultural levels, analyzing the empirical facts and research blind spots revealed by existing studies, and proposing future research directions.

FROM PRIVATE SCHOOL-STYLE CONTINUATION TO ORGANIZED REPRODUCTION

In a systematic study of the historical context of guzheng education in Malaysia (Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔], 2010; Wang Xiying [王惜盈], 2016; Cai Yuwen [蔡宇文], 2022), it is pointed out that guzheng has experienced a migration path from ‘family-community-school’ in intergenerational inheritance. Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔] (2010) traced the growth path and teaching experience of guzheng teachers and found that the first generation of guzheng players were mostly self-taught or privately taught traditional skills, relying on ‘non-institutionalized interpersonal networks’; after entering the 21st century, guzheng inheritance turned to the ‘organized mechanism’ of school courses, music centers, and art festival platforms, and the continuation between generations was gradually institutionalized (Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔], 2010). This evolution not only changed the way of skill transmission but also changed the composition of knowledge discourse power—from ‘elderly experience’ to ‘professional teacher certification’.

Wang Xiying [王惜盈] (2016) specifically pointed out that many Chinese families maintain their cultural memory by encouraging their children to learn guzheng and regard ‘learning guzheng’ as a symbolic act of cultural inheritance. Through field observations, she found that in middle school Chinese orchestras and community cultural centers, ‘mother-daughter co-performance’ and ‘master-apprentice ensemble’ have become common phenomena, forming a three-layer inheritance network of family-school-community (Wang Xiying [王惜盈], 2016). She emphasized that this model not only reflects the vertical continuation of culture but also shows that cultural inheritance is a ‘socialized structure’ that is far beyond the scope of individual learning behavior.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL MEANING AND THE TENSION OF INHERITANCE

Ren Yanran [任嫣苒] (2024) pointed out in his field interviews with guzheng learners of different ages in Penang and Selangor that there are significant differences in the cultural significance of the guzheng between generations. The older generation often regards the guzheng as a continuation of emotional memory and hometown identity, and their learning motivation is mostly related to the emotional connection with traditional Chinese culture, while the new generation of learners emphasizes the artistic expression and personal expression value of the guzheng and regards it as a medium for skill training or stage performance (Ren Yanran [任嫣苒], 2024). Ren called this phenomenon ‘intergenerational migration of cultural soundscapes’, pointing out that the guzheng has been transformed from a symbolic tradition to a cultural tool with personalized and generational expression in contemporary Malaysia.

Cai Yuwen’s [蔡宇文] (2022) research further revealed the connection between intergenerational cultural identity differences and teachers’ teaching concepts. She found that the older generation of

guzheng teachers tend to emphasize the complete reproduction of traditional repertoires and attach importance to the ‘orthodoxy’ and cultural purity of skills; in contrast, young teachers’ pay more attention to teaching interaction and localized content integration and try to stimulate students’ interest and identity by adapting local nursery rhymes or introducing contemporary performance elements (Cai Yuwen [蔡宇文], 2022). This intergenerational understanding of ‘cultural reproduction’ and ‘cultural reconstruction’ reflects the cultural tension that is prevalent in guzheng teaching practice: on the one hand, it is the insistence on traditional purity, and on the other hand, it is the exploration of cultural adaptation and ethnic communication.

This kind of intergenerational cultural cognitive difference not only affects the choice of guzheng teaching methods but also profoundly shapes the new generation of learners’ understanding and identification of the cultural identity carried by the guzheng.

THE REALISTIC DILEMMA OF CROSS-ETHNIC COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL INTERACTION

In existing research, except for some cases of non-Chinese learners mentioned by Ren Yanran [任嫣苒] (2024), most of the literature still focuses on the Chinese community and rarely pays attention to the cross-cultural interaction model of guzheng in the diverse society of Malaysia. In an interview with middle school students on cultural identity, Ren mentioned that there are very few Malay or Indian students learning guzheng in Chinese schools, but due to language barriers in teaching materials, cultural barriers in repertoires, and insufficient recognition from parents, they often find it difficult to ‘stay’ in the regular teaching system (Ren Yanran [任嫣苒], 2024).

Ren Yanran [任嫣苒], 2024) also observed in her research that although some middle schools have tried to open ‘open ethnic’ guzheng interest classes, there are very few non-Chinese students who really persist in the long term. She believes that the limited cross-ethnic communication of guzheng is not only due to cultural differences themselves but also the result of the joint effect of the education system, teaching materials compilation, and ethnic differentiation policies (Ren Yanran [任嫣苒], 2024). The existing guzheng teaching system generally lacks a ‘cultural translation mechanism’, such as the lack of Malay/English auxiliary teaching materials, teachers’ insufficient understanding of multiculturalism, and the lack of repertoire creation for ethnic integration, which all hinder the guzheng from becoming a truly ‘cross-ethnic cultural symbol’.

Zhang Yunxiang [张云翔] (2010) pointed out that the ‘public visibility’ of the guzheng in Malaysia has indeed increased, and it often appears in national festivals, international performances, and other occasions, but it is still mostly dominated by Chinese students/performers, and the ‘cultural dialogue’ between ethnic groups has not been truly realized. He called for the promotion of multilingual teaching experiments and ethnic co-performance projects at the institutional level and the strengthening of cultural adaptability training to enhance the dissemination tension of the guzheng in the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia.

DATA INTEGRATION AND RESEARCH GAP IDENTIFICATION

Through the integration of the above studies, it can be found that the intergenerational inheritance mechanism of guzheng in Malaysia presents the following three structures:

Dimension	Key characteristics and trends	Supporting literature
Transmission structure	Shift from informal private teaching to institutional transmission via schools and communities; formation of a three-tier network involving family, school, and community.	Zhang Yunxiang (2010); Wang Xiyang (2016)

Intergenerational differences	The older generation emphasizes faithful reproduction of tradition, while the younger generation focuses on personal expression and performance aesthetics.	Ren Yanran (2024); Cai Yuwen (2022)
Barriers to cross-ethnic interaction	Transmission remains largely within Chinese communities due to a lack of strategies for interethnic inclusion and mechanisms for cultural translation.	Ren Yanran (2024); Wang Xiying (2016)

Figure 4: Table showing structural dimensions of guzheng transmission and cultural interaction in Malaysia.

Although the above studies provide important materials for understanding the intergenerational transmission of guzheng in Malaysia, there are still three deficiencies in the current research:

1. Lack of systematic observation of informal inheritance mechanisms (such as learning within the family and non-institutional interaction between teachers and apprentices).
2. Lack of longitudinal tracking research on the identity changes of performers from childhood to youth to adulthood.
3. Lack of empirical verification and case comparison on how the guzheng can become a ‘bridge for cross-ethnic communication’.

Existing studies have shown that guzheng in Malaysia can achieve intergenerational inheritance and cultural continuity through three mechanisms: ‘structural reproduction’, ‘intergenerational adaptation’, and ‘cultural negotiation’. It not only undertakes the maintenance function of ‘cultural memory’ in families and schools but also forms the tension of identity construction and value reconstruction between different generations. However, if guzheng is to truly become a cross-generational and cross-ethnic cultural carrier, it is necessary to break through the current limitations of ‘internal circulation of ethnic groups’ and establish a more open education system, more inclusive teaching content, and more culturally adaptable communication paths.

Future research should focus on the following directions: firstly, conduct micro-narrative research on the role of family and informal networks in inheritance; secondly, conduct follow-up case studies to observe the dynamic evolution of cultural identity in the life course of learners; and thirdly, explore how to promote guzheng to become a cultural exchange medium among multiple ethnic groups through policies, courses, and performance mechanisms. This will not only help promote cultural integration in Malaysia but also provide strong local experience support for the cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese music.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY: KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE OF GUZHENG RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA

Through the systematic integration of 8 core research documents from 2000 to date, this study reveals the main achievements of guzheng research in Malaysia under four themes: historical development, performance teaching, cultural identity, and intergenerational inheritance. Existing research generally affirms the role of the guzheng in maintaining cultural memory, confirming ethnic identity, and popularizing art education in the Chinese community in Malaysia, and shows the following characteristic trends:

1. As a symbolic carrier of Chinese immigrant culture, the guzheng’s dissemination path has undergone a transformation from private school-style oral transmission to institutionalized teaching.#
2. Guzheng teaching models are becoming increasingly diverse, covering private education, schools, and community channels, but are still mainly based on mainland China’s textbooks and grading systems, with problems of insufficient localization and innovative exploration.

3. Guzheng plays a dual role in the construction of cultural identity: it is not only a symbolic tool to strengthen the sense of belonging within the ethnic group but also an important means for Malaysian Chinese to express their culture and negotiate their identity with the outside world.
4. There are obvious differences between generations in the understanding of the meaning of guzheng and the teaching philosophy, reflecting the tension between cultural inheritance and cultural reconstruction. At the same time, the actual results of cross-ethnic communication are still relatively limited.

From an integrative perspective, these studies have initially constructed an analytical path of ‘Guzheng as ethnic music practice—educational practice—cultural identity—intergenerational inheritance’, providing a solid foundation for understanding the functions and changes of traditional musical instruments in overseas Chinese societies.

THEORETICAL ENLIGHTENMENT AND PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

From a theoretical perspective, this review helps to deepen the understanding of the interactive relationship between music, cultural identity, and social practice. The function of the guzheng in Malaysia has long surpassed its performance attribute as a musical instrument and has become an important medium for carrying ethnic memory, expressing cultural identity, and intervening in social public space. The two-layer mechanism of ‘internal ethnic identity construction’ and ‘external cultural expression’ sorted out in this chapter not only reveals the symbolic function of traditional music in immigrant communities but also provides a new theoretical connection point and interdisciplinary dialogue platform for Chinese music research, cross-cultural identity theory, and ethnic culture research.

From the perspective of education and cultural policy practice, the current guzheng teaching in Malaysia faces the following key challenges: firstly, the teacher training system lacks professional support at the cultural level, resulting in an imbalance between technology-oriented and cultural-oriented teaching practices; secondly, teaching materials and teaching resources are overly dependent on external input, lacking local original content and ethnic adaptation design; thirdly, the cross-ethnic promotion mechanism is insufficient, making it difficult to form a ‘cultural exchange platform with guzheng as the medium’.

Therefore, in future policymaking and teaching reform, we need to pay attention to the cultural communication function of the guzheng, not just its educational value as a technical subject. We can stimulate the potential of guzheng’s shared identity in a diverse society through the development of multilingual teaching materials, multiethnic cooperative performances, and ethnic cultural integration programs.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTIONS

Combined with the above analysis, future research on the development of guzheng in Malaysia urgently needs to draw problem awareness from real teaching situations and cross-cultural communication environments, focus on the three core issues of ‘who is learning guzheng’, ‘how to learn’, and ‘how to spread better’ and explore local and operational research paths.

Firstly, it is recommended to conduct structured questionnaires and interviews in existing Chinese secondary schools and community music education centers to investigate the relationship between students’ guzheng learning motivation, persistence, and cultural identity. Such empirical data will help to establish a student participation path model and identify the key factors that affect the stability of guzheng learning in different regions and family backgrounds. Secondly, the research can cooperate with frontline teachers to conduct small-scale intervention experiments at the teaching site, try to combine traditional Chinese guzheng music with local melodies (such as Malay folk songs and festival songs), analyze their impact on students’ learning interest and cultural acceptance, and promote the development and evaluation of localized teaching content.

At the same time, research on teachers should not be ignored. By interviewing guzheng teachers with multi-ethnic teaching experience, we can gain an in-depth understanding of their practical difficulties and strategies in teaching language, teaching material adaptation, and cultural interpretation, and then

propose targeted teaching support plans. Finally, it is recommended to systematically track the differences in the acceptance reactions and cultural understanding of guzheng performances by audiences of different generations and ethnic groups in various campus music festivals and community performances and compare the cultural communication effectiveness of traditional music and local adaptations to evaluate the practical potential of the guzheng as a cross-cultural communication medium.

The above research directions can all be carried out based on existing educational institutions and community platforms, with high practical implementation, which will help promote the Malaysian guzheng research from ‘theoretical interpretation’ to ‘empirical intervention’ and further respond to the social needs of cultural integration and ethnic communication.

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POLITICAL MUSIC IN THE 2024 INDONESIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: EXPRESSION AND COPYRIGHT CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the use of music in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Although the election was completed on February 15, 2024, the use of music as a campaign tool took place massively. This study tries to observe how music can influence public opinion to determine the direction of choice and how the public responds to the use of music in politics, in which musicians are seen as tending to be politically affiliated with or support certain candidates. Thus, a survey method was used to obtain these data. Through the approach of political involvement theory and supported by interviews, it can be seen how musicians have strategies for creating political songs. The results showed that some musicians chose to hide their names so that there would be no backlash among their fans, while others felt afraid that their candidate would lose and affect their careers. This study provides a comprehensive picture of the condition of music in Indonesia that is in contact with the politics of the 2024 presidential election and becomes a kind of roadmap for the use of music in the world of politics in the future.

Keywords

lyrics, political choices, presidential elections, propaganda, copyright, musical expression

INTRODUCTION

The presidential election in Indonesia is not merely a matter of practical politics. It involves many elements, including music. Music with the theme of the presidential election, especially the call to vote for a particular candidate, is widely spread on social media. He (2023) explained that music is a pretty effective means of boosting the electability of candidates, in this case, presidential candidates. Music is thus a form of agitation for the public (Turino, 2008). A real example is the creation of a song entitled *Lek Ra Kowe, Aku Ora Wae* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awOxJefU5jk>), specifically intended for presidential candidate Ganjar Pranowo. Not long after it was launched, the song went viral and, of course, had a significant impact on influencing public opinion and mobilizing the masses.

In line with this, the song *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas* by Richard Jersey (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwYRwOj9RdA>) is seen as capable of enhancing the emotional connection among Prabowo Subianto's supporters. *Amin Aja Dulu* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRxewHJMjHI>) has become a recurring anthem during Anies Baswedan's campaign rallies. Looking further back, 2014 witnessed the creation of the song *Salam Dua Jari* by the band Slank (Putra et al., 2017), which was specifically composed to support the presidential candidate Jokowi. However, this phenomenon is not limited to grassroots support or independent musicians. The former President and Chairman of the Democratic Party's Supreme Council, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), also chose a unique way to express his support for Prabowo Subianto. In his performance, SBY delivered the song *Kamu Nggak Sendirian* by Tipe-X (Ayu, 2023a), symbolizing solidarity and cooperation within a political context. Similar cases can also be observed on a global scale.

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In the United States, candidates also use music during presidential campaigns as part of their campaign identity (Blankenship & Renard, 2017). For instance, Barack Obama utilized *Yes We Can* by will.i.am as his iconic campaign song (Ford et al., 2010), while Donald Trump frequently used *M.A.G.A. Theme* and *Y.M.C.A.* by the Village People—although the latter sparked controversy due to the band's disagreement with its use (Greenberg, 2020). On the contrary, Joe Biden chose *We Take Care of Our Own* by Bruce Springsteen (Schrader, 2023) and *Can't Put It in the Hands of Fate* by Stevie Wonder (Kreps, 2020). In Europe, a similar phenomenon can be observed. A notable example is Emmanuel Macron's campaign during the 2017 French presidential election, where Macron used *Oxygène* by Jean-Michel Jarre (A. Setiawan, 2023). In India, Narendra Modi employed various patriotic and nationalist songs, such as *Modi Aane Wala Hai* (Jha, 2014). Meanwhile, Jair Bolsonaro used Brazilian rock and patriotic songs in Brazil to reflect a tough and nationalist image (Evangelista & Sá, 2021).

There are inherent conflicts behind the excitement and influence of using music in politics. When a song is used to support a particular candidate, it automatically creates opposition, leading to societal polarization (Mack & Martin, 2024). In this case, music, which ideally serves as a bridge to connect people, can instead become a divisive force. Copyright issues also emerge as a critical aspect. Has the creator permitted its use when a song is created or performed for political purposes? (Schwender, 2017). In many instances, songs are commercially utilized in campaigns without the creator's consent or compensation, violating economic rights. Copyright issues in the context of political music are not only relevant in Indonesia but also globally. For example, in the United States, artists such as Neil Young, Bruce Springsteen, Adele, Rihanna, Pharrell Williams, Tom Petty, and The Rolling Stones have protested the use of their songs in political campaigns—especially during Donald Trump's presidential campaign—when they felt that such use did not align with the message or values they intended to convey through their music (Hussein, 2024).

Cases where artists oppose using their songs in a political context highlight the need to understand and respect the decisions and copyrights of music creators (Zim, 2023). In this study, several musicians deliberately hid their names in the political music they created. In addition to preventing backlash among fans who are not politically aligned, it also has implications for the copyright of the music, which becomes anonymous so that the creator cannot claim royalties if their song is widely accessed and goes viral. Furthermore, the issue of political music copyright in Indonesia is becoming increasingly attractive to review because it brings together idealism and market demand: idealism to support a particular candidate and risks losing the market if the candidate they support loses. Therefore, many musicians are neutral or create political music while hiding their identities. However, using music in politics also opens the door for collaboration between musicians and candidates. In this way, music plays its role as political music, and there is an effort to politicize music (Goehr, 1994). Such collaborations can amplify the reach of political messages and create a stronger momentum. For example, when a well-known musician or band endorses a candidate, it can significantly influence public opinion and enhance the candidate's image in the eyes of music fans, or, conversely, it may have the opposite effect (İmik Tanyildizi, 2020).

In a society increasingly connected through social media and digital platforms, political songs spread rapidly and reach a wide audience (Mehring, 2020). This indicates that music is not merely a matter of melody but also an effective political communication tool in the digital age (Way, 2019). In politics, the messages conveyed through music are often emotional and can deeply influence public opinion (Blankenship & Renard, 2017). Although political music is becoming more prevalent in Indonesia, in-depth research on its influence and impact, particularly in presidential elections, remains scarce, if not nonexistent. Most studies tend to focus on general political campaign strategies without addressing the specific role of music (Iyanu and Oluwafemi 2022; Saraswati 2018; Ulfa, Purnomo, & Kasiwi 2020; Isrofillah 2024; D. Setiawan & Sukresna 2022). Yet, music possesses a strong emotional appeal and can reach various layers of society (Bakhtiyor, 2021). Many important aspects remain unexplored, and there is limited academic research on political music in Indonesian presidential elections. For example, how do political songs influence voter behavior? How are these songs used to shape the image of candidates? And to what extent can they mobilize the masses to support or oppose a presidential candidate?

Therefore, research on political music in the context of Indonesia's presidential elections is finding its urgency. By studying political songs during presidential campaigns, emerging trends in the use of music as a campaign tool can be identified. This analysis could include the most effective music genres, common lyrical themes, and public responses to these songs. Consequently, this research enriches academic literature and provides practical insights for politicians, musicians, and communication experts in designing more effective and ethical campaign strategies, especially regarding copyright issues, in the future. This research also holds significant novelty in both scientific and practical contexts. In addition to being one of the first comprehensive studies exploring the relationship between music and presidential election politics in Indonesia, it seeks to develop an analytical model that can be used to predict the effectiveness of political songs. This model considers various variables, such as the artist's popularity, music genre, and lyrical context, which can influence public reception and the political impact of a song.

METHOD

This study uses a content analysis method (White & Marsh, 2006). It analyzes the tendency of political music content that appears when the presidential election takes place. Three political songs affiliated with each candidate will be selected in this context. The selection is based on the number of viewers or virality. The results are three songs that can attract public attention from each candidate. The first song is *Amin Aja Dulu* [just the Anis and Muhaimin couple for now], intended for the Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar couple. The second song is *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas* [step on the gas, Prabowo and Gibran are the most fitting couple], intended for presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto and his deputy Gibran Raka Bumi Raka. Finally, the third song is *Lek Ra Kowe Aku Ora Wae* [if not you, I better not choose], intended for presidential candidate Ganjar Pranowo, paired with Mahfud MD. The song's writing order is adjusted to the candidate's serial number, Anies number 1, Prabowo number 2, and Ganjar number 3.

Interviews were then conducted with music practitioners (Jamshed, 2014), namely, musicians involved in political music. One of these musicians is Pambuko, a pop and ballad musician who has been making political music for almost 15 years in the interests of mayoral, gubernatorial, and presidential elections. Next is Iyon DD, a Banyuwangi pop music maestro who has been involved in political music for over 20 years. When the interview was conducted in September 2024, Iyon DD had just completed one of his musical works for one of the regent candidates in Banyuwangi. From Pambuko and Iyon DD, it can be learned the reasons they came into contact with political music, how they position themselves so that there is no backlash from their fans who disagree, or whether a particular strategy is carried out when making political music.

In addition to the sources of political music musicians, this study also interviewed politicians who have been intensively using music as a campaign medium. She is Ratna Cokroaminoto, a young politician from one of the major parties in Indonesia who is also a musician. From Ratna, it can be seen that many musicians have contributed their songs to the presidential candidate pairs supported by her party. Ratna is responsible for selecting them, and not all songs are approved. Many musicians asked that their names not be written as creators for many reasons. Finally, the researcher interviewed music and political observers, namely, Joko S Gombloh and Amin Abdullah. Joko S Gombloh is a music critic and observer who has been reading a lot about the phenomenon of political music in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Mohammad Amin or Amin Abdullah is a researcher who wrote the book *Music is Politics* (2021). From both of them, the map of the development of political music in Indonesia can be seen, as well as how music is used as a space for agitation and propaganda. Moreover, both of them also observed the critical position of copyright in political music.

This study also uses a survey method aimed at the public (Jansen, 2010). The survey was conducted to see the public's tendency to choose a particular presidential candidate (Gül, 2023). The survey address can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/KuisisionerMusikPolitik2024>. Several fundamental questions were asked to voters with demographic backgrounds:

- How big is the role of music in influencing your choice in the 2024 Presidential Election?
- Do you think the use of campaign music by presidential candidates effectively attracts young voters?
- Which musicians do you know who are loyal to creating music for political interests?

The answers to the survey are the basis for a more detailed explanation in the discussion and analysis results. The results will be able to be known in detail how the public views and perceives the ecosystem of the use of political music in the 2024 presidential election. More importantly, it measures the extent to which the public is mobilized to support a particular candidate through the political music they listen to.

Experimental methods were used in this study to challenge one of the musicians who created political music (Silva, 2022), Pambuko, to create a new work in the form of a song specifically for his chosen presidential candidate. This experimental study was used to see the musical tendencies created by Pambuko, including those related to emotional nuance elements and the appeal to reach his fans. After that, the researcher analyzed the tendencies of the lyrics, and how Pambuko's song could be enjoyed and influence the public's view to support one of the candidates when sung. This study did not go as far as publishing Pambuko's song to the broader public to see the public response, considering that the presidential election was over and the winner was known. The musical work was used solely for analytical purposes in this study.

The basic concept of this research refers to the theory of political involvement from Teorell (2006), which explains that every person or group can participate in political activities through various channels. This is reinforced by Glimmerveen, Ybema, & Nies (2022) that the channel can be many things, and one of them is music. In other words, the election of presidential candidates is not only an effort to attract public sympathy but also a place for the emergence of new works of art (Kirchberg et al., 2023), with the same source and idea, namely, the presidential election. Yildirim & Guler (2022) view music as one of the forms of artistic expression that has the most potential to influence public opinion in conveying political message narratives, mobilizing, and moving the hearts of voters. The 2024 presidential election is a measuring point for the extent to which political music is used and how much impact it has on raising the candidate's image in the eyes of the public.

The perspective of cultural expression, as expressed by Susanti, Susrijani, & Sudhiarsa (2020), is used to investigate the role of music in building political identity in Indonesia. This is closely related to public behavior in using cultural elements, namely, art [music], in determining the direction of their partisanship. Psychologically, music has a significant role in constructing a person's thoughts. Political music, thus, emerges because the public feels represented by their voice and partisanship through the lyrics and emotional impressions expressed (Donegani, 2004). He (2023) stated that music is a bridge that conveys musicians' voices to determine their political direction, although various risks accompany it. This study is the first to comprehensively examine the symptoms of the use of political music in the presidential election in Indonesia, and it is possible that it can be a roadmap for seeing the tendency of the use of political music in the future.

RESULT

On Wednesday, 14 February 2024, the presidential election in Indonesia was held with three competing candidates, namely, Anies Baswedan with his deputy Muhaimin Iskandar, Prabowo Subianto with Gibran Rakabumi Raka, and Ganjar Pranowo with his deputy Mahfud MD. Afifah & Efendi (2024) observed the framing carried out by digital media on the three pairs and how each candidate tried to attract public sympathy in various ways. Several months before, each candidate campaigned ahead of the voting, forming a creative team tasked with spreading the candidate's messages in multiple ways, one of which was music. Campaign songs emerged for each presidential and vice presidential candidate. Social media was flooded with musical works that tried to stir the public's hearts to vote for the candidate being campaigned for [in other words, sung]. In the end, the election was won by the Prabowo-Gibran pair with 58.83% of the vote. Anies Bawedan-Muhaimin with 24.37% and Ganjar-Mahfud with 16.8% were next in succession (Mantalean & Farisa, 2024).

Previously, this study sorted songs widely found on social media, spread, and commented on by the public. As a result, more than 200 songs were collected. Then, ten songs from each candidate were selected that were the most viewed based on monitoring on *YouTube*; here are the songs along with the number of viewers.

No	Song Title	Creator	Link	Number of Views
1.	Amin	Mothemess	https://youtu.be/2FMQCVgYrko?si=XGG1Xsh9i2XZjUyI	246.165
2.	Amin	Muhammad Amrullah	https://youtu.be/5bicWjPyVKU?si=fWPkxAjZR1U3W02N	190.152
3.	Amin Aja Dulu (Official)	anonymous	https://youtu.be/qRxewHJMjHI?si=bxM_mZGduEtZRtHv	943.458
4.	Amin Number 1 - Pejuang Perubahan	Yana Zein	https://youtu.be/ozaf0GmpE3A?si=WCCpaM6gvHIG7N7G	14.998
5.	Aminkan	Yana Ry	https://youtu.be/8gcZCp6Ykg0?si=Dil_3WZ1J1CfmjI	144.637
6.	Anies Presiden	Refly Harun/Ogie Cherista	https://youtu.be/MhLRFklVbao?si=nx9_ifMkUaVv6tj	383.020
7.	Anis Baswedan Capres Jedag Jidug	Septian Ncs	https://youtu.be/tPJ4-dXNwh8?si=bJRmWlMCOh5zR88I	48.788
8.	Anis Baswedan For Presiden	Refli Kande	https://youtu.be/_wNBBXmncUo?si=HZvvQfaDYdL1JYS3	755.477
9.	Kemenangan Anis-Muhaimin	Kelana Remaja	https://youtu.be/esPhLay79rA?si=sErKyFGq1mvr6JK7	36.220
10.	Untuk Anies Dan Cak Imin Untuk Perubahan Yang Lebih Baik	anonymous	https://youtu.be/dRpxIVd9AMw?si=3bKErGV4pmopvyEK	488.350

Figure 1: Table of the top ten political songs for Anies Baswedan–Muhaimin Iskandar. Overview by the authors.

No	Song Title	Creator	Link	Number of Views
1.	Doa Untuk Pemimpin Negeri	Aan Story	https://youtu.be/4EjB4HiP-eE7?si=m-EUMYPcj-0c65F8	1.125.352
2.	Kami Bersamamu (Prabowo - Gibran)	Suryanto Siregar	https://youtu.be/MZT88LJTLxU?si=mfcn72KKzX1prVik	36.503
3.	Lagu Prabowo Gibran Pro Rakyat	anonymous	https://youtu.be/xaSaDRaImyU?si=wIHgJ4bqpRkEF40o	1.129.719
4.	Laskar Abdi Negara (Prabowo)	Leonardo Ricci	https://youtu.be/Ajaxr8hsVUs?si=ZW8y1leBEipz4chk	150.702
5.	Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas (Official)	Richard Jersey	https://youtu.be/jwYRwOj9RdA?si=ajRQYXRPXmIww26K	35.921.438
6.	Prabowo Gibran	Tangnga Djara	https://youtu.be/8IXUBOxm_Zc?si=XxmXfcZnhdPzbget	97.359
7.	Prabowo Gibran - Pemersatu Bangsa	Dudy Justice	https://youtu.be/PJMjWE3FKYs?si=OdbBh2KJiLotwLDW	13.786
8.	Prabowo Gibran Maju Satu Putaran	anonymous	https://youtu.be/MBopJz1cDsg?si=F5-8nf9DT0hM47zI	248.221
9.	Prabowo Gibran Memang Istimewa	anonymous	https://youtu.be/RBkN9I9RUpA?si=pg6KWyrKJNwsgCaq	1.533.365
10.	Prabowo Gibran Pasti Menang	Buy Akur/Ceceng Roman	https://youtu.be/qBc0BwDaTto?si=9YW8LuurFxYwxxhg	1.442.095

Figure 2: Table of the top ten political songs for Prabowo-Gibran. Overview by the authors.

No	Song Title	Creator	Link	Number of Views
1.	Banteng Metu Kandang	Yonanda Frisna Damara	https://youtu.be/f2K8GM6xfck?si=2uK9RW1Egm_vybWo	308.587
2.	Bersama Ganjar Mahfud	Fery Hudaya	https://youtu.be/A3fCKyXY1jg?si=GqGqYvZzMBxcnMOL	210.024
3.	Ganjar Mahfud Untuk Indonesia	Sigap	https://youtu.be/CML7bilk9e0?si=CplgZVTa4rKjPwkO	84.154
4.	Gue Ganjar	Brando Susanto	https://youtu.be/RzWWGar9oGw?si=qJ9GavJYR3t5Syp3	176.316
5.	Lek Ra Kowe Ora Wae	Kang Seger / Mr Ajur	https://youtu.be/awOxJefU5jk?si=_6w0z0zXIVmbRBtD	621.241
6.	Presiden Pilihan Kita	Fadil & Djion	https://youtu.be/VUVVYuw7ddo?si=vPLITtulJSfcwps	22.278
7.	Salam M3tal (Official)	Bimbim Slank	https://youtu.be/18qaf-D1p5k?si=vXx8Igt2kuL15MiD	479.464
8.	Salam Satu Suara	Dinar Gumilang	https://youtu.be/lplrEh-V75w?si=DY38qm3T9iG3DcV8	48.017
9.	Suara Rakyat Suara Tuhan	Marijon Damanik	https://youtu.be/jQPb2yn3TMY?si=YufTBKrsEDjs4VxR	63.000
10.	Tas Tes Ala Ganjar Mahfud	Bening Ayu	https://youtu.be/LhGEK_9jnt8?si=qi4FAUJhANEZ90E-	245.730

Figure 3: Table of the top ten political songs for Ganjar-Mahfud. Overview by the authors.

Based on the details of Figures 1–3, it can be seen that the viral campaign songs from each candidate are *Amin Aja Dulu* for Anies Baswedan, *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas* for Prabowo, and *Lek Ra Kowe Ora Wae* for Ganjar Pranowo. Through YouTube, it is known that these songs are the most played and talked about among similar campaign songs from each candidate. The data in Figures 1–3 were taken one week before the presidential election, precisely on February 7, 2024, at 19.45 WIB. Researchers observed the number of viewers who accessed each candidate's campaign songs. The results show that *Lek Ra Kowe Aku Ora Wae* was watched 621,241 times, while *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas* recorded a much higher number with 35,921,438 views. The song *Amin Aja Dulu* attracted attention with 943,458 views.

Thus, the song *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas* emerged as the most viewed, followed by *Amin Aja Dulu*, and lastly, *Lek Ra Kowe Aku Ora Wae*. These results align with the rankings of each candidate's [winning] vote shares in the 2024 presidential election. Given this correlation, the basic assumption is that access to music can serve as a benchmark for gauging public participation. A high number of viewers can be interpreted as an indication of public interest and support for a presidential candidate. Music plays a crucial role in shaping the image and attracting voters' attention, where a song's popularity can reflect the strength of public support for a candidate (Abubakar Siddique & Sidal, 2022).

In the context of the 2024 Presidential Election, viral campaign music demonstrates that the success of these songs is closely tied to their ability to communicate political messages effectively and emotionally. The song *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas*, for example, not only highlighted the Prabowo-Gibran candidate pair but also succeeded in creating a solid and memorable identity among the public. This song was performed in a rap or hip-hop rhythm with a fast, energetic tempo and lyrics that were easy to understand. Additionally, a specific dance movement was created for this song, which the other two candidates' songs did not have. This further enhanced the song's appeal and the public's engagement in the campaign to support the related candidate. On the contrary, the role of social media as a primary distribution platform was equally important (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018). The dissemination of campaign song content through social media expanded its reach and increased interaction with voters (Quevedo-Redondo et al., 2023). Social media algorithms that favor viral content facilitate rapid dissemination (Chalke & Mishra, 2023), enabling political messages to reach a broader audience quickly. As political music observer Joko S Gombloh stated (personal communication, August 4, 2024), campaign strategies through music, when packaged and distributed effectively, can significantly impact election outcomes.

Hermawan and Latief Najmuddin (2024) explain that Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as presidential and vice-presidential candidates, were the most active in disseminating their campaign videos through social media, especially *TikTok*. They utilized this platform intensively to reach young voters and active social media users. Their campaign videos, including campaign music, successfully captured the attention and participation of a large audience. As a result of this activity, social media users became highly familiar with the Prabowo-Gibran campaign. Through *TikTok*, they created an emotional connection with the audience using catchy and relevant campaign music (Wiratno & Rozi, 2024). This familiarity made their campaign messages more memorable and fostered a sense of closeness with the candidates they supported. The effective use of social media in disseminating campaign music underscores the importance of digital platforms in modern political strategies (Wen, 2023), where the speed of information dissemination and the ability to reach a broad audience in a short time are key to gaining voter support (Fujiwara et al., 2024).

This study also conducted a public survey through the link ([https://bit.ly/Kuisisioner MusikPolitik2024](https://bit.ly/Kuisisioner_MusikPolitik2024)) on July 25, 2024. Several questions were posed in the survey, including: 'How significant is the role of music in influencing your choice in the 2024 Presidential Election?' Of the 500 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 32% (160 people) answered very significant, 20% (100 people) answered significant, 17% (85 people) answered moderately significant, and 16% (80 people) answered less significant. The remaining 15% (75 people) were supposedly not influenced at all. These results indicate that music, primarily when disseminated systematically through social media, can influence public perception and political choices, particularly among young voters and active social media users.

Additionally, the survey asked, ‘Do you think the use of campaign music by presidential candidates is effective in attracting young voters?’ The survey results showed that most respondents, 58% (290 people), found campaign music very effective in attracting young voters, while 20% (100 people) considered it effective. 10% (50 people) of respondents felt that campaign music was moderately effective, 5% (25 people) considered it less effective, and only 7% (35 people) believed that campaign music was not effective at all. These findings suggest that using music in political campaigns has strong appeal and high relevance among young voters, who are likelier to engage with music-based content shared on social media.

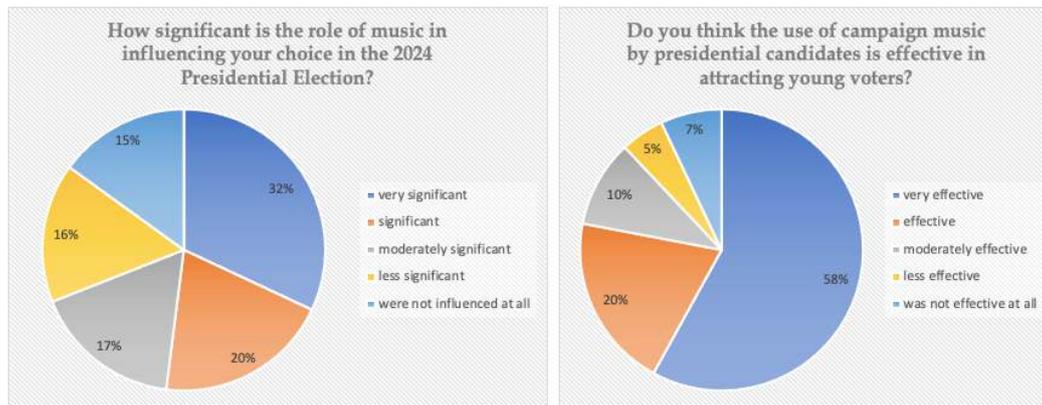


Figure 4: Survey results conducted with the public from July 25, 2024, to August 1, 2024. Depictions by courtesy of the public designers.

Ayu (2023b) explains, supported by data from the Indonesian General Election Commission—*Komisi Pemilihan Umum* [KPU]—that over 50% of voters in the 2024 presidential election are dominated by young people. With the increasing influence of young voters, music-based campaign strategies have demonstrated their effectiveness in capturing the attention of this demographic (Hallam, 2010). Radovanović (2022) explained that almost all young voters are very dependent on content or anything that has the potential to go viral on social media, including political music. This study reveals that Prabowo-Gibran's campaign song *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas* was the most viewed, accessed, shared, and commented on. The song dominated social media users, especially on the *TikTok* and *Instagram* platforms.

Joko S Gombloh believes that the virality of the song in the 2024 presidential election is due to the social media algorithm factor. The algorithm regulates how content is recommended based on the interests of users and what they have previously watched or seen. In other words, as stated by Anderson et al. (2020), social media algorithms work based on interactions built by users in the digital realm, from which tendencies and even the direction of public support for specific presidential candidates can be read. This is further strengthened by a filter bubble that filters or limits further interaction of social media users with content that is not in the same breath or does not match previous interaction recommendations (Chitra & Musco, 2020). Therefore, the song *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas* has succeeded in becoming election music that is not only the most viewed but also the most commented on and shared content. Sharing music will form a new filter bubble, listened to by people who have the same frequency of friendship on social media, and so on. The incident was like a snowball, which initially rolled small but gradually grew bigger and bigger. In the end, tens of millions of users accessed the song *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas*. This is in contrast to the two songs for other presidential candidate pairs.

Moreover, according to Cinelli et al. (2021), this is even more complete when there is a social media echo chamber, where when someone likes a specific content, they are not recommended to see content that is not in line or not on the same frequency. Thus, the most watched music has the potential to determine the direction of public support for a particular candidate. When users are continuously exposed to content that aligns with their political views or choices, they will likely feel more confident in their decisions and disregard opposing information. In this context, campaign songs that successfully attract attention and are widely shared serve as tools to reinforce political identity and create

communities around presidential candidates. In other words, the song *Oke Gas Prabowo Gibran Paling Pas* not only becomes popular but also symbolizes solidarity among its supporters, encouraging them to support the campaign through social media actively. This phenomenon illustrates how music functions as a tool for propaganda or political communication (Okoro, 2020) and strengthens social networks and support for candidates in an increasingly fragmented digital era (Ackermann & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2022)

MUSICIANS WITH COURAGE

In the context of the Indonesian presidential election, the support of musicians for specific candidates often garners public attention. One notable example is Slank, a legendary Indonesian music group that boldly supported Joko Widodo (Jokowi) as a presidential candidate in 2014 (Hayat & Hasrullah, 2016). This support was not merely a statement but was realized through a grand concert titled *Salam Dua Jari* on July 5, 2014, in Jakarta (Putra et al., 2017). In this concert, Slank encouraged their fans (known as Slankers) to support Jokowi actively. The event became a significant moment, energizing political enthusiasm, especially among the younger generation, who are devoted listeners of Slank's music (Rully et al., 2023). Slank's support for Jokowi in 2014 exemplifies the power of music as a tool for mobilizing public opinion.



Figure 5: Jokowi stood delivering a speech at the Salam Dua Jari concert initiated by the band Slank in Jakarta, 2014. Depiction by courtesy of the public designers. (https://asset-2.tstatic.net/tribunnews/foto/images/preview/20140705_200141_joko-widodo-di-konser-salam-2-jari.jpg)

On the contrary, musician Ahmad Dhani, a member of the group Dewa 19, also took a bold step by supporting Prabowo Subianto in the 2014 presidential election (Hayat & Hasrullah, 2016). Ahmad Dhani used the music stage to voice his opinions and introduce Prabowo's vision to the public. Through song lyrics and concert performances, Dhani expressed his support and encouraged his fans to become familiar with Prabowo and his programs. This support added a dynamic element to the political climate of the time, where various societal elements, including musicians, sought to engage actively.

Through concerts, musicians create spaces for fans to discuss, share views, and increase their engagement in the electoral process (Behr, 2022). This makes music an integral part of political campaigns that rely on emotional appeal and social connection. However, the support given by musicians also carries risks. According to Amin Abdullah (personal communication, August 14, 2024), author of the book *Music Is Politics (Musik Itu Politik [2021])*, when musicians take political stances, they must be prepared to face backlash from fans who may disagree with their political choices. Slank and Dewa 19, for example, have experienced varied reactions from the public. For some fans, a musician's support for a particular candidate can strengthen their connection with their favourite band. In contrast, for others, it becomes a reason to distance themselves from the music they once loved. Musicians' support in presidential elections is about whom they choose and how they use their influence to encourage political engagement among the public (Street et al., 2008).

Yons DD (personal communication, September 4, 2024), a pop music maestro in Banyuwangi, said that for decades, he has been creating political music but has never listed his name as the music creator. This was done because he knew that the political choices of his music fans were diverse. He had an experience when he was invited to perform on the stage of a particular candidate. Fans who did not have the same political choice often criticized him, and some even came to his house to protest. When researchers visited his home in Banyuwangi, Yons DD had just completed political music work for a regent candidate in his city. Next, he submitted the job to the customer and changed the creator's name to someone else's. The name of the other person in question was a particular figure who was close to the regent candidate. As a result, when the candidate won the election, the figure received a specific position or treatment. The awareness that is creating political music can cause division among his fans causes musicians like Yons DD not to think too far regarding copyright mechanisms when his music is widely sung and accessed by the public on social media. Yons DD allowed this research to include the results of his political music work, and the music can be accessed at the link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKQuq0Mm20U>).

Pambuko (personal communication, August 1, 2024), a renowned ballad musician with extensive experience in creating political music, highlights the dynamics musicians face when they openly support a presidential candidate. Pambuko observes that while public support from musicians can enhance political awareness and voter mobilization, it also comes with significant risks. Musicians who support a particular candidate openly must be prepared to face both positive and negative consequences depending on the election outcome. When a candidate supported by a musician wins, there is potential for receiving benefits from the government. For example, Slank member Abdee was appointed as a commissioner of a state-owned enterprise after Jokowi's election (Idris, 2021). This illustrates how political support can open new opportunities for musicians, such as public positions or government projects. Their involvement in politics brings financial advantages and enhances their public image as individuals contributing to governance.



Figure 6: The appointment of Abdee as a commissioner of an Indonesian state-owned enterprise has garnered widespread public attention. The image above is a headline from one of the media outlets. Depiction by courtesy of the public designers (<https://infografis.okezone.com/detail/772461/abdee-slank-jabat-komisaris-telkom>)

However, musicians supporting a losing presidential candidate often face more severe consequences. Ahmad Dhani serves as a notable example. After expressing his support for Prabowo Subianto, Dhani encountered various legal issues that led to his imprisonment. Although the issues he faced were not always directly related to his musical activities, his position as a supporter of an opposing presidential

candidate made him highly vulnerable to politicization (Banjarnahor, 2019). This illustrates how political support does not always lead to positive outcomes for musicians and can even jeopardize their freedom. This is also a serious consideration for many musicians contemplating involvement in politics.



Figure 7: The cover of a newspaper reporting the detention of Ahmad Dhani, a famous musician. (<https://www.tagar.id/Asset/uploads/799112-ahmad-dhani.jpeg>, depiction by courtesy of the public designers.)

Meanwhile, Ratna Cokroaminoto (personal communication, August 4, 2024), a musician and politician, emphasizes that the risks faced by musicians in politics often serve as a deterrent for them to take a stance. Musicians supporting an unsuccessful presidential candidate will likely encounter difficulties securing performance permits. The ruling government may use its power to hinder musicians' access to the stage through stringent licensing or unexplained delays (Wallach, 2005). Thus, these events illustrate how the political and musical worlds are often interconnected (Goehr, 1994), significantly impacting musicians' careers.

Musicians who support specific candidates may also experience a decline in their fan base (further in-depth research is needed on this matter). Some fans feel alienated when their favorite musicians take political stances that conflict with their own views (Pedelty & Keefe, 2010). This creates a dilemma for many musicians who wish to express their opinions while maintaining a positive relationship with their fans. In this context, a musician's support for a presidential candidate is not merely a personal choice but also a strategic decision that can impact their career. On the one hand, they have the opportunity to contribute to social and political change; on the other hand, they must be prepared to face risks that may affect their career.

In a survey conducted for this research, Slank and Ahmad Dhani ranked highest in the category 'Which musicians do you know are involved in the 2024 presidential campaign?' Slank received 34%, while Ahmad Dhani received 28%. In the 2024 presidential election, Slank supported the pair Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD, while Ahmad Dhani remained loyal to Prabowo Subianto, who was running with Gibran Rakabuming Raka. The Prabowo-Gibran pair was viewed as a continuation of Jokowi's administration (Ubaidillah, 2023), and due to supporting the Prabowo-Gibran pair, which aligned with the government, Abdee Negara, the guitarist of Slank, decided to resign from his position as a commissioner of a state-owned enterprise (Uly & Sukmana, 2024). This decision highlights the

direct impact of musicians' political involvement on their careers outside the music industry, demonstrating the real risks they face when taking an explicit political stance.

Thus, few musicians or music groups, like Slank and Ahmad Dhani, take the bold step of openly showing political support. Some musicians and music groups interviewed in this study chose to remain neutral or not to express political support openly. This choice ensures that their music careers continue without political controversies. Maintaining good relationships with fans with diverse political views is a top priority for some musicians. The supporters of their passionate fans support the existence of musicians, and for many musicians, deciding to still be in political music by supporting a particular candidate is quite risky. Given that not all fans have the same political direction. Thus, in this context, most musicians take a neutral stance to maintain a good relationship with their fans from various backgrounds.

This is also evident in their marketing and publicity. More neutral musicians only discuss their work and performances but avoid political opinions. Artists in this scenario tend to hold concerts for music and entertainment without adding political messages to the concerts. In this way, they do not risk adverse reactions from fans in response to political opinions that may conflict with their fans (Obiegbu et al., 2024). By not taking sides with any candidate or political party, they quickly perform at various events that the government or individuals may hold. On the contrary, neutrality also brings many problems. Musicians who do not express political opinions are sometimes seen as not brave enough or not caring about whatever is happening in society or politics. Neutrality in a polarized society can turn into indifference. Therefore, many musicians try to balance their careers and stay relevant to fans who want to be involved in important issues.

COPYRIGHT CHALLENGES

The political song phenomenon in Indonesia often leaves several issues, one of which is copyright. From this study, it is common to use many songs within the political campaign process, including those involving the presidential election, without crediting the creators. The practice of outright purchasing political music is shared, meaning that musicians sell their works once without receiving royalties or long-term benefits from the ongoing use of the songs (Ratnawati, 2019). While outright purchase provides immediate financial gain for musicians, they forfeit the rights to future recognition and potential earnings. According to Amin Abdullah (personal communication, August 14, 2024), this situation reflects the weak bargaining position of musicians in the political music industry.

On the contrary, in political music collaboration contracts, the desire not to credit the creator often becomes a requirement frequently requested by the musicians themselves. Many musicians conceal their identity as creators due to the potential negative impact it might have on their fan base. By avoiding the publication of their names, they hope to maintain neutrality and prevent polarization among supporters with differing political preferences. This stance reflects musicians' concerns about the long-term consequences of their involvement in politics, both professionally and personally.

Pambuko (personal communication, August 1, 2024) underscores the importance of maintaining idealism in creative work. Despite frequently receiving offers to compose campaign songs, Pambuko prefers not to associate his name with such works. For him, direct involvement in politics could undermine the reputation and integrity he has established with the public. He believes that distancing oneself from specific political identities is a prudent step to protect his artistic work and values. Pambuko accepts offers to create political music solely for financial considerations. Many musicians feel compelled to compromise their idealism to meet their livelihood needs in an economically unstable environment. He acknowledges that while music has the power to convey messages, the practical need to earn a living often takes precedence. This compels him to make pragmatic decisions to engage in projects that may not fully align with his values.

The event appears contradictory because, despite Pambuko's emphasis on maintaining idealism, he still engages in the political realm for financial reasons. This contradiction reflects the dilemma many musicians face in today's industry, where the demands to adapt to economic realities often conflict with the artistic principles they uphold. Ratna Cokroaminoto (personal communication, August 4, 2024) adds that, in many cases, musicians find themselves in situations where deciding to create

political music becomes a difficult choice between preserving artistic integrity and meeting financial needs.

Nevertheless, musicians also create music for political campaigns while choosing not to credit their names or request royalties. This 'nameless' music is often a strategic decision to distance themselves from political identification that might provoke varied public reactions. In this way, they can appeal to audiences without causing controversy that would most likely harm their reputation. Many of these artists post their work through social networking sites independent of their own. That way, the public can still enjoy their music without directly linking them with political stances. This method forms a sort of 'anonymity' for them to participate in campaigns and not take advantage of fans or their reputation.

Ratna Cokroaminoto (personal communication, August 4, 2024), who has been involved in music and politics for more than ten years, regularly receives submissions of special political music whose origins are usually unclear to her, including for the 2024 presidential election. Suddenly, these works appear without any indication of credibility. Thus, whether the song reflects the personal inspiration of its creator is unknown. The complexity of the political music ecosystem in Indonesia can be seen from the many works that do not have a clear identity, adding to the challenges faced by stakeholders in assessing the quality and validity of copyright. Of the seven musicians and five bands interviewed in this study, they circulated their anonymous musical works in the hope that the political message they were trying to sing would reach a wider audience without knowing that the music was their work. This reflects the condition of musicians in the Indonesian political music landscape, who negotiate between idealism and pragmatism. Business and reputation considerations often hamper a desire to participate in social or political change.

Anonymous music is generally composed in styles that musicians do not typically perform. Musicians will adopt different musical strategies and, in turn, seek music that is out of their comfort zone. The music is anonymized, so the public does not know who the composer or arranger is. In this way, musicians can innovate without fear of their audience and backlash about political connotations. Sometimes, they take other works as a foundation and compose genres and texts accordingly (Brown, 2008). However, anonymity means that through this, musicians sell the rights to their political music; in this way, they will never be able to claim recognition or royalties for these works, which may be a substantial financial loss. This has successfully delivered the intended political messages, but the consequences of such a move are relatively intricate. According to Dy (2022), this becomes even more complicated because, in political music, the uncertainty of copyright and recognition adds difficulties for musicians between their artistic contribution and material gain.

EXPERIMENTATION

This research challenges Pambuko, who has been in the world of political music for over 15 years, including in the context of presidential elections, and those years made him understand the dynamic political environment and shaped his artistic approach to the market's wants or needs. However, in the intervening period, with all the copyright issues and usages of music without giving credit to him, he felt compelled to reflect upon his creative process and the impact of his works.

This study gave Pambuko complete freedom to determine the genre of music he wanted to produce. Without genre restrictions, he had ample space to experiment and find the sound that best suited the message he sought to convey. This allowed him to express his ideas more personally and deeply so that the music produced reflected his personal views and feelings about the current political situation. Apart from the kind of music, Pambuko was also left free to choose the person to whom the song would be addressed. Total authority was accorded to him to decide on which presidential candidate he felt his musical work deserved to support. This decision was made from Pambuko's point of view so his songs might bear moral and political weight in concert with the precepts he held so dear.

However, given the autonomy to do with his song as he liked, Pambuko chose not to share the music he produced beyond this research. He preferred the music to remain in the research confines and not be included in a publicity campaign for a large audience. This decision was compelled by the need to retain control of his art and what he was trying to depict concerning the message, while at the same time preventing exposure so as not to stir up the public (or fans) into dangerous reactions. Pambuko

also granted full permission to the research team to use the song exclusively within the context of this study. This means the song will become an integral part of the study, demonstrating how political music can function within a specific context without engaging in broader campaign dynamics. In doing so, Pambuko ensures that his contribution remains within the boundaries he considers safe and aligned with his values.

The song performed by Pambuko, titled *Kiprah Prabowo*, can be accessed at the following link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okhRh8FRnro>). The lyrics are as follows:

<i>Hei mari-mari</i>	[Hey, come on, come on]
<i>Hei berdemokrasi</i>	[Hey, let's practice democracy]
<i>Memilih wakil rakyat</i>	[Choosing a representative]
<i>Miliki jiwa sehat</i>	[With a healthy spirit]
<i>Hei mari-mari</i>	[Hey, come on, come on]
<i>Hei mendekat ke sini</i>	[Hey, come closer here]
<i>Sudah teruji kiprahnya</i>	[His track record is proven]
<i>Prabowo namanya</i>	[Prabowo is his name]
<i>Wakil rakyat yang merakyat</i>	[A representative who is close to the people]
<i>Wakil rakyat jalankan amanat</i>	[A representative who fulfills the mandate]
<i>Mari kita menangkan</i>	[Let's win]
<i>Prabowo Presidennya</i>	[Prabowo as President]

Figure 8: Lyrics of the song entitled Kiprah Prabowo created by Pambuko. Depiction by courtesy of the public designers.

The song highlights Prabowo's figure as a presidential candidate. Pambuko chose to use instruments such as guitar, violin, drums, keyboard, and bass guitar in its musical composition. The choice of the ballad genre reflects a desire to convey the message with a more reflective tone, aiming to touch the listeners' emotions and build a personal connection with the endorsed candidate. An analysis of the lyrics of *Kiprah Prabowo* reveals Pambuko's effort to position Prabowo as a figure whose political track record is 'proven.' Phrases like 'Hei mari-mari, Hei berdemokrasi' invite listeners to actively participate in the democratic process while embedding the idea that voting for Prabowo is a rational and healthy choice. The lyrics appear to be designed to inspire political participation, with a clear focus on a single figure, Prabowo.

In the verse shown above, Pambuko emphasizes Prabowo's qualities as 'Wakil rakyat yang merakyat' (a representative close to the people) and 'jalankan amanat' (fulfills the mandate). These phrases highlight two key aspects: Prabowo's connection with the people and his integrity in carrying out political responsibilities. The words 'merakyat' and 'amanat' are chosen to emphasize that Prabowo not only has political experience but also maintains a close and relevant relationship with the needs of the general public. However, from a critical perspective, these lyrics can also be seen as a form of glorification that overlooks the diversity of opinions regarding Prabowo. The overwhelmingly positive lyrics, without any critique or reflection on the controversies or challenges Prabowo has faced, suggest that the song functions more as a propaganda tool than as an invitation for listeners to think critically. The lyrics of *Mari kita menangkan, Prabowo Presidennya* (Let's win, Prabowo as President) directly urge listeners to vote for Prabowo, reinforcing the song's primary purpose as a political campaign tool. While the lyrics are designed to influence the audience emotionally, their effect depends on the public's reception. This doubtless will make the listeners inclined toward Prabowo, closer to this song, while the opposite side would consider this song indoctrination.

CONCLUSION

This conclusion profiles musicians' strategic roles in political campaigns in Indonesia, especially during presidential elections. The support of the musicians for some presidential candidates shows how music could act as a tool of mass mobilization. Thus, musicians may constitute political opinion in their fans and spaces of public discussion through their popularity and influence. This way, music also crosses the level of mere entertainment into critical socio-political dimensions. One of the key findings of the research is that musicians' involvement in politics essentially endows strategic advantages on the politicians they support. The contribution of musicians increases the visibility of the

candidates and helps the candidates establish effective relationships with the electorate through music. For instance, the 2014 ‘Salam Dua Jari’ by Slank successfully drew public attention to itself and that of the media to boost support for Jokowi. Music allows politicians to connect with the electorate actually and impactfully and have their voice reached, especially by the younger generation.

It also reflects the darker side of musicians involved in politics: supporters of losing candidates are often subjected to legal and social persecution. An example is Ahmad Dhani's support for Prabowo Subianto in 2014, and in 2019, he was embroiled in a series of legal issues that were believed to have been influenced by his position as a supporter of the opposing presidential candidate. This reveals real political risks for musicians engaging in campaigns, and such risks sometimes spill into areas of their lives well beyond the music. Another significant finding is the decision of some musicians to remain neutral in politics. While the study finds that political support gives strategic advantages, many musicians do not choose to make their political opinions public. It's a way to avoid backlash from different political views of fans or just to keep the careers stable. The decision to remain neutral would suggest that musicians understand the risks of tagging along with political involvement, hence opting only for their music as one way to keep good relations with diverse fans.

This paper further discusses the social implications of the involvement of musicians in politics. Political support can estrange their fans, which leads to the shrinkage of one's fan base if the political view of the musician does not correlate with the greater majority of their fans. Conversely, political support bolsters and solidifies a musician–fan relationship if their political views are constant. Thus, political support by musicians has complex effects, which can be both positive and negative depending on the context given for any social and political situation. Accordingly, the current research identifies the fact that musicians' engagement with politics is a two-edged sword; on the one hand, musical artists' political support has the capacity to give a sufficient boost to political campaigns and help raise the political participation of the common public. On the other hand, it creates major risks for the careers of musicians, in view of backlash from the fans, copyright and legal consequences, and pressure from opposing parties. These find important connotations in the dynamics that music and politics share in Indonesia and in the challenges that musicians face in deciding to take an open political stand.

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THE CHING IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF THE XƠ ĐẰNG PEOPLE IN VIETNAM

Nguyễn Thế Truyền¹

Abstract

This chapter delves into an in-depth study of the various sets of chings (ching) within the cultural life of the Xơ Đẳng people, who have long (since the beginning of the last century) resided on the eastern slopes of the majestic Trường Sơn mountain range in the northwestern part of Quảng Ngãi province.

The discussion will go about the following: the three-piece ching set (including regular ching and khung ching); the four-piece can ching set; the six-piece năng ching set; the seven-piece ching set; the h' lênh ching set (with configurations of 8, 9, 10, 12–15 pieces); and a number of Xơ Đẳng ching compositions (that are later dated). Through this, the chapter will address organological issues, scientific parameters concerning the shape and size of each ching set; the naming conventions of each ching in the sets; as well as the function, performance environment, and repertoire of ching in the life of the Xơ Đẳng community.

Keywords

organology, Xơ Đẳng chings, Xơ Đẳng musical instruments, Cadong folk music, Cadong musical instruments

INTRODUCTION

The Xơ Đẳng people refer to a flat gong as ching. There are 2 types of chings: flat chings (ching bằng) and bossed chings (goong or ching goong). In this chapter, the term “ching” is used specifically when referring to the gongs of the Xơ Đẳng.



Figure 1: Provinces of the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Picture in the public domain, and map in the public domain.

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There are Bana, Brau, Churu, Coho, Êđê, Giarai, Giê-Triêng, H'rê, Mạ, Mnông, Romam, and Xơđăng people living in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

In the article “Musical Instruments in the Cultural Life of the Xơđăng in Quảng Ngãi,” published through SHCM and Logos Verlag Berlin, *Asian-European Music Research Journal* (Nguyễn Thế Truyền, AEMR 12: 57–70. 2023), Xơđăng people were introduced, covering aspects such as geography, natural environment, and culture; musical instrument classification; instrument crafting materials; and general issues. Therefore, these topics will not be reiterated in this chapter.

The Xơđăng people primarily reside in the Sơn Tây Thượng, Sơn Tây, Trà Bồng 2, and Kon Plong in Quảng Ngãi province, as well as in Nam Trà My of Quảng Nam province. Their language belongs to the Mon-Khmer language family, part of the Austroasiatic linguistic system. The Xơđăng people mainly sustained their livelihoods through shifting cultivation, farming, animal husbandry, hunting, and gathering. This study is based on the results of the author's surveys and fieldwork conducted in Xơđăng communities, including the villages of Sơn Bua, Sơn Tân, Sơn Mùa, and Sơn Dung (in Sơn Tây district), Trà Kem, and Trà Xanh (in Tây Trà district) of Quảng Ngãi province, as well as several villages in Kon Plong district, Kon Tum province, some years ago.

The Xơđăng people refer to gongs as ching. The term “đánh ching” means striking the ching with a mallet to produce sound; *đấm ching* refers to using a fist to hit the ching to create sound; and *gõ ching* involves tapping the ching with a knuckle to generate sound.



Figure 2 (left): Traditional costume of Xơđăng women; Figure 3 (right): Xơđăng girls by the Kem Stream
Photo courtesy by Ngọc Chi.

Unlike other musical instruments made from bamboo, leaves, rattan, leather, or wood, the ching is considered the most important instrument for the Xơđăng and is made from bronze. Unlike other instruments, where the artisan is also the creator, the Xơđăng people have not yet been able to produce chings themselves. Instead, they must purchase or barter for them with the Vietnamese people from Phước Kiều village, Điện Phương commune, Điện Bàn district, Quảng Nam province, Ward Điện Bàn, Đà Nẵng City, or from other regions, sometimes even traveling as far as Myanmar to obtain these.

The Xơđăng people in Quảng Ngãi have a custom of performing a ritual for newly acquired chings after purchasing or bartering for them. To conduct this ritual, the owner of the ching must invite a shaman (p'dâu) to their home to perform a ceremony to appease the ching spirit before it is used. During the ceremony, a white-feathered chicken is slaughtered, and its blood is smeared onto the new chings. The shaman prays for the ching not to bring misfortune to the owner. After this ritual, the owner is free to use the ching without fear of divine retribution or bad luck.

For the Xơđăng, the ching not only is a valuable asset often traded for livestock such as buffaloes, cows, and jars but also holds significant spiritual importance. Due to the belief that the ching is a sacred object within the family, after use, it is stored in a designated place known as the sacred corner.

Musical instruments of the idiophone family, in general, produce sound through striking or beating with mallets (either bare or wrapped), clubs, fists, pestles, or long sticks. Examples include phách, bells, clappers (Vietnamese), đuông (Mường), t'rung (Xơđăng, Mnông, Giarai), buffalo horn wooden blocks (various ethnic groups), thanh la (Nùng, Giáy, Mường, Vietnamese), and chings (various ethnic groups).

THE SET OF THREE CHING

The Xơđăng in Quảng Ngãi have two types of three-piece ching sets: the regular three-piece ching and the ching khung.

The regular three-piece ching set: Each ching in this set has two holes drilled into the rim for attaching a carrying rope.

- Mother Ching (vông): Diameter of 40.5 cm, thickness of 5 mm, and a rim height of 7.3 cm.
- Father Ching (k'tum): Diameter of 39.4 cm, thickness of 3 mm, and a rim height of 6.8 cm.
- Child Ching (túc): Diameter of 36.5 cm, thickness of 5 mm, and a rim height of 6.5 cm.

Ching 3	Average Size			Role in Performance	Playing Posture
	Diameter (cm)	Thickness (mm)	Rim Height (cm)		
Vông (Mẹ) (Mother Ching)	40.5	5	7.3	Low tone	Standing, slightly inclined
K'tum (Cha) (Father Ching)	39.4	3	6.8	Keeps rhythms	Placed on the thigh
Túc (Con) (Child Ching)	36.5	5	6.5	Melodic playing	Hung

Figure 4: Some information about the Xơđăng people's set of three regular ching instruments in a table made by the author.

The Xơđăng ethnic group is known for their preference and use of large-scale ching ensembles, including sets of 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 chings. In community activities and traditional festivals, the 3-ching set is rarely used among the Xơ Đăng but is notably prevalent among a neighboring ethnic group, the H'rê. It is hypothesized that this 3-ching set may have originated from the H'rê, an ethnic group that has long coexisted with the Xơ Đăng, resulting in cultural integration and exchange over time. The terminology, playing posture, and patterns of this 3-ching set among the Xơ Đăng are analogous to those of the H'rê.

THE 3-CHING ENSEMBLE

The Xơđăng 's 3-ching set, often accompanied by a drum (høgur), is referred to as the ching ensemble. This ensemble typically involves four performers: three ching players and one drummer (høgur player). The largest ching is called ching tồ, also known as chinh p'rang; the second largest is ching h'lay; and the smallest is ching p'rong.

In the village of Trà Kem, Trà Bồng 2 commune, Quảng Ngãi province, the Xơ Đăng people frequently utilize the 3-ching set and a drum during ceremonies such as buffalo and pig sacrifices. During these events, both men and women, young and old, participate in joyful dances, moving in a counterclockwise circle while holding gron (rattles of various sizes) that produce a distinctive sound.

No.	3-ching ensemble + 1 høgur	Name	Role
1	Largest Ching	Ching Tồ	Low Tone
2	Second Largest Ching	Ching H'lay	Rhythm
3	Smallest Ching	Ching P'rong	Melodic ornamentation
4	Drum	Høgur	Keeping rhythm

Figure 5: Names of the 3-ching ensemble in a table made by the author.

THE 4-CHING ENSEMBLE

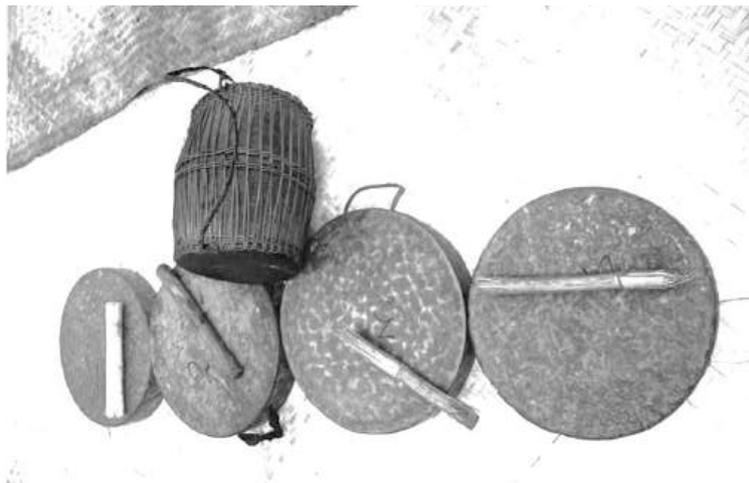


Figure 6: The 4-ching ensemble + 1 drum of the Xơ Đẳng people in Trà Xanh, Tây Trà, Quảng Ngãi. Photo by the author.

The 4-ching set used by the Xơ Đẳng people in Quảng Ngãi is known as Ching Can (Mother Ching). The chings are arranged in order from largest to smallest as follows: Ching Can (Mother Ching), Ching Tok Cấn (Grandmother Ching), Ching Moan (Eldest Child Ching), and Ching Tok Moan (Youngest Child Ching), along with one hogur (drum).

No.	Ching Ensemble	Inner diameter (cm)	Outer diameter (cm)	Ching thickness (cm)
1	Ching can	38.7	39	6.4
2	Ching tok cấn	38.7	38.7	6.1
3	Ching moan	38.6	38.7	6
4	Ching tok moan	37	37.5	6.2

Figure 7: Dimensions of the 4-ching ensemble in a table made by the author.

During performances, the artisan plays the Ching Bà (Grandmother Ching) with a muted technique, producing softer, more subtle sounds compared to the other chings. Meanwhile, the Ching Mẹ (Mother Ching) plays rhythms with many syncopations, while both the Ching Moan (Eldest Child Ching) and the Ching Tok Moan (Youngest Child Ching) maintain the beat. The primary performance method for this ching ensemble involves suspending all the chings in fixed positions, with the performers standing in relatively stationary positions while playing.

No.	Ching Can Ensemble (4 pieces)	Function	Family role	Tones
1	Can	Melody	Mother	Many variations
2	Tok cấn	Staccato	Grandmother	Soft
3	Moan	Keeping meter	Elder Child	
4	Tok moan	Rhythm	Younger Child	

Figure 8: Functions and family roles of each gong in the ching can ensemble (4 pieces) in a table made by the author.

THE 6-CHING CHING NĂNG ENSEMBLE

The 6-ching ensemble, also known as Ching Năng, is another type of ching set highly favored and widely used by the Xơ Đẳng people. The 6-ching set is sometimes used as a substitute for the 4-ching set. In this configuration, the 6-ching ensemble consists of two large chings, two medium-sized chings, and two small chings. The details of this ching set are presented in Figure 9, including the ensemble composition, the names corresponding to family roles, scientific parameters (sizes), and the role of each ching during performances.

No.	Ching ensemble (6 pieces)	Quantity (piece)	Diameter (cm)	Thickness (cm)	Role
1	Can (Mother)	2	40.5	6.7	Staccato
2	Tok (Eldest Child)	1	39	6.63	Rhythm
3	Tok Moan (Second Child)	2	39	6.6	Keeping rhythm
4	Kuân (Youngest Child)	1	38	6	Melody

Figure 9: The 6-ching ensemble in a table made by the author.

THE 7-CHING ENSEMBLE WITH A DRUM



Figure 10: A 7-piece ching ensemble + 1 drum of the Xơđăng people in Quảng Ngãi.
Photo by the author.

The 7-ching ensemble, accompanied by a drum, is widely used by the Xơđăng people in Quảng Ngãi, especially in community life and village festivals. The ching mallets are made from the Ta tree (referred to as Xà Nố or Mần Đậu by the Cor people), with a length of about 29 cm and a diameter of

3 cm. These mallets are typically dried in the sun before use. The dimensions of the 7-ching ensemble are detailed in Figure 11.

No.	Ching ensemble (7 pieces)	Diameter (cm)		Thickness (cm)	Note
		Inner	Outer		
1	Ching 1	40		7.5	Flat
2	Ching 2	40	40.5	7.5	Has a knob
3	Ching 3	39.1	39.5	6.5	Has a knob
4	Ching 4	38.4	38.5	7	Has a knob
5	Ching 5	38.4	38.8	6.6	Has a knob
6	Ching 6	38.1	39.6	7	Has a knob
7	Ching 7	38.7		6.8	Has a knob

Figure 11: The dimensions of the 7-ching ensemble of the Xơ Đăng people in Quảng Ngãi in a table made by the author.

THE CHING H'LÊNH ENSEMBLE

Ching H'lênh is a term used to describe various ching ensembles of the Xơ Đăng people, which come in the following configurations: 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15 chings. The most common configurations are:

- 8-ching Ching H'lênh: 7 flat chings + 1 knobbed ching
- 9-ching Ching H'lênh: 9 flat chings + 1 drum
- 10-ching Ching H'lênh: 9 flat chings + 1 knobbed ching
- 12-ching Ching H'lênh: 11 flat chings + 1 knobbed ching
- 13-ching Ching H'lênh: 8 flat chings + 5 knobbed chings
- 14-ching Ching H'lênh: 11 flat chings + 3 knobbed chings
- 15-ching Ching H'lênh: 12 small flat chings + 3 knobbed chings

In addition to the configurations above, there is usually one hơgur (drum) included in the ensemble. The Ching H'lênh is composed of two types of chings: knobbed and flat. The number of knobbed chings and flat chings is typically odd, except in the case of the 15-ching ensemble. During performances, the artisan stands in place or moves in a counterclockwise circle, holding the ching with the left hand and striking the inner surface of the ching with a mallet held in the right hand.



Figure 12 (left): A 9-piece ching ensemble + 1 drum; Figure 13 (right): Đinh Thị Lu performing a solo on a 9-piece ching ensemble. Photo by the author.



Figure 14: A 10-piece ching ensemble + 1 drum owned by an Artisan in Sơn Tây Thượng Commune. Photo by the author.

THE 10-CHING ENSEMBLE

The 10-ching ensemble includes 7 flat chings and 3 knobbed chings. These chings are named as follows:

- Ching Con (Child Ching)
- Pan Đông Ching (Elder Brother Ching)
- Linh Lang Ching (Younger Sister Ching)
- Pan Đông Tiêu (Younger Brother Ching)
- H'lênh (Eldest Sister Ching, leading the rhythm for the smaller chings)
- Ching Can (Mother Ching)
- Goong Doh (Younger Ching, small flat ching)
- Pam Đông Goong (Elder Brother Ching with a knob)
- Tok Cãn (Grandmother Ching with a knob)
- Goong Can (Mother Ching with a knob)

Each ching plays a specific role in the ensemble, contributing to the overall harmony and rhythm of the performance.

No.	Name	Role	Diameter (cm)	Knob?
1	Goong can (Mother)	Base tone, rhythm	Inside: 56.3, Outside: 60.4	Has a knob
2	Tok cãn (Grandmother)	Base tone + rhythm	Inside: 42.8, Outside: 45.5	Has a knob
3	Pan đông goong (Eldest brother)	Harmony, melody	Inside: 23, Outside: 34	Has a knob
4	Goong doh (Younger brother)	Harmony, melody	40.5	No knob
5	Ching can (Mother)	Harmony, melody	38	No knob
6	Ching H'lênh (Elder sister)	Leads the smaller ching instruments during the ensemble	35	No knob
7	Pan đông tiêu (Second brother)	Melody	32.5	No knob
8	Linh lang ching (Younger sister)	Melody	30.2	No knob
9	Pan dong ching (Older brother)	Melody	28	No knob
10	Ching con (Child)	Melody	25	No knob

Figure 15: All ching roles played in the ensemble, contributing to the overall harmony and rhythm of the performance in a table made by the author.

THE 13-CHING ENSEMBLE

The 13-ching ensemble consists of 8 flat chings and 5 knobbed chings, accompanied by one hogur (drum). Among the 8 flat chings, the Ching Can (Mother Ching) is placed at the beginning of the ensemble, and the Ching Kuân (Youngest Child Ching) is at the end. These two chings are individual and not paired with any other chings. The remaining 6 flat chings are arranged into 3 pairs, each named according to the family roles, such as Eldest Child, Second Child, and Penultimate Child. Each pair of chings is considered a yin-yang couple, or as the artisans believe, a husband and wife pair. During performances, these paired chings play in opposition—where the husband's ching asks, the wife's ching responds. The names and arrangements of the three pairs of chings are as follows:

- First Pair: Ching Tô Tiêu and Ching Tạo Tiêu (husband and wife), also known as Tiêu Ka Lô (husband) and Tiêu Ka Zi (wife).
- Second Pair: Ching Tô Linh Lang Tiêu and Ching Tạo Linh Lang Tiêu (husband and wife), also known as Linh Lang Tiêu Ka Lô (husband) and Linh Lang Tiêu Ka Zi (wife).
- Third Pair: Ching Tô Lênh Lênh and Ching Tạo Lênh Lênh (husband and wife), also known as Lênh Lênh Ka Lô (husband) and Lênh Lênh Ka Zi (wife).

Finally, the Ching Kuân (Youngest Child Ching) is positioned at the end of the ensemble, completing the arrangement.

ADDITIONAL CHING ENSEMBLES

In addition to the 8-flat ching arrangement with its specified family hierarchy, the ensemble includes a group of 5 knobbed chings with the following designations:

- Goong Mang: Small knobbed ching (Youngest Child)
- Goong Tiêu: Medium-sized knobbed ching (Second Child)
- Goong Put: Father Ching, responsible for maintaining the rhythm and controlling the tempo of the ensemble
- Goong Can: Mother Ching
- Goong Cãn: Largest and lowest-pitched knobbed ching, referred to as the Grandmother Ching

The 13-ching ensemble is accompanied by one hogur (drum), creating a complete set for performance.

THE 15-CHING ENSEMBLE

The 15-ching ensemble comprises 12 small flat chings, known as Ching H'lênh, and 3 knobbed chings. The increase in the number of flat chings from the previous arrangements serves to strengthen the middle positions of the ensemble. These 12 flat chings are arranged according to a matrilineal family structure (excluding the father's position), as follows:

- 1 Ching Kol: Also known as Ching Mang (Youngest Child)
- 1 Ching Can: Mother Ching

5 Pairs of chings:

- Tô Tiêu / Tạo Tiêu (Eldest and Younger Wife Chings)
- Tô Nai / Tạo Nai (Eldest and Younger Chings)
- Tô B'roong / Tạo B'roong (Eldest and Younger Chings)
- Tô Linh / Tạo Linh Linh (Eldest and Younger Chings)
- Tô Lênh Lênh / Tạo Lênh Lênh (Eldest and Younger Chings)

These pairs of chings are organized in a manner reflecting family relationships, evoking the traditional longhouse model where multiple small families live together.

THE HƠGUR DRUM

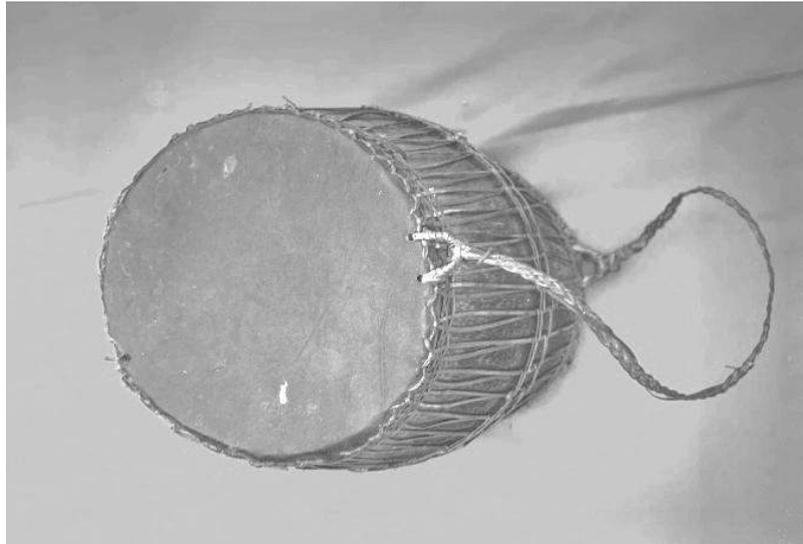


Figure 16: Hơgur Drum of the Xơ Đăng People. The rattan bindings, the body, and the method of skin attachment is clearly visible. Photo by the author.

The hơgur is a small drum used by the Xơ Đăng people, with a size and structure similar to drums used by the Cor and H'rê ethnic groups. The hơgur measures 41–45 cm in length, with a drumhead diameter of 25 cm. The drum body is carved from a single piece of wood, typically from a tree whose fruits attract birds. The outer surface of the drum body is wrapped with over a hundred rattan strips woven in a diamond pattern, and a few pebbles are placed inside to enhance the sound. The drumhead is made from animal skins such as deer, muntjac, goat, or cow, but never buffalo skin. The performer wears the drum around their waist and plays it with their hands (not with sticks), primarily to maintain rhythm during ensemble performances. The hơgur is often played in conjunction with the ching ensemble during many festivals and celebrations of the community; however, like many other Xơ Đăng instruments, it is not permitted to be used in funeral rites.

According to elderly artisans, the Xơ Đăng do not use buffalo skin for drumheads because the buffalo is a sacrificial animal to the deities during the buffalo-stabbing ritual, and its image is highly revered in their daily lives. To make the drums, they usually choose skins from deer, muntjac, serow, or cow, as they believe these skins produce a more resonant and pleasing sound.

SOME XƠ ĐĂNG CHING COMPOSITIONS

The variety and types of Xơ Đăng ching are rich and diverse, which underscores the importance of ching in the cultural life of the Xơ Đăng and reflects the superior development of their musical performance art. However, the number of ching compositions is relatively limited. The Xơ Đăng ching compositions are often lively and joyful, such as *Mừng lúa mới* (Celebrating the new rice), *Mừng chiến thắng* (Celebrating victory), *Ơi anh ơi* (Oh, brother), and *Đãk tu*. Here, we do not intend to delve deeply into the compositions or their harmonization. It can be said that almost every community celebration and joyous occasion of the Xơ Đăng resonates with the sounds of these compositions.

For instance, the *Mừng chiến thắng* ching piece (excerpted melody), collected and notated by Thế Truyền, consists of only six measures, but it is played repeatedly many times.

Biểu diễn: Đội ching
xã Sơn Bua, Sơn Tây

Nhịp nhàng - hân hoan

Hàng âm 8 nốt ứng với 8 hoặc 9 chiếc ching

Figure 17: Melodic excerpt of the piece *Mùng chiến thắng* made by the author.

Biểu diễn: Đội ching
xã Sơn Bua, Sơn Tây

Vui tươi - dân dã

Hàng âm 7 nốt ứng với 7 chiếc ching hoặc nhiều hơn

Figure 18: Melodic excerpt of the piece *Oi anh oi* made by the author.

Another example is the *Oi anh oi!* ching piece (excerpted melody), also collected and notated by the author.

Among the ching compositions particularly cherished by the Xođăng, *Oi anh oi!* stands out as a masterpiece of their folk performance art. When this ching piece is played, it seems that almost everyone in the village, young and old, male and female, wants to join in the celebration. They dance in a circle, moving counterclockwise.

Another notable ching piece is *Mùng lúa mới* (Celebrating the New Rice) (excerpted melody), collected and notated by the author.



Figure 19: The piece with many repetitions, called *Mừng lúa mới*, is a welcome of the harvest. Excerpt made by the author.

The *Mừng lúa mới* ching is used when the harvest is complete or during moonlit nights and festivals, where the Xơ Đăng often perform ching. The sound of the ching reverberates through the mountains and forests, touching the hearts of all who hear it. During festivals, the buffalo-stabbing ceremony, harvest celebrations, weddings, and other joyful community events, people often sing ranghê (a form of spontaneous, free-spirited singing) and play the *Mừng lúa mới* ching. This piece is typically performed with an eight-piece ching ensemble.

Like *Mừng chiến thắng* and *Oi anh ơi*, the *Mừng lúa mới* ching piece is also played repeatedly during community performances. The melody of *Mừng lúa mới* is vibrant, joyful, and lively, captivating everyone.

The *Mừng lúa mới* ching piece is not exclusively used for celebrating the new rice. It is played during almost all joyful community events, such as festivals, weddings, and celebrations of successful hunts, among others.

CONCLUSION

The ching of the Xơ Đăng people is performed in an open system, which is a distinctive feature of their music and folk performance art in general. The composition of Xơ Đăng ching ensembles is rich and diverse, surpassing that of neighboring ethnic groups like the Co and H'rê. The scientific measurements of the ching instruments, including inner and outer diameters, highlight the variety in size among the different ching within each Xơ Đăng ensemble.

The Xơ Đăng view each ching ensemble as a family, with each ching representing a family member. This belief is reflected in the names they give each ching, such as ching mẹ (mother ching), ching chị (sister ching), ching anh (brother ching), and ching con (child ching). The mother ching is always the largest and plays a crucial role in performances. This practice likely traces back to a matriarchal society from the distant clan commune era, as indicated by the structure of their traditional stilt houses, which are also divided in a way that reflects this familial organization.

The music of the Xơ Đăng is a priceless cultural heritage, not only for the Xơ Đăng themselves but also for the broader Southeast Asian musical tradition. Due to its cultural significance, the Xơ Đăng ching, along with the Space of Ching Culture in the Central Highlands, was recognized by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on 25th November 2005.

Further research is needed to explore the historical origins and cultural value of these folk instruments in the social life of the Xơ Đăng, focusing on their functions in future projects.

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DECODING THE AULOS

Juan Sebastián Correa Cáceres¹

Abstract

In the eyes of the ancient world, the aulos was probably the most symbolically charged aerophone. Thus, it is known that the ancient Mediterranean and Near East inhabitants took it with them wherever they travelled. This shows the high value that this musical instrument had, especially as an object that served to express culture. While it was known as the aulos in ancient Greece, the Romans called it the tibia or fistula, which is decisive proof of its cultural diffusion in the ancient world. This aerophone consisted of two diverging cylindrical tubes with a single or double reed mouthpiece. Both its design and manufacture illustrate cultural values and musical practices. Apart from being used for entertainment, religious contexts, expeditions, and battles, the aulos was also an item of trade presented as a gift to rulers. By analysing archaeological, written, iconographic, and ethnographic sources, this contribution presents scenarios where the aulos played a role, highlighting its relevance for the societies as mentioned earlier.

Keywords

aulos, spiritual, gender, technology, trade

ORIGINS

The origins of the aulos remain somewhat mysterious². However, a marble figurine discovered on the island of Keros in 1884 suggests that these are probably found in the Aegean region. The figurine representing a man playing the double pipes dates to the Early Bronze Age (2800–2300 BC), specifically to the Early Cycladic Period II (c.2500–2200 BC) (Figure 1). The artefact was found in Kavos Daskaleio, a site that was either a cemetery or a pan-Cycladic sanctuary.³ Therefore, the figurine may be the image of a musician, whose body is buried in one of the graves or a pilgrim's votive offering deposited at the sanctuary in return for the deity's assistance.⁴ It can be inferred that the figurine was primarily used for ceremonial practices. Apart from yielding this figurine, Kavos Daskaleio also produced a statuette of a harpist (Figure 2). Remarkably, both statuettes represent male figures, implying that music in Cycladic society was probably performed by its male members. This contrasts with Nuragic society, where a bronze statuette discovered in Ittiri, Sardinia, represents an androgynous being playing an aulos-type instrument (launeddas) (Figure 3). This suggests that this triple-pipe aerophone was either played by both sexes or by gender-defined minorities, such as homosexuals and bisexuals.

When contemplating the origins of the aulos, it is important to consider that the subject in question may have originated in mainland Greece. The Neolithic settlement of Dispilio in Thessaly, Kastoria, for instance, yielded three fragments of bone pipes which date to 6000 to 5000 BC, while the site of Avgi (c.5700–4500/4300 cal BC), also located near Kastoria, produced a bone pipe with one finger hole (Figure 4).⁵ Despite this evidence, which predates the Aegean figurine, a possible origin of the aulos in mainland Greece cannot be substantiated, as there is no evidence indicating that these Neolithic pipes were played in pairs, as the Keros figurine shows.

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² Aulos (plural auloi). For the Romans, the aulos was the tibia (plural tibiae). The term auletes describes a male aulos player. The word auletrides stands for a female aulos player.

³ The exact provenance of the figurine is unknown. It is thought to be part of the Keros hoard—a collection of over 350 figurines discovered in a deposit north of the settlement of Kavos. This site unfortunately was looted. Gets-Preziosi, 1982; Doulas, 1972 and 2000; Renfrew, 1984: 27-29.

⁴ In antiquity, it was customary to deposit statuettes at the shrine to ask for favours or to thank the gods. In addition, worshippers or musicians also offered musical instruments in dedication to the gods.

⁵ AncientPages.com, 2014; Avgi Kastoria, 2008.



Figure 1: Figurine of a double-pipe player from Keros, Parian marble (Early Cycladic II period c.2500–2200 BC). National Archaeological Museum of Athens (3910). Photograph by the author and with courtesy of the Museum.



Figure 2: Marble statuette of a male figure playing a lyre or harp, Keros (Early Cycladic II period c.2500–2200 BC). National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Photo at the museum accessible via: Robur.q [CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED], , last accessed 13th May 2024. Photograph by the author and with courtesy of the Museum.



Figure 3: Profile view of the ‘Ithyphallic launeddas (flutes or clarinets) player’, a Nuragic bronze statuette (c.800–700 BC). National Archaeology Museum of Cagliari. Photographs by courtesy of the Museum and made by the author.

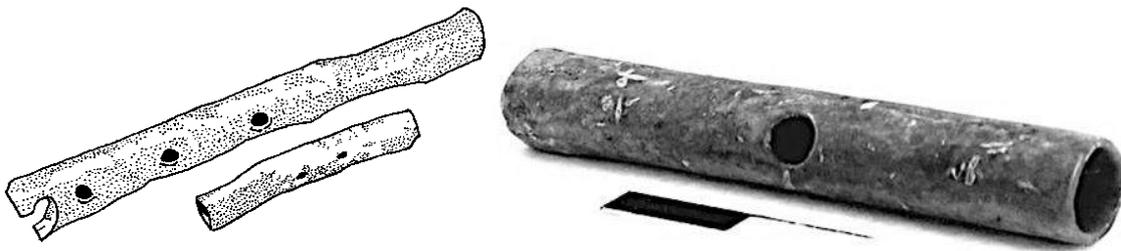


Figure 4: (left to right) Neolithic bone pipes from Dispilio, Kastoria, Greece (redrawn from a photo provided through <http://www.ancientpages.com/2014/10/28/ancient-dispilio-disk-and-traditional-history-of-writing/dispilioflutes01/>, last accessed 13th May 2024). Neolithic bone pipe from Avgi, Kastoria, Greece. Photo by courtesy of the exhibition: http://www.neolithicavgigri.gr/?page_id=50, last accessed 13th May 2024, Dr Georgia Stratouli took these photos and send them to the author.

ARTEFACT OF EXPRESSIVE CULTURE

The aulos was an important part of expressive culture and came to represent the cultural values of different societies in antiquity. The Cycladic society, for example, which emphasised maritime activities such as fishing, trade, and seafaring, unfortunately left no written records; however, its archaeological artefacts allow us to deduce that the instrument played a role in specific activities.⁶ Moreover, they tell us that the aulos playing tradition was passed down from one generation to another since at least the Early Cycladic Period II (c.2500–2200 BC). There is evidence of aulos playing dating back to the Cypro-Archaic II Period (600–480 BC) (Figure 5).

Later literary works could offer insights into the significance of this instrument in Cycladic society. Herodotus, e.g. in his *Histories* (Book I.141), recounts how musicians utilised the aulos to lure fish, shedding light on its cultural importance:⁷

The story of the fluteplayer [*auletes*] who saw some fish in the sea and played his flute [*aulos*] to them in the hope that they would come ashore. When they refused to do so, he took a net, netted a large catch, and hauled

⁶ On Cycladic material culture Getz-Preziosi, 1987.

⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories*. Revised with introduction and notes by John Marincola. Translated by Aubrey De Séincourt. London: Penguin Books.

in. Seeing the fish jumping about, he said to them: It is too late to dance now: you might have danced to my music—but you would not (Herodotus, 2003: 64).

This story may be partly fictitious and partly historical; thus, one can deduce that it was orally transmitted. However, Plutarch confirms that music accompanied various activities because people believed that it could control the minds of individuals and animals.⁸

This explains why the aulos was played during events such as hunts and the scourging of slaves, where the intent was to demonstrate power and control over the prey or the slaves.

Throughout antiquity, the aulos was used in various activities, including banquets, sacrifices, funerals, orgies, festivals, and both public and private religious ceremonies. The presence of auletes or auletrides in activities not typically associated with music, such as the pankration and other athletic events, suggests that Greeks and Romans believed music could influence and shape youthful minds.⁹



Figure 5: Figurine of a musician playing the aulos, Cypro-Archaic II (600-480 BC). Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens. Photograph by the author.

CONNECTIONS WITH THE SPIRITUAL REALM

As suggested by ritual objects found in graves, Cycladic people shared a common concern vis-à-vis death.¹⁰ They likely believed in supernatural forces or deities, and music possibly served as a means to contact them. The aulos has a distinctive voice, quite different from the Cycladic harp: its loud and enticing sound probably served to catch the gods' attention.

The aulos played a crucial role in the religious practices of the Greeks, Cretans, and Romans, particularly during sacrifices. The story of Ismenias, a renowned aulos player from Thebes, illustrates this:¹¹

⁸ Plutarch. 1967. *Moralia Volume XIV*. translated by Benedict Einarson and Phillip H. De Lacy, Loeb Classical Library Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 413.

⁹ The pankration was a violent sport that blended boxing and wrestling with kicking, strangling, and joint manipulation.

¹⁰ Gill and Chippindale, 1993.

¹¹ Plutarch. 1878. *Plutarch's Morals*, translated from the Greek by several hands corrected and revised by William Watson Goodwin (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, III, 235).

And Ismenias piping at a sacrifice, when no good omens appeared, the man that hired him snatched the pipe [aulos] and played very ridiculously himself; and when all found fault, he said: To play satisfactorily is the gift of Heaven. And Ismenias with a smile replied: Whilst I played, the Gods were so well pleased that they were careless of the sacrifice; but to be rid of thy noise they presently received it (Plutarch 1878: 235).

Sacrifices consisted of several practices, most of which were accompanied by music played on the aulos. The aerophone was used to communicate with and please the gods. The sacrifice began with a procession leading an animal to the altar, accompanied by the aulos (Figure 6).¹² This instrument was also used during purification practices, where priests, attendants, and gods engaged in close communion.¹³ Practices related to the sacrificial animal, such as its purification, were not accompanied by the aulos (Figure 7).¹⁴ However, both petitions and prayers by the priest and attendants were set to music.

Sacrifices required validation from the gods, which was obtained by pleasing them. People believed that aulos' music pleased the gods' ears, and thus, the hiring of an aulos player for religious ceremonies was essential. The actual sacrifice and its validation involved offering certain parts of the animal to the gods and burning them on the altar. Typically, these parts included the thighbones, the tail, and the gall bladder. The priest anticipated the tail twisting upwards, indicating that the gods had accepted the sacrifice.¹⁵



Figure 6: Boeotian Lekane (No. 1879,1004.1), c.550 BC, The British Museum, London. A sacrificial procession in honour of the goddess Athena, where a group of people leads the sacrificial animal to the altar, accompanied by the music of the aulos (redrawn from photo accessible via <https://www.bmimages.com/preview.asp?image=00051340001>, last accessed 13th May 2024).



Figure 7: Stamnos by Eucharides Painter (C 10754), Louvre Museum, Paris. (L-R) A priest sprinkles some water over the sacrificial victim. The auletes observes the action but he does not accompany it with music (redrawn from Nordquist 1992: 127-128 by the author with courtesy by the museum).

¹² Kubatzki, 2016; 2018.

¹³ Nordquist, 1992.

¹⁴ Vergara, 2014.

¹⁵ Ekroth, 2014.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Both males and females played the aulos. However, the instrument was mainly associated with women known as auletrides or hetairai. These female aulos-players, often of slave status, worked as entertainers in private gatherings or symposia, which flourished during the Hellenistic period (c.321–31 BC) and continued through the Byzantine times (Figure 8). Auletrides' performances aimed to provide pleasure and enjoyment for the guests. As slaves, they could be prostituted. These private gatherings or symposia were male-dominated contexts where no free women were allowed.¹⁶



Figure 8: Bell krater. Symposium scene. A woman plays the aulos at the centre. Source: Photo by the author 13th May 2024.. Dombrena painter, Thisbe. Late 5th-early 4th century BC. Picture is in the public domain.

The Greeks associated the aulos with sexual connotations. These denote the physical aspects of the body, focusing on the distinct biological characteristics associated with males and females. For example, the so-called wedding aulos was meant to represent the bride and the groom. The longest pipe represented the male, while the shortest represented the woman. This case echoes the condition of sexual dimorphism, where the male is taller than the female.¹⁷

For the Greeks, the sound of the aulos was orgiastic. The musical mode that was directly related to this instrument was the Phrygian. For Socrates, the Athenian Classical philosopher, the Phrygian mode is akin to the aulos because both have the same potential and are equally exciting and orgiastic.¹⁸ The music played at bacchanals and orgies was based on the Phrygian mode and performed on the aulos. Bacchanals were Roman festivals dedicated to Bacchus (the Greek Dionysus). These were characterised by ecstatic music, dancing, drinking, and revelry. Orgies, on the contrary, were rites associated with various deities and included a sexual component. The rituals aimed to induce spiritual and emotional ecstasy, while sexual activities symbolised fertility, life force, and the breaking of social norms to connect with the divine.¹⁹

¹⁶ Touliatos, 1993; Goldman, 2015.

¹⁷ Wilson. 1999. Citing Pollux's Onomasticon, vol. 4, 80.

¹⁸ Aristotle. 1908. Aristotle's Politics. translated by Benjamin Jowet. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 316.

¹⁹ Roberts, 2005: 230-232.

SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURAL STATUS CONCERNING THE AULOS

In ancient Greece, most aulos players were foreigners of slave status. They hailed from diverse corners including Phrygia, Miletus, and Smyrna. Some of these players were professional performers who, apart from entertaining at private gatherings, played at public events and competitions. A recent discovery indicates that music on the aulos was played at Plato's deathbed.²⁰ The scroll, discovered at the villa of Papyri in Herculaneum, says that an auletride from Thrace played the music intended to soothe Plato's agony. The philosopher, however, did not appreciate the performance. Despite being gravely ill and feverish, Plato criticised the musician's poor sense of rhythm in the presence of a Chaldean guest from Mesopotamia (Ansa, 2024). Both auletes and auletrides were considered servants, and their status was lower than that of singers (Figure 9). Citing Athenaeus (1854), the ensuing passage exemplifies this point:

But the Hilarodus, as he is called, is a more respectable kind of poet than these men are; for he is never effeminate or indecorous, but he wears a white manly robe, and he is crowned with a golden crown: and in former times he used to wear sandals, as Aristocles tells us; but at the present day he wears only slippers. And some man or woman sings an accompaniment to him, as to a person who sings to the flute [aulos]. And a crown is given to a Hilarodus, as well as to a person who sings to the flute [*aulos*]; but such honours are not allowed to a player on the harp or on the flute [aulos] (Athenaeus, 1854: 990).

Athenaeus indicates that music held a subordinate status in ancient Greece. Aulos players received payment either from their patrons or from their singers. Greek law, however, forbade payment of more than two drachmas to them (Aristotle, 1912).²¹ Auletes and auletrides were often denied prizes at events due to their perceived low social status.



Figure 9: Music performance called auloidia. A bearded auletes together with a singer called aulodes on a podium. Attic black-figure pelike (530-520 BC), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo by courtesy of The Met (2017) Museum. Accessible via: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/eb/>

²⁰ Plato (428–347 BC) was a philosopher who wrote mostly in the form of dialogues. He wrote about music, education, and science.

²¹ Aristotle. 1912. *Athenian Constitution*, translated by Frederic George Kenyon. London: G. Bell and Sons, 92.

Terracotta_neck-pelike_%28wine_jar%29_MET_DT255674.jpg CC0 1.0 Universal, Picture in the public domain.

According to Aristotle (1908), the aulos could not be used for educational purposes because it was an amoral instrument.²² Consequently, the aerophone was reserved for performances that encouraged catharsis, serving as an outlet for emotion afforded by drama rather than learning. Aristotle's predecessors banned its study, specifically for young people and free men. Although the aulos was mainly associated with people of low social status and slaves, it was also popular among the upper classes.

ITEM OF TECHNOLOGY

The aulos evolved from a simple piece of bone with holes to the Imperial tibia found at Pompeii (Figure 10 right). These instruments were made from reed, bone, ivory, wood, or metal. Immigrants, mainly from Crete and Greece, may have contributed to the development of the Cycladic aulos during the Early Bronze Age (2800–2300 BC). It is known that they brought their culture to the Cyclades, including their music. Archaeological evidence indicates that they shared their knowledge and skills in stoneworking and pottery making.²³ This raises the question of whether Cretans adopted the aulos from Cycladic people or vice versa. It is known, however, that Cretans developed a type of aulos with an upwards-curved horn attached to one of its pipes. This aulos may be contemporary or slightly later than the Cycladic. The horn attached to one of its pipes may have been purely ornamental or functioned as a bell, amplifying the sound. This distinctive feature is undoubtedly a technological development.

The Cretan aulos is depicted on a sarcophagus dating to c.1400 BC. This artefact was discovered at the archaeological site of Aghia Triadha (Figure 11). The Cretan aulos was undoubtedly created before that date, as it was incorporated into Cretan religious ceremonies. Its invention may even date back to Minoan times. The fact that the Minoan population resulted from the interbreeding of Cretan Neolithic people with immigrants from mainland Greece, Anatolia, and the Aegean leads us to assume that the invention of the Cretan aulos was brought to Crete in some way by those immigrants. The Phrygians (fl. c.800 BC), who inhabited central-western Anatolia, had a similar instrument that the Greeks called the Phrygian aulos. This instrument was an improved version of the Cretan aulos. The Romans also adopted the Phrygian aulos and called it the *elymos* (plural *elymoi*) (Figure 12).

The exact nature of these pipes remains uncertain. However, subsequent authors offer insights into their design and purpose. Varro (116–27 BC) observes that the right pipe of the Phrygian aulos has one hole, the left two, one of which produces a sharp sound, the other a dull one.²⁴ The left Phrygian pipe, being curved and longer, produces a lower tone compared to the straight, right one. Servius (*Aeneid* Book X. 615) notes that Phrygian pipes vary in length and possess bores of differing sizes.²⁵ Tibullus (259 *Elegiae* Book II. 1.85) describes them as curved.²⁶ Pollux (1824) mentions that Phrygian pipes, or *auloi elymoi*, consist of two pipes, one longer than the other. According to Porphyry (AD 234–c.305), Phrygian pipes feature a narrow bore, resulting in deeper tones.²⁷ Hesychius of Alexandria (5th or 6th century AD) suggests that playing the Phrygian pipes correctly involves holding the curved pipe in the left hand.²⁸

A 'typical' aulos had circular holes (Figure 10, left). It had four to six holes in each pipe, including a vent and a thumb hole. The vent hole was typically located near the bottom of the pipe and was not

²² Aristotle. 1908. *Aristotle's Politics*. translated by Benjamin Jowet. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 312-313.

²³ Barber, 1987; Pedley, 2007.

²⁴ Bloemendal, 2010.

²⁵ Moore, 2012.

²⁶ Tibullus, Catullus. 1988. *Pervigilium Veneris*. Translated by Francis Warre Cornish, John Percival Postgate, and John William Mackail, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge : Harvard University Press / London: William Heinemann,.

²⁷ Howard, 1893.

²⁸ Schmidt, Mauricius. 1864. *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*. Jenae: Maukij, 459.

fingering. The thumb hole was situated between the index and middle fingers, and it was used to produce different tones.

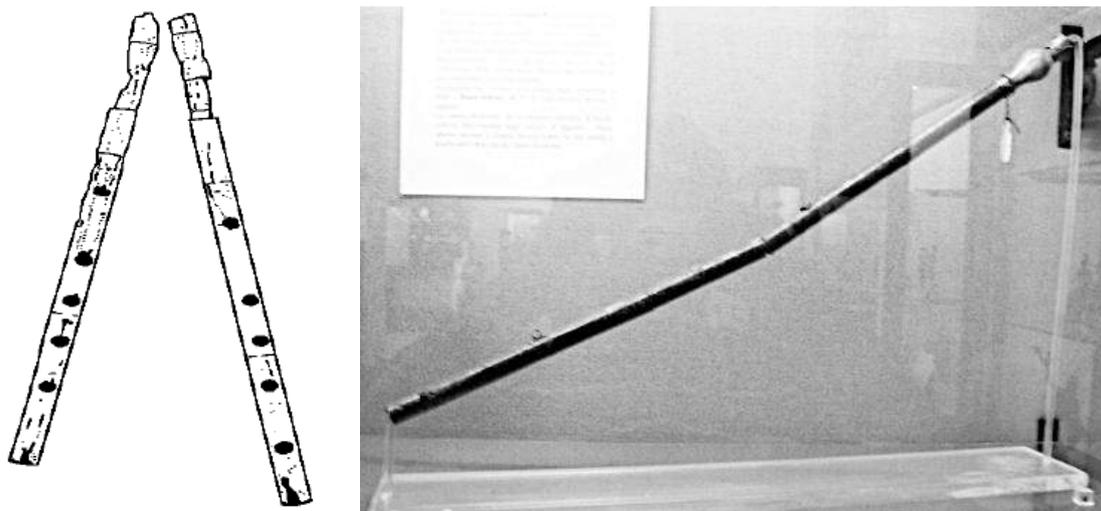


Figure 10: (left to right) The auloi of Pydna, reconstruction. Redrawn by the author from Psaroudakes 2008: 207, Figure 2). The Pompeii auloi or tibiae. Photograph by the author with courtesy of the respective museum.

Athenaeus (1854) tells us that Pronomus (c.400 BC) invented an aulos in which he could play the whole harmonia, namely, the Dorian, Phrygian, and Lydian musical scales.²⁹ Before this contribution, aulos players needed three types of aulos, one for each scale (Pausanias, 1935).³⁰ Pronomus increased the number of holes in the instrument, which is proportional to the length of the tube. He fitted the aulos with a system of rotatable collars that enabled holes to be opened and closed. Late specimens had collars, hook-shaped levers, and half collars which operated through rods with buttons. The instrument had up to 24 holes of different sizes and shapes (Figure 10, right).

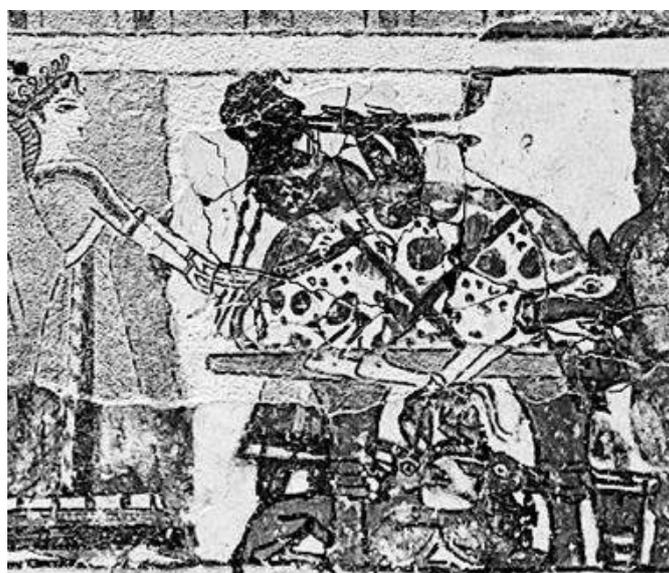


Figure 11: Cretan aulos depicted at the Aghia Triadha's Sarcophagus (c.1400 BC), Iraklion Museum, Crete (Photo: ArchaiOptix (2019) accessible via [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Painting_on_limestone_sarcophagus_of_religious_rituals_from_Hagia_Triada_-_Heraklion_AM_-_06_\(cropped\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Painting_on_limestone_sarcophagus_of_religious_rituals_from_Hagia_Triada_-_Heraklion_AM_-_06_(cropped).jpg) [CC BY-SA 4.0], picture in its current shape is in the public domain.

Archaeological evidence indicates that they shared their knowledge and skills in stoneworking and pottery making. This aulos may be contemporary or slightly later than the Cycladic. The horn attached

²⁹ Athenaeus. 1854. *Deipnosophistae*, [English *The Deipnosophists or, Banquet of the Learned, of Athenaeus*]. Translated by Charles Duke Yonge, 3 vols. London: Henry G. Bohn, vol. 3, 1008.

³⁰ Pausanias. 1935. *Description of Greece*. trans. by William Henry Samuel Jones, 5 vols. Loeb Classical Library London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, vol. 4, 225.

to one of its pipes may have been purely ornamental or functioned as a bell, amplifying the sound. This distinctive feature is undoubtedly a technological development.



Figure 12: The Phrygian aulos or elymos. The photo is by Anna-Katharina Rieger (2009) and accessible via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relief_of_Archigallus.jpg, last accessed 13th May 2024. This picture is cropped by the author and in the public domain.

ITEM OF TRADE

Trade plays a crucial role in facilitating musical exchanges. The case of the silver pipes discovered at the royal cemetery of Ur in Mesopotamia may be an illustrative example (Figure 13).³¹ The pipes come from a burial context, namely, a tomb that probably belonged to a court musician. The fact that the artefact was deposited as a grave good suggests it was an object of prestige. These objects are commonly brought from distant places and are valuable – first, aesthetically, and second, as a commodity. It is known that Mesopotamia imported metals and stones from Anatolia. Silver mining in Anatolia began around the fourth millennium BC, with notable activity at the Nahklah mines.³² In light of this information, the pipes from Ur were possibly made there or brought as raw materials to Mesopotamia. The idea that the pipes were included among the luxury goods brought in trade is appealing.

The commercial exchanges between Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Syria greatly contributed to the different aspects of the aulos, for instance, in using special materials for their construction.³³ The choice of materials depended mainly on the wealth of the culture. Instead of bone and ivory, precious materials such as silver were also used. These materials were undoubtedly imported and expensive, a reason why certain hierarchies, such as the one of Ur in Mesopotamia, used them as a symbol of their economic power.

³¹ Woolley, 1934: 258-259.

³² Muhly, 2011: 859.

³³ Postgate, 1992: 211-216.



Figure 13: (left to right) Fragments from silver pipes, Ur, Early Dynastic III (c.2500 BC), The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Photo: © Copyright Penn Museum). Silver pipes from Ur, reconstruction. Redrawn by the author from Rimmer, 1969: 39, Figure 9.

CONCLUSION

While the origins of the aulos remain a mystery, archaeological evidence suggests possible scenarios regarding its uses and cultural significance. The marble figurine represents Aegean traditions during the early Bronze Age. While implying ceremonial and religious contexts, it suggests gender-specific roles within Cycladic society. The question of whether the aulos originated in mainland Greece remains open. The evidence from Neolithic settlements cannot be substantiated, as it is unknown whether these pipes were played simultaneously. Further research and archaeological findings may corroborate this hypothesis.

The aulos was important to various ancient societies. Its popularity ensured its survival through generations. Music played on the aulos intertwined with ancient rituals, enhancing their spiritual atmosphere. Rituals in which sacrifices were offered to the gods needed validation. The melodies of the aulos not only communicated with the gods but also pleased them, thereby validating the sacrifice.

The aulos carried significant social implications. It was primarily associated with women, who often held slave status. These women, known as auletrides or hetairai in ancient Greece, entertained guests in private gatherings, where they ran the risk of sexual exploitation due to their social status. The sexual connotations of the aulos show the intricate connection between music, gender, and politics in ancient Greek society.

The evolution of the aulos shows the relationship between technology, culture, and trade throughout history. Both the material choices and manufacturing techniques reflect the economic prosperity of various cultures. For instance, the silver pipes from Mesopotamia exemplify that culture's economic affluence and trade influence. The Imperial *tibiae* from Pompeii exhibit technological advancements, economic dominance, and the link between music, material culture, and social dynamics.

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DANCING IDENTITIES: THE WALTZ AS A CULTURAL BRIDGE IN KAZAKH MUSIC

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Abstract

This paper examines the cultural transformation and vocal adaptation of the European waltz genre in Kazakh music. Although the waltz originated as a social dance in 18th-century Europe, its evolution in the Kazakh context illustrates a dynamic intercultural process shaped by national aesthetics, folklore traditions, and the specifics of vocal music. In the study, we consider the appearance of the waltz in Kazakh music in the 1930s and 1950s and examine how composers such as Latif Khamidi, Nurgisa Tlendiev, and Shamshi Kaldayakov adapted this form to pop vocal music. The analysis demonstrates how the waltz transformed from a dance form into a poetic and emotional vocal genre reflecting the national worldview and musical identity. Special attention is paid to the legacy of Shamshi Kaldayakov, who is often called the ‘King of the Kazakh waltz’, whose melodies made this genre truly popular. It is clearly shown that the pop waltz in Kazakh music is not just a genre phenomenon but also a form of cultural dialogue between tradition and modernity, and between the national spirit and a universal musical language.

Keywords

Kazakh waltz, vocal genre, cultural adaptation, East-West dialogue, popular music

HOW DID WALTZ COME INTO KAZAKHSTAN? INTRODUCTION

Waltz as a term appeared in the 18th century and originally meant a peasant dance rooted in the Austrian and South German folk traditions of the 16th century. Already at the beginning of the 17th century, similar dances were performed at balls at the court of the Habsburgs. Over time, penetrating into urban culture, the waltz became more refined – its movements acquired smoothness, roundness, and elegance. Along with gavotte, mazurka, and cancan, it has evolved into one popular dance and musical genres of the era (Abdullina, Sui, 2018: 314).

The waltz is characterized by a moderate or fast tempo and a size of $\frac{3}{4}$ (less often $\frac{6}{8}$). The first written mention of it dates back to 1770, and by the beginning of the 19th century, dance had already dominated the balls of Vienna and Paris. The heyday of the genre is associated with the work of Johann Strauss Sr. and his son, Johann Strauss Jr., who was nicknamed the King of the Waltz (Ivanovsky, 1978: 17).

As it spread across Europe, the waltz split into several regional styles. The most famous was the Viennese waltz with its fast tempo and graceful rotational movements. The Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), which even received the unofficial name Dancing Congress, played a special role in popularizing dance (Stratton, 2024: 384). Despite the initial public resistance and criticism, the waltz

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gradually gained cultural recognition, becoming a key element of diplomatic balls attended by the aristocracy and the new professional elite.

In parallel, other varieties developed, such as the slower French waltz and the lyrically inspired waltz with elements of the Landler, reflecting local traditions. This flexibility of the genre not only ensured its success in different cultures but also laid the foundation for the adaptation of the waltz outside Europe, including Central Asia.

But how did the waltz come to Kazakhstan? Kazakhstan is a country with a distinct musical heritage and a national performing school, where genre synthesis has become an important vector for the development of professional art in the 20th century. The waltz in the works of Kazakh composers often becomes a space of dialogue between the European form and the Kazakh modal system, manifesting itself as an expressive means of lyrical melody and national intonation.

Mosienko in her work analyzes how in the 1930s and 1940s, the drama theater played a key role in adapting European musical genres to the Kazakh musical tradition (Mosienko, 2016). At the same time, the formation of the nomad school of composition demonstrated a double perception – a combination of folk performing style with Western musical forms. This synthesis can be interpreted as a conscious intercultural dialogue, where the waltz is transformed through the prism of local rhythmic and melodic structures.

Similar intercultural processes can be observed across Asia, where European musical traditions interacted with local cultures in diverse and often uneven ways. As Bayramova (2022) notes in *Oil, Trade, and Music: Penetration of European Musical Instruments and Music to Azerbaijan and Its Subsequence*, the spread of Western instruments and educational systems in Azerbaijan at the turn of the 20th century shaped the foundations of modern Azerbaijani composition and performance. A comparable process is described by Tạ Hoàng May Anh (2025) in *The French Cultural Acculturation Process in Vietnamese Songs before 1975*, where the encounter between French and Vietnamese musical languages produced new hybrid forms that reflected both imported and indigenous aesthetics. Extending these regional perspectives, Tan Shyr Ee (2024) emphasizes that global music knowledge transmission unfolds in uneven patterns, generating new hierarchies and marginalities within supposedly inclusive cultural exchanges. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that musical globalization is a multilayered negotiation of meanings in which local creativity redefines the very idea of ‘global’. The development of the Kazakh waltz fits into this broader pattern, representing an active and conscious reinterpretation of the European genre through national artistic sensibility.

Of particular interest is the manifestation of the waltz in Kazakh pop music of the second half of the 20th century, for example, in the work of Shamshi Kaldayakov and Nurgisa Tlendiev, where the classical form of the waltz is filled with national intonations and becomes part of the mass musical consciousness. The pop waltz in Kazakhstan can be considered as a form of cultural identity that conveys not only musical but also socio-cultural meanings.

Thus, the study of the Kazakh waltz in the aspect of intercultural adaptation of the genre makes it possible to identify the mechanisms of integration of global musical forms into local contexts, which makes this study relevant for both ethnomusicology and cultural studies, musicology, and interdisciplinary studies of cultural globalization.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the transformation of the waltz genre from its European origin to adaptation in Kazakh academic and pop music culture, revealing the mechanisms of intercultural interaction and the peculiarities of genre interpretation in a local context.

This research is very personal. It grew out of the live practice of communicating with Kazakh performers and composers, as well as from the desire to understand why waltz continues to appeal so directly to both artists and the audience. Ryskulov, who proposed this topic for research, relies in his work on the live experience of interacting with contemporary performers, with Iskakova, Saduakassova, Karimov, Alpeissova, Akparova, and Nurtaza, in turn, provided the study with a methodological basis, as they work directly with modern Kazakhstani researchers whose dissertation research is devoted to waltz topics, for example, with Myltykbayeva. Together, we sought to combine living empirical experience with a solid methodological base, so that the resulting research could help, firstly,

trace the evolution of the waltz and, secondly, answer the question of why the waltz is becoming increasingly popular in Kazakhstan.

CLASSICAL EUROPEAN WALTZ

The waltz, as a musical and dance genre, originated at the end of the 18th century in the German-speaking regions of Europe – mainly in Austria and Southern Germany – and soon became an integral part of both secular and professional musical culture. Originating from peasant circular dances (such as the Ländler that has the same steps but a different tempo (Reeser, 1949: 16)), the waltz quickly gained popularity due to its simplicity, paired performance, and expressive melody. For the first time as a separate genre, it began to form in the 1770s – 1780s, and already at the beginning of the 19th century, it gained considerable popularity in Vienna (Stratton, 2024: 384).



Figure 1: Capodanno a Vienna con il Ballo nella Hofburg [New Year's Eve in Vienna with the Ball at the Hofburg]. Picture in the public domain since 2016.

The key element distinguishing the waltz from previous dance forms was the three-part meter with a characteristic emphasis on the first part: this created a feeling of smoothness, rotation, which became both the musical and kinetic basis of the genre. In addition, the waltz was accompanied by elegant melodies, smooth harmonic transitions, and steady rhythmic formulas, which made it easily recognizable and adaptable. Spreading across Europe and beyond, it took on new forms – from French to English, and from Polish to Hungarian, becoming a kind of cultural code of the Romantic era. In addition to dance halls, it became a part of opera and chamber works, appearing in such authors as Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Liszt, and others, embedding themselves in the fabric of symphonies, ballets, and piano miniatures.

Thus, already in the 19th century, the waltz went beyond its national origin and became a universal art form capable of integration into various cultural contexts, which predetermined its widespread internationalization in the 20th century.

Spreading its influence beyond the German-Austrian musical tradition, in the 19th century, during the period of romantic music, the waltz became very popular, as it reflected the spirit of the times (Noh, 2016: 6). Over time, the waltz has acquired many regional variations, each reflecting the aesthetic and rhythmic preferences of the relevant cultural context. As the waltz spread around the world, it did not lose its recognition, but it acquired new features in every culture, demonstrating a high degree of adaptability and the ability to synthesize with local traditions. These examples are important for understanding how the waltz was able to integrate into the Kazakh musical culture, both in academic and pop formats. Throughout its history, the waltz has served not only an aesthetic but also an important social function, reflecting changes in the social structure and tastes of different eras. His

transformation from a peasant folk dance into an exquisite symbol of secular culture is a vivid example of how musical forms become a reflection of cultural dynamics and social mobility.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the waltz became a symbol of a new freedom of the body and expression of feelings, contrasting itself with the more formalized Baroque court dances. His pair structure, which allowed for close physical contact, was perceived as a challenge to old norms and initially drew criticism from a conservative society. However, by the middle of the 19th century, the waltz had consolidated its position as one of the main genres of urban leisure, having penetrated into dance halls, salons, and then into concert life. In this sense, it has become an instrument of social integration, bringing together representatives of different classes and cultures.

From an artistic point of view, the waltz demonstrated a high flexibility of genre form. It retained the structural features of the dance genre – three-four rhythm, repetition, periodicity – but became actively used in chamber, symphonic, opera, and ballet music. Waltzes by Ravel, Hindemith, and Prokofiev demonstrate how the waltz can act as an expressive means of lyricism, drama, irony, and the grotesque (Noh, 2016).

Later, in the middle of the 20th century, the waltz became a part of pop and film music, embodying romance, nostalgia, and sometimes irony in relation to the past. Its melodiousness and clarity of form have made it particularly convenient for stylizations and processing in a wide variety of genres – from jazz to pop music and even rock. The ability of the waltz to adapt to various musical traditions is directly related to its structural flexibility and versatility. At the level of rhythm, harmony, and form, the waltz is a fairly stable, but at the same time open, model that allows you to include local intonation and rhythmic elements. This adaptability makes it particularly attractive for inclusion in national musical languages.

The classical rhythmic basis of the waltz is a three-four rhythm (3/4) with an emphasis on the first movement, which creates a feeling of roundness and smoothness. This size is easily stylized and syncopated and varies rhythmically, allowing it to be adapted to various musical traditions. For instance, the Latin American waltz, *vals criollo*, which appeared on the basis of European music, acquired specific features characteristic of Latin American music (Veniard, 2013). In the Russian tradition, there is also a tendency to saturate the rhythmic structure with elements of broad chant and length (e.g., in Glinka's *Fantasy Waltz* or Lyadov's *Waltz*).

The harmonic language of the waltz is usually based on functional tonality, often using stable turns: tonality – subdominant – dominant – tonic. Such a clear structure makes the waltz understandable and easily recognizable. In different cultures, local modes are added to this: for example, in Kazakh music, intonations of the pentatonic, specific modulations and quarter-fifth turns are possible. The Kriol waltz is characterized by movements in parallel major and minor keys, which brings the harmonic language closer to the lyrics of popular songs.

A typical waltz form is a three—part (A–B–A) or verse-chorus, which makes it easy to create both instrumental and vocal compositions. Such formal predictability is convenient both for dancing and for the musical design of stage and variety performances. During adaptation, the form can expand, as in the symphonic waltzes of Tchaikovsky or Ravel (*Waltz of Flowers* by Tchaikovsky and *Waltz for Orchestra* by Ravel), or, conversely, simplify to the couplet principle, as in a popular song, where memorability and ease of perception are important.

It was this structural stability and stylistic flexibility that allowed the waltz to become a cultural transformer: it was easily mastered in various contexts – from palace balls to street parties, from piano pieces to guitar miniatures, and from ballet to pop music. Due to these qualities, the waltz has proved to be a particularly convenient genre for intercultural dialogue, including in Kazakh musical culture, where its structure fits into existing intonation and rhythmic systems.

CLASSICAL WALTZ ON KAZAKH GROUND

The appearance of the waltz in Kazakh music is closely related to the processes of Europeanization and professionalization of musical culture in Kazakhstan in the 1930s and 1950s. During this period, the foundations of academic composer education were laid, the first national musical groups were

formed, operas and symphonic works were created, and, at the same time, genres of the Western European tradition, including the waltz, were actively mastered.

One of the first composers to use waltz elements in Kazakh music was Evgeny Brusilovsky, who played an important role in the formation of Kazakh academic music. In his opera *Kyz-Zhibek* (1934) and other works, waltz rhythms appear as a means of creating imaginative lightness, elegance, and ballad character. Brusilovsky, having a Russian academic education, organically combined the Western genre form with Kazakh melodic and rhythmic intonations, which was the first step toward adapting the waltz in the national culture.

During the same period, Akhmet Zhubanov and Latif Hamidi also showed interest in the waltz genre, using it in chamber instrumental and vocal works. Their work marks not only the borrowing of a form but also an attempt at its internal transformation under the influence of Kazakh melos. An example is the *Kazakh Waltz* by Hamidi, in which waltz metrorhythmicity is combined with a chant characteristic of the Kazakh song and a pentatonic base (Ketegenova, 2009: 128).

Already in the 1940s, the waltz became a recognizable and sought-after genre in Kazakh musical culture, primarily in song lyrics. This is due both to its emotionally expressive nature and to its convenience for vocal expression – the smooth three-part rhythm and couplet form perfectly match the traditional Kazakh vocal thinking (Mylytkbaeva, 2009).

Thus, the period of the 1930s–1950s can be considered as a stage of the primary development and intonation adaptation of the genre, during which the waltz begins to acquire national specificity, while maintaining its European basis. This served as the foundation for the subsequent development of the Kazakh waltz as a unique cultural phenomenon located at the intersection of local and global musical experience.

CO-WORKING OF KAZAKH NATIONAL MUSIC AND EUROPEAN FORM

The adaptation of the waltz in Kazakh music was not limited to borrowing the three-part meter and formal features of the genre. Since the middle of the 20th century, a profound transformation of the genre has been taking place, as a result of which the waltz is integrated into the intonation system of Kazakh music, becoming an integral part of the national musical language. This transformation is based on the synthesis of the metrorhythmic structure of the European waltz and the fret features of the Kazakh tradition.

Kazakh music, historically based on pentatonics, variable frets, and free rhythms, initially seemed poorly compatible with the usual three-part waltz rhythm. However, a unique approach is being developed in the works of Kazakh composers of the 1950s and 1970s: the texture of the waltz remains, but it is filled with characteristic melodic turns, motifs dating back to the technique of playing the *dombra*, ornamentation of Kazakh vocal intonations, and fret flexibility.

A striking example of this synthesis is the instrumental waltzes of Sydyk Mukhamedzhanov, where the European dance form is combined with Kazakh melodic turns based on alternating quarter-fifth structures, chants, and characteristic intonations. Similar features are observed in Akhmed Zhubanov's chamber works, in which the waltz form is used as a stage to demonstrate Kazakh intonational expressiveness.

WALTZ AS VOCAL GENRE

In the second half of the 20th century, the waltz genre received a special development in vocal music, especially in the song genre. Composers, including Tlendiev, Hamidi, and Kaldayakov, create waltz compositions in which classical three-part music is combined with national images. In works such as *Koktem waltz*, *Ana turaly zhyr*, and *Syrgalym*, lyricism, melodic length, the use of characteristic chants, and pentatonic melodies are emphasized, while the form remains recognizably waltzing.

The musical and structural analysis of these works shows that Kazakh composers actively vary the elements of the classical waltz: they can weaken the accents on the first measure, use syncopations

and incorrect phrases, while maintaining the overall feeling of waltzing movement. Harmonic language is also undergoing changes – along with functional harmony, parallelisms, primitive reliance on quarts and fifths, as well as elements of modal thinking are often used.

Thus, the Kazakh musical culture has developed its own waltz style, in which the European genre model is reworked through the prism of the national intonation system. This style is successfully manifested both in academic forms (chamber instrumental and symphonic works) and in the lyrics of popular songs, demonstrating a unique way of intercultural synthesis.

In the second half of the 20th century, the waltz found a new life in Kazakh culture thanks to the genre of pop songs, which featured a meaningful and emotionally intense combination of European dance form with Kazakh melody, intonation, and poetics. A key figure in this process was composer Shamshi Kaldayakov, People's Artist of Kazakhstan, author of more than 300 songs, most of which are written to the rhythm of a waltz.

THE KING OF KAZAKH WALTZ

It was in Kaldayakov's work that the waltz went beyond the academic stage and became part of the mass musical consciousness. His works were not just a borrowing of a genre – they became a form of expression of national feeling, love for his native land, images of mother, woman, and nature (Kaliakbarova, 2015: 118). Songs such as *Kaidasyn*, *Bakyt kushagynda*, *Kuanysh waltzes*, *Syr suluy*, and *Ak bantik* gained national popularity and made Kaldayakov a cult figure, nicknamed 'King of the Kazakh waltz'.

His waltz compositions demonstrate a unique synthesis of rhythms characteristic of the genre and the Kazakh intonation system. In music, Kaldayakov's European triplicity is naturally intertwined with Kazakh modality, pentatonics, and intonations close to folklore melos. This makes his waltzes easily recognizable, touching, and close to the Kazakh listener.

The work of Kaldayakov has a high emotional expressiveness, filled with images understandable to the mass audience, and at the same time retains artistic sophistication. He became not only a pop composer but also an exponent of the national style through a popular song, turning the waltz genre into a symbol of the era.

Kaldayakov's creative legacy has left an indelible mark on the cultural memory of the people. A striking example of this is the waltz *Syr Suluy*, which not only marked the beginning of the *Kyzylorda* folklore ensemble but also became its symbol. Created in collaboration with Shukirov, this masterpiece immediately won the hearts of listeners. Over time, the composition has not lost its charm, turning into a real pearl of Russian waltz art.

According to the researchers, the genre specificity of the waltz in Kaldayakov's work is manifested not only in musical means but also in the poetic structure of texts that rely on folk imagery, ethno-psychology, and aesthetic sensitivity. Kaldayakov's waltzes are often plot compositions that combine elements of poetry, epic, and romance. They have become an important element of national and cultural education, broadcasting images of beauty, morality, respect for a woman, mother, and the native land (Kaliakbarova, 2015: 118).

Thus, the waltz on the Kazakh stage, especially in the legacy of Kaldayakov, received a new cultural and artistic function: it became a form of self-expression of the Kazakh musical identity in popular culture, demonstrating a unique way of localization and adaptation of the European genre in the national environment.

Although the waltz genre was borrowed from a specific European musical and dance tradition, its penetration into Kazakh music cannot be perceived as a simple borrowing of the form. On the contrary, in the context of national musical thinking, the waltz has undergone significant artistic transformations, becoming a unique phenomenon combining the intonations of the Kazakh song, the peculiarities of the national rhythm, and the lyrical coloring of the folk melody. A striking example of the formation of the waltz in Kazakh music is the work of Latif Hamidi, one of the first composers to turn to this genre.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF OTHER KAZAKH COMPOSERS

Hamidi's works, such as *Kazakh Waltz*, *Koktem waltz* (Spring waltz), and *Bulbul* (Nightingale), have become not only popular but also symbolic in many ways. The *Kazakh waltz*, performed for the first time by opera diva Kulyash Bayseitova, is especially significant. This composition immediately won the hearts of listeners and became a kind of anthem of love and happiness. The composer himself recalled the difficulties of creativity: The desire to combine the European form with the Kazakh melos required great creative sensitivity, search, and inspiration. As a result, L. Hamidi managed to create a melody that can rightfully be called the pearl of the national musical classics, which became the composer's calling card» and the starting point of the history of the Kazakh waltz as a genre.

Continuing the line of the waltz song, it is impossible not to mention the name of Nurgisa Tlendiev – a composer who managed to combine the principles of Kazakh folk musical aesthetics with European genre forms. National motifs can be clearly heard in his waltzes, from the characteristic rhythm and melodic intonations to the use of folk instruments such as the dombra and the Kazakh orchestra of folk instruments. His waltz songs, such as *Kel, yerkem Alatauyna*, *Zhan-zharym*, *Tenizde – tolkynda*, *Bakyt waltz*, *Almatym menin*, *Ken dala*, and *Bayanauy waltz*, have become real masterpieces of Kazakh lyrical song (Iskakova, 2010).

For Tlendiev, the waltz is not just a form of dance but also a way of artistically expressing feelings for the Motherland, nature, and native people. His works are imbued with light intonations, images of Kazakhstani landscapes, lyrical mood, and deep respect for Kazakh musical traditions. Tlendiev's waltz songs, created in the genre style of a concert waltz, are intended for performance by professional singers, but, at the same time, they have retained the simplicity and accessibility inherent in folk songs.

Thus, both Hamidi and Tlendiev became composers who not only adapted the waltz to the Kazakh musical culture but also made it an integral part of the national musical heritage. Their work confirms that the interaction of traditions can produce truly original artistic phenomena.

POP WALTZ

The pop waltz in Kazakh music has become an important stage in popularizing the national sound, adapted to the requirements of the time and a wide audience. If the waltzes of Latif Hamidi and Nurgisa Tlendiev became the first examples of the symbiosis of folk intonations and European forms, then later this tradition was developed in the pop culture of Kazakhstan, where the waltz acquired a special role – to be accessible, recognizable, and a carrier of the Kazakh musical identity.

Pop waltz, as a genre, is characterized by melodic clarity, expressive lyrics, and the simplicity of vocals, which makes it especially close to the mass audience. It retains a waltz-like dimension, but significantly enhances the role of song as a form of self-expression – love, landscape, and philosophical. Kazakh composers increasingly began to use the waltz not as a dance form, but as an emotionally intense, poetic way to tell about feelings and their native land.

A special feature of the Kazakh pop waltz is the inclusion of timbres and intonations characteristic of traditional music: dombra accompaniment techniques, folklore turns, fret features, and a specific vocal style of performance. This synthesis contains not just a borrowed form but also an updated tradition aimed at preserving and developing the Kazakh musical identity in the context of globalization.

Waltzes performed by Kazakh pop stars such as Rosa Baglanova, Bibigul Tulegenova, Rosa Rymbaeva, Zhenis Iskakova reflect exactly this feature – a combination of national poetics with a universal musical form. Their performance of Kazakh waltzes has become an important cultural phenomenon contributing to the formation of national taste, especially among young people.

In addition, the pop waltz has become a powerful instrument of musical education: it is performed in music schools, colleges, and at student concerts, which helps to strengthen the bond between generations of performers and listeners. It is thanks to the variety treatment of the waltz that the Kazakh musical tradition is becoming closer to a wide audience.

Thus, the pop waltz in Kazakh music is not just a genre phenomenon, but a form of cultural dialogue between tradition and modernity, and between the national spirit and the universal musical language. His role in popularizing the Kazakh sound cannot be overestimated: it is thanks to him that national music goes beyond the academic stage and becomes part of the living musical space of society.

The transfer of academic form into popular culture in the context of the Kazakh musical tradition is a complex and multifaceted process associated with a change in the context of perception, the transformation of performing style, and the rethinking of genre frameworks. The waltz, which came to Kazakh music from the European classical tradition, was initially perceived as an element of the academic repertoire. However, already in the middle of the 20th century, there was a steady process of its integration into mass musical culture, which contributed to the rethinking of the genre itself in the spirit of national aesthetics.

One of the key aspects of academic form transfer is to preserve the structural rigor and artistic expressiveness of the classical genre while adapting it to a wider audience. Thus, the composers and performers tried to preserve the three-part rhythm, the smoothness, and the romantic flavor characteristic of the waltz, but at the same time saturated the form with intonations close to Kazakh traditional music: pentatonic, fret variability, melismatics, and rhythmic formulas characteristic of *kuys* and folk songs.

The works of Latif Hamidi, who initiated the Kazakh waltz in an academic form, became the basis on which more democratic forms of representation were later formed. For example, his *Kazakh Waltz*, originally performed on the academic stage by Kulyash Bayseitova, later appeared on radio and television, and entered concert programs and even into the household repertoire. Thus, academic work has become a part of the cultural memory of the people, having gone from the stage of the opera house to music schools and variety concerts.

Nurgisa Tlendiev, continuing the Khamidi line, made a special contribution to the popularization of academic forms through mass culture, while relying on the synthesis of folk and professional traditions. His waltzes retain the imagery of academic music, but are clothed in an accessible, emotionally saturated form, where traditional images of nature, love, and native land become central. The orchestra's use of folk instruments, the timbre expressiveness of the *dombra*, and the choral texture make his works highly artistic and close to popular perception.

The transfer of academic forms into popular culture is also carried out through the music education system, television, radio, and festival movements. The popularization of waltz songs performed by professional singers such as Bibigul Tulegenova and Rosa Rymbaeva makes academic material accessible to a wide audience. In the concert practice of the 1960s and 1980s, a special place was occupied by solo performances accompanied by an orchestra of folk instruments, in which academic vocals were combined with the folk sound and intonation of the Kazakh song.

Thus, the transfer of academic form into popular culture is a process aimed not at simplification, but at rethinking and spreading high artistic values. It contributes to the formation of stable cultural codes, within which the Kazakh musical tradition acquires new forms of life without losing its authenticity. It was in this context that the waltz became a symbol of cultural synthesis, an example of a harmonious combination of academic rigor and folk expressiveness.

WHY IS WALTZ SO POPULAR IN KAZAKH POP VOCAL?

CONCLUSION

One of the main reasons for the growing popularity of the waltz in Kazakh music is its accessibility and emotional clarity. Today, the waltz has firmly entered the repertoire of pop performers, becoming a familiar and beloved sound for a wide audience. Young performers such as Zhanar Dugalova, Aigerim Kalaubayeva, Zhenis Iskakova, Tamara Assar and Meirambek Besbayev continue to rethink this genre, bringing it closer to modern aesthetics. Their versions, as well as reinterpretations of Rosa Rymbaeva's iconic waltzes by artists such as Madina Saduakassova and the *KeshYOU* group, give new breath and meaning to melodies that have long been part of the collective memory.

According to our observations, this continuity of reinterpretation shows that the composers of previous generations are very close and understandable to modern listeners, since the Kazakh waltz has a deep national basis. Not only are the melodies themselves remembered but also the poetic texts that remain relevant over time. Each waltz carries a trace of the past, sounding in the present, an echo of memory that lives during the performance. The emotional themes of these songs – love in its sublime and humane manifestations, devotion to the motherland, admiration for beauty and motherhood, reflections on life itself – made the waltz a particularly adaptable and stable form in Kazakh vocal culture.

Not every musical genre finds such a deep response in the nation’s sound world. The waltz has been found, and this says a lot about the continuity of generations of Kazakhstani performers who reread, arrange, and revive familiar melodies in their own way. The legacy of outstanding composers such as Shamshi Kaldayakov, whose lyrical style perfectly matched the rhythm and mood of the waltz, continues to inspire both professional and amateur musicians.

The popularity of the waltz is also supported by such major cultural projects as *Sagyndyrgan anderai* by Ilyassova, which performs songs by Kaldayakov, and *Shamshi anderi*, a series of concerts held annually in Astana and Almaty, later broadcast on national television. These projects emphasize not only the timelessness of Kaldayakov’s music but also the idea that the waltz in Kazakhstan has become a living part of the national sound identity, uniting generations, styles, and emotions.

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HYBRIDITY AND MEDIA IN DANGDUT MUSIC: ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, AND ITS ROLE IN INDONESIAN AND INTERCULTURAL POPULAR CULTURE

Rubiyanto¹

Abstract

Dangdut music, a cultural hybrid of Indonesia, has evolved over half a century from its origins in poor communities as a resistance to the influx of Western rock music. Combining Malay rhythm elements of Indian, Arabic, and Western music, dangdut has now grown into a global popular culture. This study explores (1) the origins and development of dangdut music in Indonesia and globally; (2) the role of media in the Indonesian dangdut music industry; and (3) the characteristics of dangdut as a hybrid of local and global values. Using a qualitative approach and ethnographic methods, the researcher conducted participatory observation within dangdut communities, complemented by interviews, literature reviews, and analysis of online media. The findings reveal that dangdut's dynamic evolution is impacted by social, economic, political, cultural, and religious aspects. The significant roles of mass and digital media, the dangdut community, the recording industry, and government support have been crucial in sustaining its existence and global reach.

Keywords:

Dangdut Music, cultural hybridity, mass and digital media, intercultural, popular culture

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, dangdut is a type of music originating from the lower social class. In the past, the rhythm and lyrics of the song, as well as the singer's chants, could only be enjoyed by marginalized people who lived in slums, narrow alleys, villages, and those with low tastes, even identical to a life of poverty. However, over time, this began to shift, and the middle social class accepted dangdut until it slowly penetrated the minds of some of the elite. Its emergence is similar to that of rap, jazz, R&B, blues, and hip-hop music, originating from poor African-American communities in the United States. The presence of dangdut has become part of Indonesian popular culture after initially being classified as low culture.

Talking about dangdut cannot be separated from the figure of Rhoma Irama, an artist from Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia, who proclaimed dangdut in 1973. The beginning of dangdut's emergence as a subculture marked a period of struggle. It became a counterculture against the onslaught of rock music that entered Indonesia (such as the music groups Deep Purple, The Rolling Stones, and Led Zeppelin) in the 1970s and the local Indonesian rock group Giant Step (Rubiyanto, 2022; Weintraub, 2010). Dangdut is a legitimate part of contemporary Indonesian culture. As a cultural hybridity, dangdut is a valuable, sensitive prism for viewing Indonesian society (Lockard, 1998). However, dangdut has not yet fully become a national culture (Quroatun'Uyun, 2020).

Initially found in villages and open fields, the dangdut can then be witnessed through programs broadcast by various radio and television media or social media content. Media companies process dangdut as a commodity to get audience ratings and profits from advertisers. They commodify dangdut

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through quiz programs, music shows, soap operas, infotainment, awards, and talent scouting (Kurniawan & Nopus, 2020; Rianto, 2013; Rubiyanto, 2020; Susanti, Suryana, and Nugraha 2020). Through various media, dangdut transformed from folk culture to pop culture.

Even though it has penetrated almost all levels of society, most Indonesian people still see dangdut as a lower-class music genre, less interesting, and less stylish (Kholis & Prabayanti, 2021; Rubiyanto, 2022). Maybe because most of the lyrics are always in dialectic with the social world of people with low incomes and follow the rhythm of their lives, if observed further between the rhythm and lyrics in each song, they strengthen each other in reflecting social reality as a manifestation and aspiration of society, especially those who are marginalized, excluded, and thrown away from the social, economic, political, and cultural structures themselves.

As an original Indonesian music genre characterized by gendang (drums) and suling bambu (bamboo flutes), its distinctive rhythm can shake the hearts of listeners. It can sometimes clear the hearts and minds of its fans with a happy atmosphere, which makes them forget about life's problems for a moment. The singer is swaying when singing a song, such as moving the hips, waist, and buttocks, which are sometimes erotic. It is a natural reaction that someone is not aware of when listening to the rhythm of the drums and can hypnotize the listener to sway along (Weintraub, 2010).

The current dangdut music is not only the original, which was first created by Rhoma Irama and was influenced by Malay, Indian, Arabic, and Western music. However, recently, many sub-genres of dangdut have emerged, such as 'campursari' dangdut, Disco dangdut, Remix dangdut, House dangdut, and koplo dangdut (Rubiyanto, 2022; Ulya et al., 2021). The sub-genre's existence combines technological developments; the tastes of musicians, composers, creators, and singers; and fan preferences. As a result, the digital technology used can potentially change society's social, economic, and cultural patterns (Raditya, 2022). Moreover, in today's digital era, dangdut music has experienced a shift in instrumentation and features (Hananta, 2023).

Initially, dangdut was considered deviant and lowly. Still, its uniqueness allowed it to adapt, absorb, and accept the influence of culture, technology, and other music genres outside dangdut until the wider community could receive it. Researchers observed cultural hybridity in dangdut, resulting in several unique identities not possessed by other music genres worldwide. Therefore, dangdut needs to be supported by all stakeholders: the community, musicians, creators, singers, composers, arrangers, fans, mass media, and digital media.

Lately, the government's role has been seen to be increasingly severe in supporting the existence of dangdut by issuing a certificate through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia to make dangdut an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Indonesia. This government legalization will then be proposed to UNESCO to gain recognition so that dangdut can be recorded as Indonesia's national cultural (music) treasure (Maulana, 2023). Based on the data, not a single type of music has been recorded and recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Indonesia, and only traditional Indonesian musical instruments have been recognized along with others (UNESCO, 2025).

This study aims to answer the following three questions:

1. What are the origins and dynamics of the development of dangdut music in Indonesia and globally?
2. What is the role of the media in the Indonesian dangdut music industry?
3. What are the characteristics of dangdut music as a cultural hybrid with local and global values?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term dangdut is an onomatopoeia or imitation of the sound of drum beats (dang) and twists (dut). It first appeared around 1973, accompanied by various derogatory statements from the upper classes toward lower-class music lovers (Frederick, 1982; Weintraub, 2010). The spirit of dangdut began in the early colonial period when a potpourri of Indonesian, Arabic, and Western instruments played together in *Tanjidor* (a traveling orchestra typical of the Betawi tribe in the capital city of Jakarta)

(Kesumah, Purna, and Sukiyah 1995). Around the 1920s, a Betawi Chinese ensemble known as *Gambang Kromong* emerged, which was a mixture of Chinese, Sundanese, Maluku, and Portuguese musical instruments and melodies. After that, *Keroncong* music was introduced in the early 20th century. *Keroncong* singers and musicians usually toured cities on the island of Java, such as *Tanjidor*. *Keroncong* music began to be known as *Orkes Melayu* (Malay Orchestra or O.M) in the 1940s and also the beginning of the emergence of *Gambus* music with original Malay rhythms (Frederick, 1982; Kesumah et al., 1995; Lockard, 1998). O.M. later became the identity of the *dangdut* music group, and *Rhoma Irama* also used the term *Orkes Melayu* for the *dangdut* music group he formed on October 13, 1973, under the name O.M. *Soneta* before it became the *Soneta* group.

In the 1960s, *dangdut*, popularly known as Malay rhythmic music, became the national music of the Sultanate of *Tanah Deli* (now known as *Medan City*) in North Sumatra. Even before *Rhoma Irama* popularized *dangdut* abroad, singer *Rubiah* had brought the music to Malaysia and Singapore. (Kesumah et al. 1995). Therefore, it seems less appropriate to say that *dangdut* is the music of the marginalized. Moreover, *dangdut* is the only music genre in the country that received full support from the New Order government, which wanted to make *dangdut* the national music. (Arjaya, 2016; Rubiyanto, 2022).

Dangdut has become an Indonesian cultural identity (Arjaya, Afianto, & Nurullita, 2021). According to Carey, as a process, culture is associated with the general characteristics of a group of people (e.g., physical environment, equipment, religion, customs, or way of life). Culture can also refer to texts or symbolic objects (e.g., works of art and architecture) that have special meaning for people in a particular culture (McQuail, 2010). Culture is the whole of values that may differ and develop according to the values adopted by society (Çöteli, 2019).

The culture referred to in this study is *dangdut*, a musical art and original work of the Indonesian people. While the birth process of *dangdut* in Indonesia began with the embryo of Malay rhythm, in practice, it experienced hybridity and developed into pop culture. Then, several subgenres emerged (e.g., *Minang dangdut*, *Javanese dangdut*, *Banjar dangdut*, *Koplo dangdut*, *Disco dangdut*, *Jaipong dangdut*, *Remix dangdut*, *Pop dangdut*, and others) until it spread abroad. The existence of *dangdut* today cannot be separated from the support of interested parties and the significant role of the mass media. Homi K. Bhabha proposed the term hybridity to identify the cultural crossover that emerges in post-colonial societies (Furqon & Busro, 2020). Cultural hybridity combines two art forms to produce a new, distinctive cultural identity (Firdaus et al., 2023). There is a process of imitation of the mixing of different cultures (Ramadhan & Wulandari, 2023). Hybridity requires traces of other cultures in each culture, thus offering transcultural opportunities for external media and marketers to build effective relationships between their commodities and local communities (Kraidy, 2005). To thrive, cultural hybridity is facilitated by positive collective memory and policies that support the freedom of interaction between cultural groups (Triatmodjo et al., 2023). Lockard (1998) defines *dangdut* as an original Indonesian music genre with cultural hybridity.

METHODS

Researchers use ethnographic methods to study cultural groups to obtain cultural interpretations (Sanjatkiko & Hardiah, 2021). In qualitative research, ethnography requires researchers to conduct participatory observations by involving themselves, observing and recording cultural dynamics over a long time, and contributing to solving practical community problems (Sari et al., 2023).

Therefore, researchers conducted participatory observations of the *dangdut* community (singers, composers, creators, music arrangers, musicians, and fans) since the researcher worked at a television and radio station that produces *dangdut* programs (1991–2010) until now. Researchers also obtained data through direct involvement and observation of their environment since childhood, where most people like *dangdut*. In addition, researchers will get data from interviews with (1) the coordinator of the television *dangdut* program, (2) the director of the *dangdut* radio, and (3) the leader of the Malay

Orchestra (*dangdut* group), as well as some related literature to complement the observation. The researcher then interpreted the various data obtained to determine the cultural values of Indonesian society and to find answers to the objectives of this research.

ANALYSIS AND RESULT

DEVELOPMENT OF DANGDUT IN INDONESIA

Dangdut is a music genre with a complex and controversial history (Wallach, 2008). Perhaps that is why there is no complete and detailed narrative record of the journey of Dangdut from the past to the present. However, researchers try to divide the development of this music into two eras, namely, before and after dangdut was proclaimed by Rhoma Irama (1973) in his many oral statements as follows.

ERA BEFORE 1973

As described by researchers, dangdut was influenced by cultures from other countries such as India, Arabia, China, Europe, and Portugal. In this era, dangdut was still in its original form of Malay-Deli rhythm, often performed to people from village to village as public entertainment. The initial term Orkes Melayu (O.M) at that time colored the development of dangdut before it was launched by Rhoma Irama, including O.M *Chandralela* led by Husein Bawafie, O.M *Bukit Siguntang* led by Abdul Chalik, O.M *Sinar Kemala* led by Abdul Kadir, O.M *Kenangan* led by Husein Aidit, and O.M *Pancaran Muda* led by Zakaria. In addition to popular music groups in this era, several singers also enlivened dangdut performances (Malay rhythm), including Ellya Khadam, Emma Gangga, Hasnah Thahar, Ida Laila, A. Rafiq, Mashabi, Munif Bahaswan, Elvy Sukaesih, Juhana Sattar, Ahmad Basahil, Muchsin Alatas, Mansyur S., and Rhoma Irama (Weintraub, 2010). According to Zakaria, the leader of O.M Pancaran Muda, when interviewed by researchers on Radio Dangdut TPI, he explained:

... unfortunately, none of the music groups have survived until now. This is because there is no regeneration of musicians, creators, or singers in the group to continue and preserve the music group if one of its personnel dies or can no longer work (Zakaria & Rubiyanto, 2006).

In addition to performing from village to village, dangdut (at that time still Malay rhythm) was performed at certain events at the invitation of the event committee, such as wedding parties. One of them was O.M *Pancaran Muda*, led by Zakaria, who once received an invitation from Mrs. Fatmawati Soekarno (wife of the first president of the Republic of Indonesia) to perform at an entertainment event at the wedding of her daughter, Megawati Soekarnoputri, on June 1, 1968 (Zakaria & Rubiyanto, 2006). Megawati Soekarnoputri was the general chairwoman of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, one of the largest parties in Indonesia today, and she was the fifth president of the Republic of Indonesia. This rare opportunity showed that Malay music (dangdut) had entered the elite. It should be noted that at that time, there was no commercial competition between singers and music groups. They only intended to entertain the community and channel artistic talents through performances from one place to another.

On average, (senior) singers have good *cengkok* (ornament of voice – twisted voice) when singing dangdut songs. These vocal ornaments are influenced by their skills in reciting the holy verses of the Qur'an, such as Ellya Khadam, Elvy Sukaesih, Munif Bahaswan, A. Rafiq, Rita Sugiarto, and Mansyur S (Weintraub, 2010). The voice quality of these senior singers remains consistent to this day. In addition to having good voices, they also strive to perform optimally in front of their fans. From a gender perspective, male singers are more comfortable singing in public than women, who must change their self-image to classical Islamic or Malay forms to present themselves more respectably (Decker, 2020; Ulya et al., 2021). Based on the researcher's observations, all singers in that era embraced Islam.

Later, around the 1990s, new singers emerged who embraced religions other than Islam (Christianity), namely, Erie Suzan, Conny Nurlita, Thomas Djorghhi, and Nella Kharisma, in the 2000s. Several things that underlie the small number of non-Muslim dangdut singers in Indonesia out of hundreds of singers include the following: (1) the majority of the Indonesian population is Muslim, (2) dangdut comes from Malay rhythms that are understood as Islam, (3) there is the impact of gambus music (Arab-Islam) on dangdut, and (4) the emergence of music groups that are primarily of Arab descent, such as Said Effendi (O.M Irama Agung), Umar Fauzi Aseran (Sinar Medan), Umar Alatas (O.M Chandraleka), Husein Bawafie (O.M Chandralela), and Husein Aidit (O.M Kenangan) (Weintraub,

2006). In addition, many popular singers of Arab descent are Muslim, such as A. Rafiq, Munif Ba-haswan, Muchsin Alatas, Intan Ali, Tommy Ali, and others, and (6) even the majority of dangdut song lyrics are written in Indonesian and have a strong Islamic theme (Lockard, 1998). In addition, (7) the lyrics of the songs by Rhoma Irama also mostly contain Islamic preaching quoted from the Al-Quran and the Hadith of the Prophet (Ar and Maskur 2021).

On that basis, it seems that there is reluctance from those who are not Muslim to learn it because dangdut is considered a culture that was born and is identical to Muslims. Over time, some senior singers and musicians born in this era have passed away, and some still show their existence until now. They still appear in various performance venues and become performers on national television programs.

ERA AFTER 1973

In this era, Malay rhythm metamorphosed into dangdut music. The entertainment industry welcomed it with open arms, and record producers also glanced at dangdut because this music was considered a tempting market opportunity. Through cassette recordings, dangdut began to be known by the upper class, with the emergence of songs by Rhoma Irama and Soneta Group starting their recordings. The public also liked the appearance of Rhoma and Soneta and the recordings of the songs they sang on stage. In this case, the Indonesian music scene entered a new color with the entry of dangdut into the recording industry. Even *Tempo* magazine called 1979 the peak of dangdut because it succeeded in dominating the cassette market and was dominated by the voices of Rhoma Irama and Elvy Sukaesih (Rubiyanto, 2022; Weintraub, 2006).

Besides Rhoma Irama and Elvy Sukaesih, another successful dangdut singer in the dangdut recording industry was A. Rafiq, who recorded the songs *Pengalaman Pertama* (The First Experience) and *Pandangan Pertama* (The First Sight) in 1978. Entering the 1990s, almost 70% of dangdut songs produced by the recording industry dominated the Indonesian cassette sales market (Lockard, 1998). Some popular song titles include *Mandul* (Infertile), *Rujuk* (Remarriage), *Cincin Kawin* (Marriage Ring), *Kuda Lumpung* (Leathered Horse), *Jangan Dulu* (Hold On), *Mawar Merah* (Red Rose), *Ke Monas* (go to the National Monument-it's in Jakarta), and others. Dangdut song lyrics generally depict people's daily lives. This closeness to the lyrics' narration creates an emotional attachment in dangdut fans.

THE UNIQUENESS OF DANGDUT MUSIC

There are several unique notes about dangdut as music that has experienced distinctive cultural hybridity.

(1) The presence of the figures of King and Queen attached to senior dangdut figures who played a significant role in the birth of this music genre. King of dangdut was given to Rhoma Irama, while Queen of Dangdut was given to Elvy Sukaesih (Rubiyanto, 2022). This pair had previously duetted in 1968 when Rhoma Irama was with O.M Purnama. Elvy Sukaesih was the first to develop the Malay music genre with harmonious *cengkok* vocals (Chaniago & Basri, 2012). Even though they have long been separated from their respective careers. However, the nicknames King and Queen still receive legitimacy from the Indonesian people. These two figures are considered worthy because they have good works and a strong commitment to advancing dangdut in the country's music scene. They were also reunited by the management of Indosiar television after a long time not dueting to sing dangdut songs for about 34 years.

(2) When meeting or performing on the same stage, junior singers usually greet senior singers first and call them father or mother. Juniors also often kiss their seniors' hands. This behavior is a form of respect for seniors and reflects the politeness characteristic of Indonesian culture.

(3) Most dangdut singers come from underprivileged families and are the backbone of the family. If they succeed and become professional singers, their immediate family, such as their mother, father, older brother, younger brother, or sibling, acts as managers who take care of their various needs, such as arranging performance schedules, arranging accommodation, preparing clothes to be worn during

performances, and negotiating cooperation contracts with event organizers.

(4) Famous dangdut singers mostly come from Java Island, where the Betawi, Sundanese, and Javanese live, or part of northern Sumatra, and some come from Sulawesi. To show the identity of their place of birth, some singers like to use the name of their region as their last name. In addition, on average, their stage name differs from the name listed on their population identity.

(5) When performing on stage, their costumes are very glamorous, decorated with ornaments and beads. Sometimes, the price is more expensive than the fee they receive. Senior singers usually wear these costumes, but for junior singers, clothes full of ornaments are no longer worn. They appear more casual and follow the latest fashion trends.

(6) Almost all song lyrics are themed on issues that are close and familiar to the daily lives of their fans, such as love, suffering, divorce, remarriage, gambling, drinking, sex, infidelity, poverty, religious values, and so on. However, moral messages are still implied in these themes.

(7) After performing several songs at an event and receiving compensation from the organizing committee, visitors or the general public who enjoy their performance also give some money, sometimes tucked into their hands. If the singer is a woman, the money is tucked between their breasts. This erotic cultural practice is called 'disawer' or 'saweran'.

(8) There are gerobak dorong (wheelbarrow) buskers or dangdut singer groups who carry complete musical equipment around villages or city outskirts. They play several songs to get paid by the public, who enjoy the songs they perform.

(9) They also have a firm emotional bond with fellow singers, creators, musicians, and fans, like one big, strong family (Rubiyanto, 2022).

DANGDUT GOES UP A CLASS

From slums and stuffy villages, dangdut has now penetrated luxury buildings in urban areas. This can be seen, for example, when private companies or government agencies hold meetings with their employees, colleagues, or partners. Dangdut is played to entertain and create a cheerful, warm, and intimate atmosphere among those present. This music is also fascinating when the elite hold their children's wedding parties in luxurious, magnificent, star-rated hotels.

Several lodging places, such as hotels or motels, deliberately provide pub, cafe, or karaoke room facilities for guests who stay to enjoy dangdut entertainment. These hotels or motels can be found in big cities, districts, and remote areas in Indonesia. Dangdut is increasingly penetrating almost every aspect of people's lives. This music is getting closer to the Indonesian people through performances in various locations.

Dangdut song lyrics are simple and easy to digest, expressing daily problems in people's lives. Therefore, the performances are always packed with fans from various levels of society. They can sing along to the songs and see their favorite musicians and singers up close and directly when they perform. Almost all elements of society support the existence of dangdut as a national culture, including government support that will propose dangdut to UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Indonesia.

Another thing is that only dangdut can penetrate the global market among the many types of popular Indonesian music. Dangdut singers can perform and be accepted in various countries in Asia, Europe, and America, including Brunei Darussalam, Japan, Malaysia, the southern Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan, the United States, and the Netherlands. Even Weintraub (an American dangdut researcher – ethnomusicologist) founded a dangdut music group called Dangdut Cowboys in his country in 2007. Then, in the late 1990s, a group of Japanese music fans also formed their dangdut group called O.M Ranema (Orkes Melayu Rakyat Negeri Matahari – People of the Land of the Rising Sun) (Wallach, 2008).

Dangdut Cowboys performed on the government television station (TVRI) in Medan (the origin of the Melayu-Deli rhythm). This concert commemorated the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and America (Tribun Medan 2019). Weintraub has a mission to introduce dangdut to the international community, which is generally still unfamiliar with typical Indonesian music.

While Ranema is an abbreviation of Rakyat Negeri Matahari, which means People of the Land of the Rising Sun, this group also popularizes the J-Dangdut or Japanese Dangdut genre. This orchestra consists of Hamdan Ooki, Kasep Ohya, Ebizo, Bintan Balu Nakamura, Hide Shindoh, M. Yokota, Dorce Zab, Emily Chang, C. Endoh, Venndy, Yuki Shara, Ukulele Windii, and Erika A. They usually perform songs from famous Indonesian dangdut singers. The genre they perform can also compete with other genres in Japan, such as J-Rock and J-Pop (Editor Kapanlagi.com 2014).

In addition to the two dangdut groups (American and Japanese) that were born and present in their respective countries, there is also a solo singer, Arreal Tilghman from America, who launched the album *Dangdut in America* in Jakarta (Ariwibowo, 2009). Arreal Tilghman won the *Dangdut in America* audition held in Delaware, Philadelphia, for two years by promoter/producer Rissa Asnan. In addition, the dangdut music video of a dangdut singer from South Korea, named Hwang Woo Joong, went viral in Indonesia, entitled *Mama Papa* (father-mother). In the music video, Joong changed his name to Ricky Ujung. In addition to Arreal Tilghman and Hwang Woo Joong, there are three other female dangdut singers, namely, Alina Saraswati alias Alina Salimgareeva from Russia; Juminem Pierre, a model from France; and Joelina Bee, a dangdut singer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States (Insertlive, 2019).

THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN THE INDONESIAN DANGDUT INDUSTRY

The appearance of Rhoma Irama and Soneta in almost every performance is practically the same and monotonous. However, some singers are inspired to appear different, unlike Rhoma and Soneta. They must have their characteristics to appeal to dancing and can be used as a selling point for themselves. Dangdut is indeed identical to swaying. To boost its popularity, various dances have been created, such as Inul Daratista's goyang ngebor (fast gyrating hip), Uut Permatasari's goyang ngecor (fast gyrating hip with one leg), Anisa Bahar's goyang patah-patah (fast gyrating hip with some pauses), and Zaskia Gotik's goyang itik (fast gyrating hip that emphasizes on the butt like a walking duck). Dangdut singers have also evolved from those who previously relied on twisted voices known as cengkok to a new generation of shake-selling singers. Sway and shaking are even used to commodify their bodies (Maulana, 2020; Rubiyanto, 2022). The mass media widely cover their performances and are a strong magnet for the audience to consume mass media. However, Rhoma Irama and most senior singers rejected their presence with their respective dance labels.

This feud was considered obscene and vulgar, especially with Inul Daratista as the first singer who became popular through the goyang ngebor (fast gyrating hip = drilling drill). The polemic involved dangdut artists, several clerics (Indonesian Ulema Council), national figures, and Indonesian and international communities (BBC NEWS, 2003; Murphy, 2003; VOA, 2009). As a result of this conflict, Inul Daratista became increasingly popular and became a new wealthy person in the Indonesian dangdut music industry. Inul succeeded in using some symbolic, social, economic capital. This finding results from research conducted by researchers for a doctoral dissertation in communication science titled *Construction of Habitus and the Arena of Actors in the Cultural Industry* (Rubiyanto, 2015).

PRINT MEDIA

Conventional mass media, such as newspapers, tabloids, and magazines, often contain articles related to dangdut, especially the success stories of singers, gossip, and groups that readers liked at that time. Print media's efforts have an impact on increasing their circulation. A tabloid print media dares to use the name tabloid dangdut as its trademark. Clearly and specifically, this media dedicates itself to dangdut in Indonesia (Issuu, 2008).

RADIO

The involvement of the government-owned Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) made the spread of dangdut songs to the public very rapid and fast. Thanks to the broad reach of RRI's broadcast programs, which covered almost all of Indonesia from Sabang to Merauke, a distance of more than 5,200 kilometers, dangdut quickly became known to the Indonesian people.

RRI became an effective mass media because most Indonesians have a radio. Radio is the most popular mass media in Indonesia because it is cheap and does not require a subscription (unlike newspapers or magazines). In addition, before 1973, many Indonesians still needed to be literate, and the characteristics of radio only required the ability to listen to when the audience consumed content. Radio can also be carried and listened to anywhere and anytime. While listening to favorite songs on the radio, listeners can also do other activities.

In addition to RRI, which covers Indonesia's entire territory, private radio stations have a narrower and more local reach. Based on data released by the Indonesian National Private Broadcasting Radio Association, there are 94 dangdut format radio stations spread across several cities in Indonesia, as follows:

Number	Radio Location (Province)	Radio Name
1	North Sumatra	• Radio Citra Buana 95.50 FM
2	West Sumatra	• Radio Citra 96.20 FM
3	Jambi	• Radio Manggis 96.0 FM • Radio Metro 101.9 FM
4	Bangka Belitung	• Radio Prima Bangka 105.9 FM
5	Lampung	• Radio Batara 98.4 FM • Radio Slendro 106, 20 FM • Radio Omega 105, 10 FM • Radio SGP 97,80 FM • Radio RBK 104,30 FM • 98,00 FM Radio Duta • Radio Kharisma 105,90 FM • Radio Ramayana 98,80 FM • Radio Andalas Kece 102,70 FM • 100,80 FM Radio Dwi Amanda • Radio Mahameru 104,50 FM • Radio Saburai 106,30 FM • Radio Prima 100, 70 FM • Radio Idola 96,60 FM • Radio Maskara 89,90 FM
6	Banten	• Radio Sam 96,90 FM • Radio Akarsari 92,20 FM • Radio KISS FM 90,20 FM • Radio Mersi 93,90 FM
7	West Java	• Radio Maya Nada 98,00 FM • Radio Sela 96,90 FM • Radio Dahlia 101,50 FM • Radio Gema Sonata 101 FM • Radio Maestro 92,50 FM • Radio Swara Pratita • Radio Rama 104, 70 FM • Radio Rugeri 93,40 FM • Radio New Shinta 97,20 FM • Radio DFAS 94,60 FM • Radio Cakra 90,50 FM • Radio Rasilima 103,20 FM • Radio Bandung 95,20 FM • Radio Gema Remaja 100,20 FM • Radio RCA 102, 10 FM • Radio Bestari 93,00 FM • Radio Gaya Banjar 97,40 FM • Radio Elmitra 95,00 FM • Radio Elgangga 100,30 FM • Radio Fortune 90, 70 FM • Radio Elpas 94.1 FM • Radio Jusyan Top M 92,70 FM • Radio Pitaloka 88,30 FM • Radio Dhaya Suara 93,90 FM • Radio Actari 96,60 FM • Radio Buana Jaya 94,30 FM • Radio RJM Mania 91,50 FM • Radio Galunggung Giri Sakti 99,00FM • Radio Tjandra 100,60 FM • Radio Sukapura 98,90 FM • Radio S-Tri 100, 30 FM • Radio Galuh 89,50 FM • Radio Sindangkasih 103,60 FM • Radio Purnama 87,90 FM
8	Central Java	• Radio Radenmas 105,70 FM • Radio Harbos FM 102,60 FM • Radio Bima Sakti 96,60 FM • Radio POP FM Pekalongan 97,90 FM • Radio Sahara Tercinta 106,40 FM • Radio POP FM 103.6 FM • Radio POP FM 97,70 FM • Radio POP FM PALING PAS • Radio Merapi Indah 104,90 FM GOYANGNYA 98,2 FM
9	Special Region of Yogyakarta	• Radio MBS 92,70 FM

10	East Java	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Segara Suramadu 107,20 FM • Radio BASS 96,60 FM • Radio Suara Giri 98,40 FM • Radio Mahameru 92,30 FM • Radio RWS 99,00 FM • Radio Ronggo Hadi 97,80 FM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Moderato 107,20 FM • Radio Puspita 103,70 FM • Radio Angkasa 95,00 FM • Radio Bhasa 93,10 FM • Radio Nada FM Madura 102,90 FM • Radio Rosco 90,6 FM
11	West Kalimantan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Diaros FM 103,60 FM • Radio Kenari 101,00 FM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Mudytha Buana 88,40 FM • Radio Diaros 103,60 FM
12	South Kalimantan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Nusantara 102,70 FM • Radio Kumala 96,80 FM • Radio Pelangi 94,40 FM • Radio Purnama Nada 98,20 FM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Dirgahayu 100,20 FM • Radio Gema Kuripan 102,50 FM • Radio Swara Ruhui Rahayu 88,80 FM
13	West Nusa Tenggara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Gemini 101,00 FM 	
14	South Sulawesi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Ramayana 87,6 FM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio Makara FM 103,60 FM

Figure 1: Table of Dangdut radio formats in Indonesia. With courtesy of Source: (PRSSNI 2025). Scheme by the author.

This table shows the largest number in West Java, which is 35 radio stations. Meanwhile, the number of radio stations in North Sumatra = 1, West Sumatra = 1, Jambi = 2, Bangka Belitung = 1, Lampung = 15, Banten = 4, Central Java = 9, Special Region of Yogyakarta = 1, and East Java = 12. In addition, several other radio stations also play dangdut songs as part of their broadcast programs, although the radio format is not dangdut (such as ethnic, religious, Indonesian pop, and family radio formats). So, the popularity of dangdut and the rise of the cassette industry in Indonesia are also getting better.



Figure 2: Parachutists carrying the flags of *Radio Dangdut TPI* and *Republik Dangdut* signifying the start of the 40-hour non-stop dangdut music show at Ancol Beach, Jakarta. Source: Personal documentation of the author.

All radio stations with a dangdut format must broadcast selected songs suitable for listeners. Generally, radio in Indonesia carries out on-air activities and various off-air activities. The goal is to get closer to its listeners so that they will be loyal to the radio station. One of them is Radio Dangdut TPI (now called Radio Dangdut Indonesia with a Music and Entertainment Radio format). This radio station once held a 40-hour nonstop dangdut event titled Republik Dangdut (Dangdut Republic) at Pantai Karnaval Ancol, Jakarta, 2006. This event attracted the public's attention, advertising agents were competing with radio stations, and other media industries. Tito Sulistio, Director of Radio Dangdut TPI, stated:

...the inspiration for this event came from the 1969 Woodstock Music and Art Fair, a three-day nonstop pop music show at Max Yasgur's farm in Bethel, New York, USA. I wanted this event to be as big as Woodstock so that many could promote and enjoy dangdut music (Sulistio and Rubiyanto, 2006).

Uniquely, in this Dangdut Republic event, there is a non-stop pair dance competition that lasts for 40 hours, following the rhythm of the songs sung by dangdut singers and accompanied by music groups in turns. The kerangkeng² dance event has two large stages and iron barricades surrounding those who sway to the song's rhythm. The researcher in charge of the creative team is tasked with organizing the performance, which lasts for three days and involves 150 singers and seven dangdut music groups (Rubiyanto, 2022).

TELEVISION

Due to the booming sales of dangdut cassettes in the community and its popularity among fans, government-owned television stations also produced dangdut music programs to be broadcast. Television of the Republic of Indonesia/TVRI (national public broadcasting) was the only television station in Indonesia that first aired in 1962. In 1989, the first private television station, Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI), was established. Then, other private television stations emerged, namely, *Surya Cipta Televisi* (SCTV), Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (TPI), Andalas Televisi (ANTV), Indosiar Televisi, and others.

One of TVRI's mainstay dangdut programs is *Aneka Ria Safari* (ARS). This program is one of the most significant events contributing to developing dangdut in Indonesia. ARS and TVRI were heavily influenced by Golkar, the ruling party of the New Order (pre-reform order). As a result, there was mutualism between dangdut interests and Golkar politics in attracting the masses' love for dangdut while allowing them to vote for Golkar in general elections or democratic celebrations in Indonesia. During the campaign period for the General Election (Pemilu) or Regional Head Election (Pilkada), dangdut becomes the primary means of communicating with the lower class to reach and gain their support (Madonna, 2020).

For new singers, the ARS program can be a shortcut to gaining social acceptance. The more often they appear at ARS, the faster they will be known, and the public (audience) will buy song cassettes or compact discs containing a series of songs sung by them. Eddy Sud, the coordinator of the ARS program and another Golkar cadre, stated to researchers at his residence:

...many people are willing to queue for a long time to be able to appear on the ARS TVRI program, and our house is never empty of visitors, whether singers, musicians, or record company producers (Sud & Rubiyanto, 2000).

Eddy Sud's statement was confirmed by Ishadi SK, Director of TVRI at that time, who explained that ARS was a profitable program for TVRI because it was a means of promoting new songs. Song producers and record labels had to pay to broadcast their songs on TVRI (Weintraub, 2010). Through the ARS program, dangdut was used as a political tool by Golkar. Although, at that time, there had been a transaction with the government broadcasting institution (TVRI), the ARS program also played a role in the development of dangdut in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, Moerdiono's statement as Minister of State Secretary of the Republic of Indonesia commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Indonesia in Ancol, Jakarta, also showed the government's support for dangdut. On stage, Moerdiono stated that dangdut was Indonesia's national music. At that time, the researcher was a television producer-director (TPI) who broadcast a live performance entitled "Semarak Dangdut 50 Tahun Indonesia Emas" (Dangdut Excitement 50 Golden Years of Indonesia) throughout Indonesia and 53 other countries. This performance featured many dangdut singers and groups and was witnessed by approximately 250,000 people in an open field, Ancol (Rubiyanto, 2022; Weintraub, 2010). This activity is Indonesia's most enormous dangdut performance and has just been matched.

Dangdut is still widely broadcast on television stations and is a popular program. Various genres of programs decorate its broadcasts, such as Indosiar television, which created a global dangdut talent search program that is followed by Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, and Timor Leste. Even NET-TV previously faced psychological obstacles be-

² Which means kērangkèng=aroundgoing, coming fro Hokkien 欄間, lōng-keng prison, jail.

cause the target audience for dangdut was not the same as its television audience segment, broadcasting dangdut to commemorate NET's fifth anniversary (Rubiyanto, 2020).

In general, dangdut performances always attract the attention of many people or the masses before the COVID-19 pandemic (Fatimah & Hayati, 2021). So, what happened in Indonesia when the COVID-19 pandemic hit? Was dangdut also affected and not broadcast on television? No. Dangdut continues to accompany the audience. Television stations moved their activities into the studio and did not invite the audience. In addition, the entire production crew systematically complies with government regulations and the National Disaster Management Agency, such as wearing masks and washing hands, to avoid transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Violating these rules would have resulted in severe sanctions from the television station and the government. This effort shows that the media is committed to preserving dangdut, especially since dangdut programs for television stations can be a strong magnet in attracting viewers and advertisers. On the one hand, through various genres of programs broadcast, the media seeks profit to expand the audience and advertiser market.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DANGDUT

Entering the current digital era, Indonesia also brings fresh air to developing dangdut music. With the rise of social media platforms such as TikTok, Spotify, YouTube, Podcast, and others, fans can easily enjoy dangdut music. The presence of the internet has also influenced public consumption of dangdut shows. In the past, they consumed dangdut through traditional media (such as radio and television) or read news in newspapers and magazines. However, now they are actively looking for content about dangdut tailored to their tastes on various social media platforms or other applications. On the other hand, record labels, individuals, and those who care about the existence of dangdut take advantage of this opportunity to upload various content to their new media accounts.

Furthermore, the spread of dangdut through social media can reach abroad and allow people worldwide to access it regardless of space and time (borderless). Surprisingly, the King of dangdut Rhoma Irama also took part in creating talk show content on social media. Since May 2018, the YouTube channel 'Bisikan Rhoma' (Rhoma Whisper) has received a positive response from the public, with more than 2.6 million subscribers and more than 510 million viewers (Rhoma Irama Official 2024).

Many sources are invited to appear on this YouTube channel. Not only are dangdut artists invited as podcast guests, but film artists, youth figures, political figures, media figures, rock musicians, comedians, and even clerics are also invited. Various topics about dangdut, success stories of guest stars, even the career journey of the king of dangdut, and so on become interesting topics to discuss. Rhoma's role in this case is as a host (who asks questions to guest stars). However, sometimes the guest stars also have a high curiosity about Rhoma's success story in his journey in the dangdut music scene. So they switch roles in the conversation. The guest star becomes the interviewer and Rhoma becomes the source. This is one of the unique things about the 'Bisikan Rhoma' program.

Rhoma always includes moral messages from a cultural and religious perspective in Indonesia in his discussions with them. According to the researcher's observations, the question and answer atmosphere was fluid, light, and full of familiarity, showing the politeness of the dangdut king, which indirectly became an example for the current dangdut generation or a form of exemplary behavior of The King" for 'Citizens of the Kingdom' and 'Dangdut People' (the term for fans) and the audience. Thus, according to Syaflinawati (2021), the presence of social media dramatically supports the sustainability of dangdut and impacts the success of its singers who appear on social media platforms such as YouTube.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DANGDUT AS INDONESIAN CULTURE

As previously described, dangdut is an original Indonesian culture from the Melayu-Deli region, North Sumatra. Although influenced by cultures from various countries, dangdut is Indonesia's national culture. For example, the Indonesian flavor is pronounced in the lyrics of the song *135 million* by Rhoma Irama in 1976. The lyrics of this song tell about various ethnic groups in Indonesia, including Javanese, Sundanese, Acehnese, Padang, Batak, Betawi, Makassar, Bugis, Ambonese,

Dayak, and others. In Indonesia, there are not only different ethnic groups but also regional languages, religions, arts, customs, typical foods, and even music.

MAINTAINING THE EXISTENCE OF DANGDUT

Stakeholders, especially creators, musicians, arrangers, singers, and lovers of dangdut who are members of the Indonesian Dangdut Music Artists Association are actively involved in carrying out activities to maintain the existence of dangdut in Indonesia. One of the routine activities is periodically holding a ‘Dangdut Song Creation Competition’. This activity, which was first held in 1979, provides benefits for maintaining the regeneration of dangdut, singers, creators, arrangers, musicians, and dangdut songs on an ongoing basis.

Not only does creativity emerge from here but also the solidarity to advance dangdut as an original Indonesian culture is also clearly visible among them. Another harmony is always maintained through sportsmanship when creating the latest colorful dangdut songs. These activities can be said to be a form of dangdut culture, namely, giving birth to an idea, work, or creation through a learning process in a group with the same values (McQuail, 2010).

In addition, to maintain its existence, recently, a dangdut subgenre has emerged that is popular with the younger generation, such as dangdut campursari, a dangdut song with Javanese regional language lyrics popularized by Didi Kempot. Most of Didi Kempot's themed songs are themed around heart-break and lost love, which touch the listeners' emotions. As a result, Didi was given the nickname “The Godfather of Broken Heart” by Sahabat Ambyar (the name for Didi Kempot's fans, most of whom are millennials and gen-Z) (Qorib & Dewi, 2021). A sense of kinship, mutual support, and respect among fans or between fans and idols is a valuable asset for the future development of dangdut in Indonesia.

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN DANGDUT MUSIC

Dangdut is a blend of Malay (Indonesian) culture with cultures from other countries. This hybridity combines North Sumatran Malay musical ensembles, Indian film music, Arabic pop music, and the West (Lockard, 1998). This can be seen from the musical instruments used in dangdut, such as tabla (India), tambourine (Arabic), electric guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, piano, mandolin, and others, originating from European culture. The types of original dangdut musical instruments originating from Indonesia are gendang (drums) and suling bambu (bamboo flutes). In addition, the singers' lyrics, rhythm, and cengkok³ sounds combine Malay, Indian, and Arabic rhythms.

For example, this form of cultural hybridity can be seen in the song *Sawan Ka Mahina*, created by Anand Baksh, which first appeared in the Indian film “Milan” in 1967 (Sopiah, 2024). Then, Rhoma Irama popularized this song in Indonesia around the 1980s and duetted with Indian singer Miss Nandini. The dangdut arrangement packaged by Rhoma Irama and Soneta Group makes this song similar to the original sung by two famous Indian singers, Lata Mangeshkar and Mukesh. Rhoma Irama also released an album with Lata Mangeshkar through the record company Le Moesiek Revole by remastering and re-releasing the album and uploading it on the YouTube channel (Rhoma Irama Official 2020).

Meanwhile, the hybridity of local and global values aims to accommodate the desire to preserve cultural uniqueness so that the world community better knows it. The strength of dangdut lies in its hybridity, which distinguishes it from other types of music. As a result, dangdut has survived until now (Raditya, 2013; Syaflinawati, 2021). Seeing the dynamics of dangdut's journey from the past to the present, it is fitting that dangdut becomes Indonesia's Intangible Cultural Heritage and a treasure trove of national cultural wealth.

³ Means ‘twisted’ in Indonesian. It is said that these sounds seem twisted in melodic shape and rhythm.

CONCLUSION

Before being launched by Rhoma Irama in 1973, this music genre was known as Irama Melayu and originated from Deli, Medan, North Sumatra. Dangdut emerged from the womb of the marginalized and developed into a folk culture to counter the entry of Western rock music into Indonesia. Dangdut is a cultural hybridity formed from a blend of local and global cultures. Dangdut's journey is swift and closely related to Indonesian society's social, economic, political, religious, and cultural aspects. The existence of dangdut has always been supported by various parties, including musicians, creators, singers, songwriters, fans, record companies, the government, and even mass and digital media. Therefore, Indonesian society should maintain dangdut as a national cultural heritage. The media is vital in popularizing, maintaining, and preserving dangdut as Indonesian pop culture.

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THE ROLE OF INTERNET IN HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC SINGING PERFORMANCES GLOBALLY IN PRESENT SCENARIO

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Abstract

Music is believed to have originated during the Vedic period. It has been preserved as a tradition since ancient times through performances. Based on various authentic pieces of evidence in music, it is reasonable to say that performance developed alongside music. Two main genres, North Indian classical music and South Indian classical music, were already prevalent in ancient times. Over time, different singing styles emerged within Indian classical music, which have been continuously promoted through performances. Since the Vedic period, artists have been sharing music on stage. Musical performances have taken the form of stage traditions since ancient times, allowing artists to easily convey their thoughts and emotions to the audience through their art. In this tradition, a specially elevated stage was arranged for artists to present their art to the audience. Currently, the Internet is mainly used to showcase music and singing performances more effectively and easily to a global audience. Musicians can now connect with their listeners more effortlessly and deliver a richer emotional experience. Using various online platforms, such as television, social media, and YouTube, has made it easier to communicate the beauty, uniqueness, and significance of different singing styles to music lovers around the world. As internet use continues to grow, it is likely to increase public interest in music and facilitate global promotion. Consequently, in the future, authentic music will deeply resonate with listeners through singing performances. Therefore, this research topic can provide new insights and perspectives for future studies, aiming to make singing performances more natural and accessible. Therefore, this research topic will be useful in offering new insights and perspectives for new researchers. It aims to make singing performances more natural, simple, and well-organized. With the use of the internet, artists can easily convey their artistic expression and creativity to listeners and society.

Keywords

Hindustani classical music, Indian classical music, Internet, presentation, singing, social media

INTRODUCTION

Indian Classical Music, especially Hindustani Classical Music is a rich and ancient art form, which has been transferred from generation to generation through the *Guru-Shishya* tradition for centuries. The Origin, development and progress of Hindustani classical music singing and Indian classical music is expanding and reaching to all. The study provides a conclusive analysis of the reasons for its popularity and success (Satapathy, 2008). According to the tradition of Indian music and drama, theatre is first mentioned in the famous Sanskrit book, *Natyashastra*. Since art is an essential part of life, it is natural for artistic elements to develop along with the development of civilization and culture. The specific place where artists sit to present any art or specific ideas is called a stage. The colorful beauty of art as its primary theme, it is also known as theatre. As a result of this long process of development, the stage, or theatre, has attained its modern form (Yaman, 2014). Evidence from this body of work suggests that the tradition of performance emerged alongside the origins of music. Stage performance is a powerful medium for establishing a direct connection between artist and audience.

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It is through stage performance that artists present their art to audiences or connoisseurs. In today's scientific age, there are many means of disseminating music to the public, such as radio, television, tape records, and stage performances. Of these, stage presentation is the most important, as the audience can hear the artist directly. To achieve success on stage, the artist must now prepare his or her performance with great understanding. While considering how much time is sufficient for each performance, one must always keep in mind the nature and aspirations of the audience. After studying the merits and demerits of the singer and the singing, one should present one's music on stage with great refinement (Vasant, 2022)

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the advent of the Internet has revolutionised the ways in which this art form is performed and disseminated. The aim of classical music is to express the true spirit of the music with a good sense of lyricism, melody and rhythm through proper presentation. (Banerjee, 2024). Digital innovations in recent years have brought about radical transformation in various sectors including music and education (Rohit & Ashfaq, 2023). The Internet has enabled Hindustani classical music to reach a global audience, allowing people from around the world to now listen, watch and learn this music online. A revolutionary change in the Hindustani classical music landscape due to the rise of online platforms, there have been many changes. Social media, online music platforms and digital advertising strategies play an integral role in the promotion of Indian classical music in modern times (Dasovich-Wilson et al., 2022). The Internet has revolutionised the ways in which Hindustani classical music is performed and disseminated. By bringing this art form to a global audience, providing new opportunities for learning, giving artists a platform to showcase their music, and playing a vital role in building a global community, in this way Internet has given a new direction to Hindustani classical music. Access to various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. This brought an unprecedented global exposure of these rich cultural art forms. Social media is addressing challenges such as quality control of music, and digital divide (Choudhary, 2024).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Music, which is as old as the Vedas has been an integral part of Indian culture. It has been performed for worship of God and to entertain the people and it has been a tradition since the Vedic period. The role of presentation in music is very important through which Indian classical music has been propagated through different platforms.

The Indian classical music genre has been propagated through various singing styles (drhupad, dhamar, khayal, tarana).

ध्रुपद [DHRUPAD]

It is commonly believed that drhupad was systematized and promoted by 'राजा मानसींह तोमर' (Raja Mansingh Tomar) of Gwalior in the late 15th century (1486–1516 CE), although some scholars hold that the style originated earlier. Raja Mansingh is credited with giving the form a structured, courtly presentation. Before drhupad, a singing style known as prabandha was prevalent. This style of singing was dominated by devotional sentiments. Originally, this music was performed in temples and churches. Drhupad is believed to have originated from this very singing style called prabandha. It can be said that when drhupad evolved from dhruvapad after modifications, Alaap and other ornamental elements were added to it, likely to suit the new style performed in the court. drhupad, like prabandha, may have been dominated by devotional sentiments, but it originated from religious places and reached the courts. Gradually, this new form or style of classical music was given the status of court music as it was adopted and performed not only by the court musicians of Gwalior but also by those of other parts of North India. (Nayak Bakhshu, Miyan Tansen, Niamat Khan Sadarang), and many other great musical figures of different times contributed to the development and popularity of this musical style.

The excellence of drhupad depends on the proper execution of several distinct expressions of sound and ornamentation. From a pedagogical perspective, representatives of various *Ghara*

groups have made significant contributions to the creation and unique presentation of ragas, even before the institutional system began. Hindustani ragas have been primarily presented through the forms of drhupad and khayal for centuries. The late nineteenth century saw a significant awakening through the initiation of academics and scholars from various fields, including music. In fact, they strived for holistic social and cultural development through certain changes. Institutional training in music began during the first half of the twentieth century. The pioneers of this renaissance envisioned the development of music and culture through a correlation between theory and practice. Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar are remembered with great respect in the field of Hindustani classical music. He took the initiative to establish music institutions as well as arranging classical music concerts and symposia with renowned music maestros to spread music education among the common people (Banerjee, 2021).

In the present era, khayal is being practiced and performed on a larger scale by a larger number of practitioners than drhupad. The practice of drhupad is gradually declining. Drhupad offers ample scope for proper expression of a raga through alaap (expression through gradual and progressive expansion of musical notes). The alaap portion of drhupad is being neglected day by day, which is extremely deplorable. People show more interest in various layakarīs (variations of meter or rhythm) than alaap. This practice is harmful for both educational and performance purposes.

धमार [DHAMAR]

Dhamar developed alongside drhupad and is closely associated with Hori songs performed during the festival of Holi. Dhamar is typically set to dhamar tāla (a 14-beat cycle) and often depicts the playful and romantic episodes of ‘राधा-कृष्ण’ (Radha-Krishna). It is conventionally presented in three parts, one of which—when sung in the drhupad style—is called dhamar.

Dhamar is an ancient style, performed in religious and festive settings, and is considered part of the drhupad ang (drhupad tradition). Although technically similar to drhupad, dhamar differs in mood and content: its subject matter emphasizes ‘शृंगार रस’ (shringar rasa) — love and beauty — and it creates a colourful, festive atmosphere in contrast to the solemnity typical of drhupad. Typical imagery in dhamar includes Radha-Krishna scenes, ‘गोपी’ (Gopi) dance, drums, cymbals, and the colour play of ‘अबीर-गुलाल’ (Abir-Gulal).

In contemporary North India, dhamar has received less institutional support and fewer performance opportunities compared with styles such as drhupad and khayal. Consequently, its practice has diminished, although it remains an important element of India’s musical heritage.

खयाल [KHAYAL]

Since the khayal a singing style is completely based on the raga. It is dependent and raga is the basis of khayal singing, hence what is raga, This becomes extremely important to understand. It is well known that the term raga is first defined in ‘बृहद्देशी’ (Brihaddesi), written by ‘मतंगमुनि’ (Matangmuni). He defined a raga as a special composition of sound that is adorned with tones and syllables and that can entertain the mind. That is, a combination and flow of tones that, when heard, creates a feeling of enjoyment is called a raga. Matangmuni gave the origin of raga. The rules or characteristics used in the presentation and creation of a raga are considered extremely important in raga singing. These ten characteristics of a raga are:

- ग्रह (graha): The tone with which the raga’s performance begins.
- अंश / वादी (ansh / vadi): The principal or dominant tone used frequently.
- तार-मंद्र (taar-mandra): Use of high (taar) and low (mandra) pitch ranges.
- न्यास (nyasa): The tone on which the raga commonly concludes.

- अपन्यास (apanyasa): Other important resting tones besides nyasa.
- अल्पत्व-बहुत्व (alpatva-bahutva): The relative infrequency or frequency of particular tones.
- षाडव-औडव (shadava-audava): Classification based on number of tones (six or five).

Vocal would have (grah, ansh, tar, mandra, nyas, apanyas, many alpatva, audava and shadav), plays an important role in the changing state of the raga and in new creation.

Raga is the foundation of Indian music and plays a crucial role in classical music performance. Indian classical music refers to systematic and high-quality musical performance through the proper articulation of sounds with precise embellishments of swaras and rhythm. Raga is a blend of powerful elements of classical music that expresses specific emotions. Classical music undoubtedly represents an evolution in music that did not happen overnight. Perseverance, rigorous practice, and unwavering dedication have led musicologists and music experts to achieve their goals. Classical music has certain essential practices, such as as meend, gamak, and shruti, through which ragas can be properly expressed. When an artist performs a raga, they strive to give it a stable form within these rules. Scholars have identified the ten characteristics of raga as graha, ansh, taar, mandra, nyasa, apanyas, audav, shadav, alpatva, and bahutva. Even in the present times, these raga characteristics are used in Indian classical music. Although these characteristics have changed in the present times, still, by keeping in mind the changes and rules in these raga characteristics, various experiments and changes are being done in the functional form of ragas so that new ragas can be invented and the form of traditional ragas can be made more excellent. (Nisha Jha et al., 2022)

THE KHAYAL SINGING STYLE IN THE PRESENT DAY

khayal singing is considered an important and popular genre of Indian classical music. Whenever classical music is discussed, the khayal singing style is the first thing that comes to mind. This means that in the present times, the khayal singing style has become synonymous with Indian classical music. The primary reason for the khayal singing style 's popularity is that it has absorbed the characteristics of many Indian musical styles. While on the one hand, it possesses the seriousness and elegance of the drhupad singing style, on the other, it possesses the playfulness and agility of the Thumari style. The word khayal is an Arabic-Persian word, meaning imagination, because in a khayal performance, the artist has complete freedom to express their imagination. The word imagination is very important in the context of the khayal singing style. Without new imaginations, new voice systems, or combinations, the singing becomes less appealing. The attraction of the raga is centered on the attachment of the notes. khayal singing is not done only on the basis of mathematics like taan, alaap, and boltan. With the help of imagination, the artist presents various parts of the raga artistically, only then imagination and emotion together give the experience of spiritual joy to the listeners and the artist himself. After drhupad, khayal singing has influenced the entire world of music, in the present times, this style has become the most popular among all the singing styles and has become synonymous with classical music. Most of the listeners who are into classical music and those who are less knowledgeable about it consider the khayal singing style as the main form of classical music.

The level and popularity of the khayal singing style in the present times can be said as the credit for making the form of khayal a subject of so much expansion, respect and detailed analysis goes to the music scholars, teachers and music institutions of modern times besides the earlier scholars, due to which the khayal style has emerged as the main style of classical music.

FORMS OF KHAYAL SINGING

Modern khayal practice is typically divided into three tempo-based forms:

1. Vilambit khayal / slow tempo:
Bada khayal: emphasises raga development through alaap, bol-alaap, taan, and sargam.

the bandish generally comprises sthayi and antara sections and is set to talas such as tilwada, ektaal, teentaal, and jhoomra.

2. Madhyalaya khayal/ medium tempo:
faster than vilambit, it is lighter and more playful, using shorter alapaas and taans. some performers move directly from vilambit to drut khayal depending on gharana tradition.
3. Drutkhayal / fast tempo:
characterised by rapid taans, sargams, and boltaans, showcasing technical virtuosity. common talas include teentaal, jhaptal, rupak taal, and ektaal.

The sthayi and antara are central to structural clarity: the composition both defines the raga's identity and offers the listener immediate melodic reference. A well-composed bandish functions as a mirror of the raga, reflecting its principal phrases and rhythmic design.

There are several reasons for the popularity of the khayal style in contemporary society, such as the variety and diversity of melody, rhythm, and lyrics in the singing. Today, artists are completely free to experiment in their singing. Based on the modern form of khayal, it can be said that it is not only suitable for romantic compositions but also includes compositions on divine praise, seasonal descriptions, 'कृष्ण लीला' (Krishna Leela), wedding ceremonies, descriptions of the 'नवरस वर्णन' (nine rasas), musical principles, and other subjects. It can be said that khayal singing has progressed from its origin to its current advanced state, and many scholars, including 'सदारंग-अदारंग' (sadarang and adarang), as well as various gharanas, educational institutions, music institutions, music conferences, All India Radio, Doordarshan centers have made significant contributions to bringing it to this position.

तराना (TARANA)

It is said that because the Muslim community did not have knowledge of devotional melodies, which is not proven, they started singing by distorting the tones, which later became known as tarana. Derived from the Persian word tarannum. Tarana singing came into vogue with the use of meaningless words like ता, ना, दानी (ta, na, dani), and its invention is attributed to Amir Khusrau. A composition consisting of melodic, rhythmic, and percussion elements is sung in a fast tempo, usually after the khayal style of singing. Its characteristic feature is the miraculous weaving together of intricate melodic phrases and singing them in rapid tempos.

Analysis of the above singing styles reveals that most of these styles are becoming extinct. If, currently, artists present the aesthetic expression of these styles, keeping in mind their theoretical aspects, through various internet platforms, then the essence of Indian classical music will spread globally.

ON THE EVOLUTION OF HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC

In the modern era, if the 20th century is called the era of change, then it will not be an exaggeration as it has brought rapid changes in every sphere of life. At present, along with scientific progress, various types of electronic equipment have been invented in music as well, which has accelerated the propagation of every genre of music. The concept of globalization was inevitable for Indian classical music as it was contrary to the music culture. After independence, classical music of North America came with a variety of new dimensions and perspectives. After the end of British rule, Indian classical musicians had to face the responsibility of earning bread along with carrying forward the musical tradition. Thus, with the advent of globalization, the music scene started taking a different shape due to which traditional music accepted many new perspectives in learning and performance (Vedabala, 2016).

In the modern era, the Internet is a global network that connects computers and various types of electronic devices to each other at a global level. Through this, we can get any kind of information from the Internet by searching on a search engine. In this, we can get information related to music such as files, videos, and songs and can also share them by uploading them. Most of the traditional presentation and its communication has got a new direction at the global level with the use of various

mediums of the Internet such as YouTube to television, Instagram or Facebook. If seen in the perspective of the Internet, before the Internet, people had to face more difficulties in accessing music. People had to wait for a long time on TV channels or any other platform to listen to music or apart from this, sometimes they had to buy music stores or catalogs for their favorite music. But when the Internet came, it probably brought a huge change in all areas. Along with changes in all fields, changes also came in the field of music and people got easy access to music at the global level. Currently, through the various mediums of the Internet, the original heritage of Indian culture, music, is being established and flourishing with modern times through the media. Internet has played an important role in making Hindustani classical singing presentations reach more and more people through the use of special applications like various dimensions of social media such as YouTube, and Facebook. Artists can mostly showcase their talent on big platforms like social media and they can easily express their feelings at the global level through their art. Indian classical music has also made its mark on the global platform. ‘अजय चक्रबोर्ती’ and ‘कौशिकी चक्रबोर्ती’ (Ajay Chakraborti and Kaushiki Chakraborti) are the popular example for Hindustani Classical Music Performers in India and world as well. Hindustani Classical music has helped evolve and remain relevant in the diverse musical world of today. Indian classical music is a powerful and transformative form of singing that connects performers and listeners deeply to their emotions and spirituality (Sla, 2024).

Currently, during the Corona pandemic, a special kind of change has taken place in the presentation of music. All types of performing arts are mostly being performed through social media apps like Facebook Live, YouTube, WhatsApp, including video calling. At present, the use of the Internet has given artists more control over their musical art. Now they can decide for themselves how to continue or present music, even how they want to market it or commercialize it. Artists can present musical singing independently through the Internet on a live stage or can also take the help of a record level to represent them, which can be saved and broadcast later.

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES AND PLATFORMS KNOWN

In the current difficult circumstances, the ongoing worldly functioning got disrupted due to the last global pandemic (Covid-19), during which the field of music also remained untouched. In such a situation, social media proved to be helpful in teaching and presenting music. Social media platforms not only connect music artists with listeners but also allow them to find their listeners among the user base. Facebook followers, Instagram followers, YouTube subscribers are examples of dedicated communities of an artist and it gives an opportunity to build real relationships with all the listeners and musicians. Indian classical music promotes cultural identity at the global level. Individualism and in a world built on rapid change, classical music represents continuity, awareness and provides an early feeling of winter (Bhardwaj, 2023). Streaming music videos on the Internet is an increasingly popular music listening activity that has taken over the field of music science. Studies on the role of films and music, as well as experiments examining the effects of audiovisual media and environment, have shown that visual information can have a significant impact on the perception and experience of music (Dasovich-Wilson et al., 2022).

FACEBOOK

Facebook is a popular social media platform that has transformed the way Hindustani Classical Music is performed and connected globally. Through it, live video and audio can be streamed from mobile devices, computers, or streaming software. Listeners can easily give feedback to musicians by asking questions online via live chat. The platform's interactive features, such as comments and dedicated groups, create vibrant online communities and enable real-time interaction between performers and audiences, fostering a sense of shared experience. Facebook also acts as an important networking tool, supporting collaborations and learning opportunities for musicians worldwide, while also serving as a digital archive for preserving and sharing valuable performances and educational content. Additionally, it offers artists essential marketing and monetization tools, helping them promote events, grow their fan base, and sustain their careers. Ultimately, Facebook has not only broadened the audience for Hindustani Classical music but also transformed the very nature of its performance and consumption, creating a dynamic and interconnected digital ecosystem.

INSTAGRAM

Through Instagram, artists can publicly share short video clips of their performances, behind-the-scenes glimpses, or photos of themselves practicing, allowing them to reach a wider audience. The platform also provides listeners with the opportunity to connect directly with artists, thereby building a fan community. Instagram's features such as Stories and Reels allow artists to showcase their art in creative and engaging ways. Additionally, through hashtags and the Explore page, new audiences can discover classical music and artists, increasing the popularity and reach of the genre. Many classical music institutions and organizations also actively use Instagram to promote their events and artists. Due to which this platform has emerged as a powerful tool for the promotion of Hindustani classical music.

YOUTUBE

In this application, new music and podcasts can be discovered and listened to on all types of devices connected to the network. In this, music listeners get an opportunity to stay connected with their favorite artists. Artists can come live and connect with their listeners online through this and can easily upload recorded audio-video in it. Here you can also give live performances by coming online and the user can broadcast it live on this application. Music also provides a unique facility to users to add almost any type of songs available on YouTube to their YouTube Music Premium playlist. This platform provides a different type of platform from other streaming services. There are many great channels on YouTube for those who want to learn singing. For example, Akashvani Ragam is a 24/7 Indian classical music channel on which Hindustani and Carnatic classical music is broadcast. Similarly, Saregama Hindustani Classical, and T-Series provide singing lessons, which can be very useful for beginners. Through these channels one can learn the nuances of singing and train their voice at home. Similarly, there are various other social media platforms which are promoting music genre (singing, playing, dancing) globally. They are playing a major role in the presentation. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that before the discovery of the Internet, people in the society were extremely less aware of classical music. The field of presentation of Hindustani classical music was limited due to a small number of platforms. Due to limited platforms for the expression of their art, the artist had to face disappointment and difficulties in earning a livelihood. After the discovery of the Internet, people's awareness towards music has increased and there has been an emergence of more ease in the presentation of music. Artists have become more capable of expressing the aesthetic elements of art and making people feel it and a sense of interrelationship has been established between the artist and the listener.

IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

The efficiency of promotion of Hindustani classical music has increased through various means of the internet and at present music lovers can easily listen to the performance of any artist. The contribution of many gharanas in the singing genre of Hindustani classical music has been highly commendable and these gharanas have been presenting the characteristics of various styles of classical music singing in a unique way, in which they have been influencing the listeners towards music by enchanting and entertaining the minds of the listeners through singing with a special kind of beauty. Artists can now make their performances more impressive by using the characteristics of different types of Gharana singing in their singing styles.

At present, any artist can learn the features of gharana singing in various styles of Hindustani classical music dhrupad, dhamar, khayal, tarana and can make his art more impressive and can express his feelings in a better way in front of people at national and international level. Along with increasing the spread of music with the use of internet, it has also contributed significantly in making music known to the society and through this, the artist can also get the feedback of the audience after singing. By making the feedback received from the audience the aim, the artist can present his art in a new and effective way.

Before the 21st century, artists were limited in reaching their art to the audience. But at present, with the help of the Internet, they are able to present their art to the audience at the national and

international level without any hindrance. Platforms like YouTube and SoundCloud, the Internet has a very important role in reaching music to listeners around the world. By creating a connection with artists at the international level through online streaming, music can be made more influential.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the presented research paper, it is known that in the past, before the discovery of the internet, there was slackness in the promotion of Hindustani classical music and artists had to face disappointment due to the limited platform for the expression of their art. There were many difficulties in earning the livelihood of the musician, the effect of which was visible on music as well. Currently, due to social media, the promotion of music and artists have also got a new dimension. With the help of the internet, many dimensions of presentation have been found in Hindustani classical music singing, through which the fame of classical music has spread throughout India. Now, by listening to the singing of any type of singing genre by any famous singer, one can get the aesthetic feeling also known as 'रसानुभूति' (Rasanubhuti). Through the internet, the features of Indian classical music are being imbibed by Indian listeners as well as foreign listeners. In future, more excellence can be achieved in the field of music by using the internet and a new dimension can be given to the presentation of Hindustani classical music singing.

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GUARDIANS OF THE SIGIRIYA FRESCOES: A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN SRI LANKA

Medha de Alwis¹

Abstract

The frescoes of Sigiriya, depicting the ethereal “Maidens of the Clouds,” represent a pinnacle of Sri Lanka's artistic and cultural heritage. As integral components of the Sigiriya World Heritage Site, these fifth-century wall paintings demand not only technical conservation but robust legal safeguarding within the framework of cultural heritage management. This chapter critically examines the adequacy of existing legal mechanisms in Sri Lanka—particularly the Antiquities Ordinance, relevant provisions of the Central Cultural Fund Act, and UNESCO's World Heritage guidelines—as they pertain to the protection of the cultural heritage of Sigiriya. Through a doctrinal analysis of statutory instruments and comparative insights from international conservation standards, the study identifies significant gaps in both the substantive and procedural aspects of current legal protections. Issues such as vulnerability to environmental damage, insufficient emergency-response regulation, and the lack of site-specific conservation protocols highlight the urgent need for a more integrated and enforceable legal framework. The chapter argues for a redefinition of Sigiriya's legal status within the broader category of cultural heritage and proposes targeted legislative and administrative reforms to ensure their sustained preservation. In doing so, it contributes to the evolving discourse on heritage law in Sri Lanka and the global conversation on legal instruments for the management of culturally significant sites, which are symbolic in terms of law regulations within the entire UNESCO's World Heritage System, including Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

Keywords:

Sigiriya, cultural heritage, legal protection, conservation policy, cultural heritage law

INTRODUCTION

The Ancient City of Sigiriya stands as one of the most remarkable cultural heritage sites in South Asia. This fifth-century fortress complex, constructed during the reign of King Kassapa I who reigned between 477 and 495 CE, encompasses sophisticated water gardens, architectural innovations, and the world-renowned frescoes that adorn the western face of the Lion's Rock (De Silva, 2005). The site gained international recognition when UNESCO inscribed it as a World Heritage Site in 1982 under the Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage (UNESCO, 1972), establishing binding obligations for its protection and conservation.

The legal framework governing Sigiriya's protection operates within a complex matrix of domestic legislation and international obligations that have evolved over eight decades. The site's conservation requirements extend beyond structural preservation to encompass protection of invaluable cultural artifacts, sophisticated hydraulic systems, and the frescoes commonly referred to as the “Maidens of the Clouds.” These paintings represent some of the finest examples of ancient Sri Lankan art and constitute irreplaceable elements of global cultural heritage.

The current legal regime has undergone substantial evolution, beginning with the colonial-era Antiquities Ordinance No. 9 of 1940 and extending through modern instruments such as the Central Cultural Fund Act No. 57 of 1980. However, the adequacy of these mechanisms in addressing specific conservation challenges faced by Sigiriya remains questionable, particularly given emerging threats and evolving international standards for World Heritage Site management as outlined in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 2019).

Environmental degradation, increasing visitor pressure, and the inherent vulnerability of ancient structures present ongoing challenges that existing legal frameworks may not adequately address.

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Climate change impacts create new conservation challenges that were not anticipated when foundational heritage legislation was enacted. The exponential growth in tourism to Sigiriya has created physical pressures on fragile archaeological structures that require sophisticated management approaches supported by robust legal frameworks.

This research examines the intersection between Sri Lankan domestic law and international legal obligations in Sigiriya's heritage management context. The study focuses exclusively on statutory provisions, legal instruments, and constitutional frameworks that govern the site's protection, without examining institutional practices or stakeholder perspectives. This limitation ensures analytical precision while maintaining focus on the structural adequacy of the legal framework. The analysis aims to identify legal gaps, assess consistency between domestic and international obligations, and propose reforms that could enhance the protective framework surrounding this irreplaceable cultural treasure. As one of eight World Heritage Sites in Sri Lanka, Sigiriya serves as a critical test case for the effectiveness of the country's cultural heritage protection laws (Amarasinghe, 2015). The findings contribute to broader discussions about heritage conservation law in Sri Lanka and the international discourse on legal instruments for cultural heritage management.

SCHOLARLY FOUNDATION

Scholarly discourse on cultural heritage protection in Sri Lanka has evolved from colonial-era artifact preservation to contemporary integrated site management approaches. This foundation examines key contributions to understanding legal mechanisms for heritage protection at Sigiriya.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The Antiquities Ordinance No. 9 of 1940 established foundational heritage protection mechanisms in colonial Ceylon, creating basic site protection and artifact control systems. Subsequent amendments through Act No. 24 of 1998 and Act No. 12 of 2005 modernized specific provisions while maintaining the colonial framework structure. The Central Cultural Fund Act No. 57 of 1980 introduced dedicated funding mechanisms and international cooperation frameworks for heritage management.

Amarasinghe (1999) traces Sri Lankan legal heritage development, demonstrating gradual evolution rather than revolutionary change in heritage protection approaches. His later work (2006) identifies critical gaps between legislative provisions and conservation requirements, particularly regarding environmental protection and emergency response protocols. Amarasinghe (2015) examines the practical application of legal frameworks to archaeological sites, highlighting tensions between conservation and tourism development.

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CONTEXT

The UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972) created binding obligations for Sri Lanka following ratification in 1980. Blake (2015) analyzes how international obligations translate into domestic implementation, revealing common challenges in implementing conservation standards within national legal systems. Francioni and Lenzerini (2004) examine specific legal obligations for state parties under the World Heritage Convention, identifying areas where national legislation must evolve to meet international requirements. International instruments, including the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property (1954) and the Venice Charter (1964), provide a comparative context for domestic legal analysis.

CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS

Recent scholarship reveals persistent challenges in heritage protection frameworks. Weerasekera (2021) identifies emerging threats, including climate change impacts and tourism pressures, that existing legislation inadequately addresses. The ICOMOS (1994) mission report provides an authoritative assessment of conservation challenges at Sri Lankan World Heritage Sites, identifying areas requiring strengthened legal frameworks.

Methodological contributions from Pickard (2001) and Cookson (2000) establish frameworks for analyzing heritage law adequacy and archaeological site protection mechanisms. Feilden and Jokilehto (1993) provide international standards for evaluating heritage protection legislation effectiveness.

RESEARCH POSITIONING

The Methodology constitutional framework established in 1978 provides a foundation for heritage protection through Article 16's cultural preservation mandate. Historical analysis by de Silva (1997, 2005) situates contemporary legal frameworks within broader constitutional and cultural development patterns. This scholarly foundation demonstrates that while substantial attention has addressed heritage protection in Sri Lanka, significant gaps remain in understanding how legal frameworks can address contemporary conservation challenges, positioning the current research within established academic discourse while identifying areas for contribution.

METHODS

This research employs a comprehensive doctrinal legal analysis methodology, focusing exclusively on primary legal sources and statutory instruments that govern cultural heritage protection in Sri Lanka. The study examines the legislative framework through a systematic analysis of relevant laws, regulations, and constitutional provisions that apply specifically to the Sigiriya World Heritage Site. The methodology encompasses both domestic legal instruments and international legal obligations arising from Sri Lanka's ratification of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972). The research design follows a rigorous desk-based approach, utilizing published legal documents, statutory provisions, and authoritative legal commentaries (Pickard, 2001). The study deliberately excludes institutional practices, administrative circulars, judicial decisions, and stakeholder opinions, as these elements fall outside the specified research purview. This methodological limitation ensures analytical precision while maintaining exclusive focus on statutory and constitutional dimensions of heritage protection.

Primary sources constitute the foundation of the analytical framework and include the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (1978), the Antiquities Ordinance No. 9 of 1940, and the Central Cultural Fund Act No. 57 of 1980. The study also incorporates relevant provisions of environmental protection legislation such as the National Environmental Act No. 47 of 1980 and urban planning laws, including the Urban Development Authority Act No. 41 of 1978 that intersect with cultural heritage management at Sigiriya. International legal sources form a crucial component of the analytical framework (Blake, 2015). The study examines the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1972, which Sri Lanka ratified on June 6, 1980, and its implementing guidelines (UNESCO, 2019). Additional international instruments, including the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property (UNESCO, 1954) and the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, 1964), provide comparative context for the domestic legal analysis.

The temporal scope covers the period from the enactment of the original Antiquities Ordinance through the most recent legislative amendments affecting cultural heritage protection. This longitudinal approach enables the identification of evolutionary trends in Sri Lankan heritage law and the assessment of how legal frameworks have adapted to changing conservation challenges (Amarasinghe, 1999). Data collection involves a systematic review of legal databases, official government publications, and UNESCO documentation. The analysis employs comparative legal methodology to assess Sri Lankan provisions against international standards and best practices in heritage law (Cookson, 2000). The analytical framework examines legal provisions across multiple dimensions including substantive adequacy, procedural effectiveness, enforcement mechanisms, and institutional coordination requirements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EVOLUTION OF HERITAGE PROTECTION LEGISLATION IN SRI LANKA

The development of heritage protection law in Sri Lanka reflects a gradual evolution from colonial-era artifact preservation to contemporary comprehensive site management approaches (Amarasinghe, 1999). The original Antiquities Ordinance No. 9 of 1940 represented the first systematic attempt to protect archaeological sites and cultural artifacts within Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was then known. This

legislation emerged from colonial concerns about the systematic removal of valuable artifacts from the island and established basic mechanisms for site protection and artifact control.

The Antiquities Ordinance created the position of Archaeological Commissioner, later redesignated as Director-General of Archaeology, with broad powers to declare sites as protected monuments and regulate activities affecting archaeological remains. The ordinance established fundamental concepts that continue to influence Sri Lankan heritage law, including the notion of state ownership of archaeological artifacts and the requirement for permits to conduct excavations or remove artifacts from protected sites. However, the colonial origins of this legislation created certain limitations that persist in contemporary heritage management (de Silva, 1997). The ordinance focused primarily on preventing artifact removal rather than establishing comprehensive conservation protocols for complex archaeological sites. The legislation also reflected colonial administrative structures that prioritized central government control over heritage resources without adequate mechanisms for local community involvement or stakeholder consultation.

The post-independence period brought gradual recognition of the need for more sophisticated heritage protection mechanisms. The Central Cultural Fund Act No. 57 of 1980 represented a significant advance in heritage legislation, establishing a dedicated funding mechanism for cultural heritage activities and creating institutional capacity for comprehensive site management. This legislation recognized that effective heritage protection required sustained financial resources and specialized institutional expertise beyond the scope of general government departments. The Central Cultural Fund Act also introduced concepts of international cooperation in heritage management, recognizing the global significance of Sri Lankan cultural heritage and the need for technical assistance and funding from international sources. This recognition proved particularly important for sites like Sigiriya, where conservation challenges exceeded the technical and financial capacity of domestic institutions alone.

The constitutional framework established in 1978 provided additional foundation for heritage protection by recognizing cultural preservation as a fundamental state obligation (Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1978). Article 16 of the Constitution directs the State to promote and protect the cultural heritage of the people, creating a constitutional mandate that supports subsequent heritage legislation. This constitutional provision establishes heritage protection as a legitimate exercise of state power and provides a foundation for restricting private property rights when necessary to protect cultural heritage sites. Despite these legislative advances, the fundamental structure of Sri Lankan heritage law remains anchored in the colonial-era framework established by the Antiquities Ordinance. Subsequent amendments and supplementary legislation have modified specific provisions without addressing the comprehensive reform needs identified through decades of practical experience in heritage management (Weerasekera, 2021). This incremental approach to legislative development has created a complex regulatory environment characterized by overlapping jurisdictions and gap-filled provisions that may not adequately address contemporary conservation challenges.

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL OBLIGATIONS AND DOMESTIC IMPLEMENTATION

Sri Lanka's ratification of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention on June 6, 1980, created binding international legal obligations regarding the protection and management of World Heritage Sites within its territory (UNESCO, 1972). The Convention requires state parties to ensure the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations of cultural heritage located on their territory. These obligations apply directly to the Sigiriya World Heritage Site, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1982.

The World Heritage Convention establishes several specific legal obligations for Sri Lanka regarding Sigiriya's management (Francioni & Lenzerini, 2004). Article 4 of the Convention recognizes that each state party has the duty to ensure the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission to future generations of the cultural heritage located on its territory. Article 5 requires states to adopt general policies that give cultural heritage a function in community life and integrate heritage protection into comprehensive planning programs. However, the implementation of these international obligations within Sri Lankan domestic law remains problematic. Unlike some countries that have enacted specific legislation to implement World Heritage Convention obligations, Sri Lanka

has not incorporated the Convention's requirements into its domestic legal framework through dedicated implementing legislation (Blake, 2015). This creates uncertainty about the legal status of UNESCO guidelines and recommendations within the Sri Lankan legal system.

The lack of formal incorporation also creates challenges in enforcing international conservation standards at Sigiriya. While the Central Cultural Fund and Department of Archaeology reference UNESCO guidelines in their operational procedures, these guidelines lack the force of law within the domestic legal system (Amarasinghe, 2006). This situation potentially weakens the enforceability of international conservation standards and creates ambiguity about the legal authority of UNESCO recommendations. The World Heritage Convention's emphasis on community involvement and stakeholder consultation also lacks adequate reflection in Sri Lankan heritage legislation. The Convention's requirements for involving local communities in heritage management decisions are not translated into specific statutory obligations within domestic law. This omission limits the legal foundation for community participation in Sigiriya's management and may contribute to tensions between conservation requirements and local community interests.

REGULATORY GAPS AND ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES

The current legal framework governing Sigiriya exhibits several critical regulatory gaps that compromise the site's effective protection. The absence of comprehensive environmental protection provisions within heritage legislation creates particular challenges for Sigiriya's conservation. The site faces ongoing threats from air pollution, acid rain, and climate change impacts that existing heritage laws do not adequately address.

Emergency response protocols represent another significant gap in the current legal framework. The Antiquities Ordinance and Central Cultural Fund Act lack specific provisions for responding to natural disasters, security threats, or other emergencies that might threaten Sigiriya's integrity. This absence becomes particularly concerning given the site's exposure to monsoon weather, potential seismic activity, and other environmental risks that could cause irreparable damage to the frescoes and architectural structures. The legal framework also lacks adequate provisions for controlling development activities in the vicinity of Sigiriya. While the site itself enjoys protection as a declared monument, the surrounding buffer zones face ongoing pressure from tourism development, agriculture, and urban expansion. The absence of specific buffer zone legislation creates challenges in maintaining the landscape setting that contributes to Sigiriya's outstanding universal value. Enforcement mechanisms within the existing legal framework also present significant limitations. The Antiquities Ordinance establishes penalties for violations of heritage protection requirements, but these penalties were set decades ago and may no longer provide adequate deterrent effects. The legislation also lacks provisions for administrative enforcement actions that could provide more flexible responses to conservation threats.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATION

The implementation of heritage protection law at Sigiriya involves multiple government institutions with overlapping jurisdictions and specialized responsibilities. The Department of Archaeology serves as the primary regulatory authority under the Antiquities Ordinance, possessing direct responsibility for site protection, research authorization, and conservation oversight. The Director-General of Archaeology exercises statutory powers to regulate activities within the protected monument boundaries and coordinate with other agencies on heritage management issues.

The Central Cultural Fund operates as the principal funding and coordination mechanism for heritage activities across Sri Lanka, including specific programs for Sigiriya conservation. This statutory body possesses the authority to collect visitor fees, allocate resources for conservation projects, and facilitate international cooperation in heritage management. The Fund's mandate extends beyond mere financing to include strategic planning for heritage site development and coordination between government agencies and international partners. The Department of Wildlife Conservation maintains jurisdiction over natural heritage aspects of the Sigiriya area, including the surrounding forest reserves and wildlife habitats that contribute to the site's landscape setting. This agency's involvement reflects the integrated nature of cultural and natural heritage at Sigiriya, where the archaeological site remains embedded within a broader ecological context that requires specialized management attention.

Local government authorities, including the Matale District Administration and relevant Divisional Secretariats, possess regulatory authority over land use planning, development approvals, and infrastructure projects that may affect the Sigiriya World Heritage Site and its buffer zones. These institutions implement national heritage policies at the local level while managing day-to-day administrative requirements for site access and visitor services. The Tourism Development Authority exercises regulatory oversight of tourism activities at Sigiriya, including accommodation development, tour operator licensing, and visitor service standards. This agency's involvement reflects the significant economic importance of heritage tourism for the local community and national economy, while highlighting the need for careful balance between tourism development and heritage conservation requirements. However, the current legal framework provides inadequate mechanisms for coordinating these multiple jurisdictions effectively. The absence of clear statutory procedures for inter-agency coordination creates potential for conflicts between different regulatory requirements and delays in implementing necessary conservation measures. Each agency operates under its own legal mandate without sufficient integration mechanisms to ensure comprehensive site management approaches.

SITE-SPECIFIC CONSERVATION REQUIREMENTS

The unique characteristics of Sigiriya create conservation challenges that generic heritage protection legislation cannot adequately address. The site's combination of architectural remains, artistic treasures, and engineered landscape features requires specialized management approaches that current legal frameworks do not fully recognize (Amarasinghe, 2006).

The protection of Sigiriya's frescoes presents particularly complex legal challenges. These fifth-century paintings face ongoing deterioration from environmental factors, visitor impact, and natural aging processes. While the Antiquities Ordinance provides general protection for archaeological artifacts, it lacks specific provisions addressing the unique conservation requirements of ancient artwork. The absence of detailed regulatory frameworks for controlling environmental conditions, limiting visitor access, and implementing preventive conservation measures creates ongoing risks to these irreplaceable cultural treasures. The site's water management systems, including the sophisticated hydraulic engineering works created by ancient builders, also require specialized legal protection. These systems continue to function after 15 centuries and represent outstanding examples of ancient engineering knowledge. However, current heritage legislation does not adequately recognize the conservation significance of these hydraulic features or provide specific protection mechanisms for their maintenance and operation.

The integration of natural and cultural heritage elements at Sigiriya creates additional challenges for legal protection. The site's designation as a cultural World Heritage Site focuses primarily on its archaeological and artistic significance, but the natural landscape setting contributes significantly to its outstanding universal value. The absence of integrated legislation addressing both cultural and natural heritage aspects limits the comprehensive protection of Sigiriya's landscape integrity. Tourism management represents another area where site-specific legislation could enhance protection effectiveness. Sigiriya attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, creating significant pressure on the site's fragile archaeological remains and artwork. While the Central Cultural Fund possesses the authority to regulate visitor access and collect entrance fees, the legal framework lacks comprehensive provisions for managing tourism impacts and ensuring visitor activities remain compatible with conservation requirements.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

Examination of heritage protection legislation in other countries reveals several approaches that could enhance Sigiriya's legal protection. Countries such as Peru, with its specific legislation for Machu Picchu, and Cambodia, with dedicated laws for Angkor, demonstrate the potential benefits of site-specific heritage legislation. Peru's Law for the Protection of Machu Picchu provides a comprehensive framework addressing environmental protection, tourism management, research coordination, and community involvement. This legislation establishes clear institutional responsibilities, creates specific enforcement mechanisms, and integrates cultural heritage protection with broader environmental conservation goals. Such comprehensive legislation could serve as a model for developing enhanced legal protection for Sigiriya.

Cambodia's Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage demonstrates another approach to addressing the intersection between cultural heritage protection and tourism development. This legislation establishes specific zones with different levels of protection, creates mechanisms for managing tourism impacts, and provides detailed procedures for authorizing research and conservation activities. The zoning approach could be particularly relevant for Sigiriya, given the need to balance heritage protection with tourism access.

The United Kingdom's approach to scheduled monument protection also offers insights relevant to Sigiriya's legal framework. British heritage legislation provides detailed procedures for authorizing activities affecting protected sites, establishes clear enforcement mechanisms, and creates appeal processes for disputed decisions. These procedural safeguards could enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of heritage protection measures at Sigiriya. Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act demonstrates how countries can integrate cultural and natural heritage protection within unified legal frameworks. This integrated approach could address the landscape dimension of Sigiriya's heritage significance while maintaining focus on its primary cultural values.

PROPOSED LEGAL REFORMS

The analysis reveals several areas where targeted legal reforms could enhance the protection of Sigiriya's cultural heritage. The enactment of site-specific legislation for Sigiriya would address many of the identified gaps in the current legal framework. Such legislation could establish comprehensive management objectives, create detailed conservation protocols, and provide specific enforcement mechanisms tailored to the site's unique characteristics. The proposed legislation should include specific provisions for protecting the frescoes, addressing their unique conservation requirements, and establishing protocols for environmental monitoring, visitor management, and emergency response. These provisions should reference international conservation standards while creating legally binding obligations within the domestic legal system.

Buffer zone protection requires specific attention in any reformed legal framework. The proposed legislation should establish clear boundaries for different protection zones around Sigiriya, with specific regulations governing development activities, land use changes, and environmental impacts within these zones. This zoning approach would provide stronger protection for the landscape setting that contributes to Sigiriya's outstanding universal value. Enhanced coordination mechanisms between different government agencies should be incorporated into the reformed legal framework. The legislation should establish clear institutional responsibilities, create formal coordination procedures, and provide mechanisms for resolving jurisdictional conflicts. A unified management authority for Sigiriya could provide more effective coordination while maintaining specialized expertise from different agencies.

The incorporation of UNESCO World Heritage Convention obligations into domestic law requires specific attention. The proposed legislation should explicitly reference international conservation standards, create legal obligations to comply with UNESCO guidelines, and establish procedures for implementing World Heritage Committee decisions. This incorporation would strengthen the legal foundation for international cooperation in Sigiriya's management. Emergency response protocols should be integrated into the reformed legal framework. The legislation should establish clear procedures for responding to natural disasters, security threats, and other emergencies that might threaten Sigiriya's integrity. These protocols should include provisions for mobilizing resources, coordinating response activities, and implementing recovery measures following emergency situations.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of the legal framework governing cultural heritage management at Sigiriya reveals a complex regulatory environment characterized by both achievements and significant limitations. The existing legislative foundation, anchored by the Antiquities Ordinance and strengthened by the Central Cultural Fund Act, provides basic protection mechanisms that have contributed to Sigiriya's preservation over several decades. However, these instruments reflect their historical origins and fail to comprehensively address the contemporary challenges facing this remarkable World Heritage Site.

The study identifies several critical gaps in the current legal framework that compromise the effectiveness of Sigiriya's protection. The absence of site-specific legislation creates challenges in addressing the unique conservation requirements of this complex archaeological site. Environmental protection provisions remain inadequate for addressing ongoing threats from climate change, pollution, and other environmental factors. Emergency response protocols lack the specificity needed to protect irreplaceable cultural treasures during crisis situations.

The implementation of Sri Lanka's international legal obligations under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention presents particular challenges. While the country has ratified the Convention and committed to protecting World Heritage Sites within its territory, the lack of formal incorporation of Convention requirements into domestic law creates uncertainty about the legal status of international conservation standards. This gap potentially weakens the enforceability of UNESCO guidelines and limits the effectiveness of international cooperation in heritage management. The research demonstrates that regulatory gaps and enforcement challenges continue to compromise the protective framework surrounding Sigiriya. The coordination between different government agencies with jurisdiction over various aspects of the site's management lacks adequate statutory foundation, creating potential conflicts and delays in conservation implementation. Penalty provisions within existing legislation may no longer provide sufficient deterrent effects, while enforcement mechanisms lack the flexibility needed to address diverse conservation threats.

The comparative analysis with international best practices reveals several approaches that could enhance Sigiriya's legal protection. Site-specific legislation, as implemented in countries such as Peru and Cambodia for their major heritage sites, could address many of the identified gaps in Sri Lanka's current framework. Integrated approaches that address both cultural and natural heritage dimensions could strengthen protection for Sigiriya's landscape setting. Enhanced procedural safeguards could improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of conservation measures. The proposed legal reforms outlined in this study offer a pathway toward strengthening the protective framework surrounding Sigiriya's cultural heritage. The enactment of dedicated legislation for the site could establish comprehensive management objectives, create detailed conservation protocols, and provide specific enforcement mechanisms tailored to its unique characteristics. Buffer zone protection, enhanced agency coordination, formal incorporation of international obligations, and comprehensive emergency response protocols represent priority areas for legislative reform.

The significance of these findings extends beyond Sigiriya itself. As one of Sri Lanka's eight World Heritage Sites, Sigiriya serves as a critical test case for the effectiveness of the country's cultural heritage protection laws. The lessons learned from this analysis can inform broader discussions about heritage conservation law in Sri Lanka and contribute to the international discourse on legal instruments for cultural heritage management. The protection of Sigiriya's cultural heritage ultimately depends on the strength and effectiveness of the legal framework governing its management. While technical conservation expertise and adequate financing remain essential, these elements cannot substitute for robust legal foundations that provide clear authority, effective enforcement mechanisms, and comprehensive protection standards. The reforms proposed in this study offer concrete steps toward strengthening these legal foundations and ensuring that the irreplaceable cultural treasures of Sigiriya receive the protection they deserve.

The urgency of implementing comprehensive legal reforms cannot be overstated, as threats facing Sigiriya continue to evolve and intensify. Climate change impacts create new conservation challenges that were entirely unanticipated when foundational heritage legislation was enacted. The exponential growth in tourism, while economically beneficial, has created unprecedented physical pressures on fragile archaeological structures and irreplaceable artwork that demand sophisticated management approaches supported by robust legal frameworks. The legal framework governing the site's protection must evolve accordingly to address these changing challenges effectively while maintaining the balance between preservation requirements and legitimate public access. The window of opportunity for implementing comprehensive legal reforms remains open, but decisive action is required to prevent irreversible damage to elements that have survived for over fifteen centuries.

This research contributes significantly to the evolving discourse on heritage law in Sri Lanka and the global conversation on legal instruments for cultural heritage management. The findings demonstrate

that effective heritage protection requires more than good intentions and technical expertise. It demands robust legal frameworks that provide clear statutory authority, effective enforcement mechanisms, and comprehensive protection standards tailored to the unique requirements of irreplaceable cultural treasures. The implications extend beyond academic analysis to encompass practical policy recommendations that could enhance the protection of one of humanity's most significant cultural heritage sites. The proposed reforms offer concrete pathways toward strengthening legal foundations that support Sigiriya's conservation while contributing to international best practices in heritage law development.

The research findings highlight the critical importance of proactive legal reform in heritage protection, demonstrating that reactive approaches to emerging threats are insufficient to protect irreplaceable cultural resources. The comprehensive analysis provides policymakers, legal practitioners, and heritage professionals with evidence-based recommendations for strengthening the protective framework surrounding not only Sigiriya but also other significant heritage sites facing similar challenges. In conclusion, the protection of Sigiriya's cultural heritage ultimately depends on the strength and effectiveness of the legal framework governing its management. While technical conservation expertise, adequate financing, and institutional capacity remain essential, these components cannot substitute for robust legal foundations that provide clear authority, effective enforcement mechanisms, and comprehensive protection standards. The reforms proposed through this analysis offer concrete steps toward strengthening these foundations and ensuring that the irreplaceable cultural treasures of Sigiriya receive the protection they deserve for transmission to future generations.

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REVIEWING THE TELESCOPE CLARINET OF NORTHERN LAOS

Gisa Jähnichen¹

Abstract

The telescope clarinet that can be found in some places of Northern Laos is a very rare musical instrument and nearly not played anymore. But the musical instrument was still available at the beginning of this century. This short paper will describe the construction and the former use of it in the communities of that area. In result, some difficulties in musical understanding of the area's musical heritage can be explained and discussed. Another point is the embedding of the musical instrument into the entire communal context. Research questions are mainly whether the hierarchies found through observation are pretended or real.

Keywords

Lao cultures, reed instruments, telescope clarinets, Khmu people, contextual embedding

INTRODUCTION

The telescope clarinet that can be found in some places of Northern Laos is a very rare musical instrument. It is nearly not played anymore. But the musical instrument was still available at the beginning of this century. It was available but was always in need of a player with specialised skills. The categorisation term 'specialised skills' becomes seemingly more and more important. The clarinet was a complicated sound tool that was owned individually since the beginning of the 19th century. This short paper will describe contextually the construction and the former use of it in the communities of that area and their current problems in caring for diversity of musical instruments. In result, some difficulties in musical understanding of the area's musical heritage can be explained and discussed. Another point is the embedding of the musical instrument into the entire communal context. Research questions are mainly whether the hierarchies found through observation are pretended or real. To find out these facts, a detailed report on the connected fieldwork can help. It is a fieldwork inside a larger fieldwork that led to the findings. Recordings are available in Vientiane's National Library and at the Berlin Phonogram Archive. Unfortunately, staged performances all play with pretended ideals as far as it was expressed by the musicians.

FEATURES OF THE INSTRUMENT

Considering the long time span between events at the national and global levels such as the further transformation of social power, technological developments, and the last major pandemic, it is surprising to see that the hierarchies of beauty in instrumental music remained largely unchanged in remote villages. In 2004, I noted (Jähnichen, 2004: paragraph above drawings 106 and 107):

A distinction must be made between two types of tongue cutting, which are: the direction of blowing is open at the bottom, and the cut is opposite to the direction of blowing, which is open at the top. The latter allows tapping of the tongue with the lips and thus enables pitch manipulations during playing. Regarding the tongue, which is open at the bottom, their mode of action can only be caused with the help of additional devices, such as bindings or underlays.

Interestingly, the possibility that the cut can show in any direction makes it obvious that the tongue and its length or the applied method of its cutting are more important to the pitch and sound than the fingerholes or the measurements from the blowing hole to the first fingerhole as is the case with flutes. However, a clarinet is a hybrid insofar as reed and flute have their part in its construction. The

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fingerholes are also somewhat important in their order and their ability to have an impact on tone structures such as the often observed playing of pitch scales.

There were encountered closed clarinets without fingerholes among people in the American Amazon Region (Jähnichen, 2004: Fig. 106, left; Freire Dourado and Jähnichen, 2024; Collaer & Elsner 1983) a while ago. They were used by coordinated groups of several players during an evening entertainment, each of whom played only one tone. The exact pitch and strength of the sound can be determined by the lacing or by lip pressure on the tongue, which can be regulated.

Other open clarinets without fingerholes are the mangtong (Jähnichen, 2004: Fig. 106, right) of the Iu-Mien and Hmong Deng (Miao Hong, the 'Red' Miao) in southern China, where these people are called nationalities, ethnic groups, or simply minorities. The latter is surprising insofar as those people are not a minority when they are visited in their villages. In their houses and surrounding the gardens, they are definitely a majority, and their understanding of rights applies. One should always be aware of these rights. This is where a small clarinet with a reed cut in the septum of a larger bamboo tube could be found. While the player enters the small tube that he holds in his right hand and blows vigorously into it, he moves with his other hand the large tube up and down to create different pitches. The mangtong exists in four different sizes, which were once exhibited in a place in Southern China in the 1980s (Liu Xiangkun & Jähnichen, 2024) and were used in pairs for the entertainment of men and women. In current writings, the mangtong appears as an additional attribute of a Miao musical instrument formation for competitions that appear rather entertaining than traditionally grown of similarly sounding lushengs (queijs) with some specific repertoire in which the mangtong is involved:

The mangtong lusheng has a large repertoire, among them are the tunes used for sacrificing, including remembrance of the ancestors, invitation and parting. The tunes used for funerals include passing by, entrance into heaven, sadness, farewell, comforting those left behind and parting with the deceased. (Project description of 628-II-129, 2008).

This view may underline the competitive character of musical ensemble playing as being used to identify extraordinary stage musicians in the province of Guizhou and other central Chinese provinces. The longest mangtong was to reach up to 1.60 m in length and had to be set down on the floor while playing. In this case, the player moves the small tube in the septum, the oscillation section of the tongue, and through this method they can affect the melody by changing pitches.

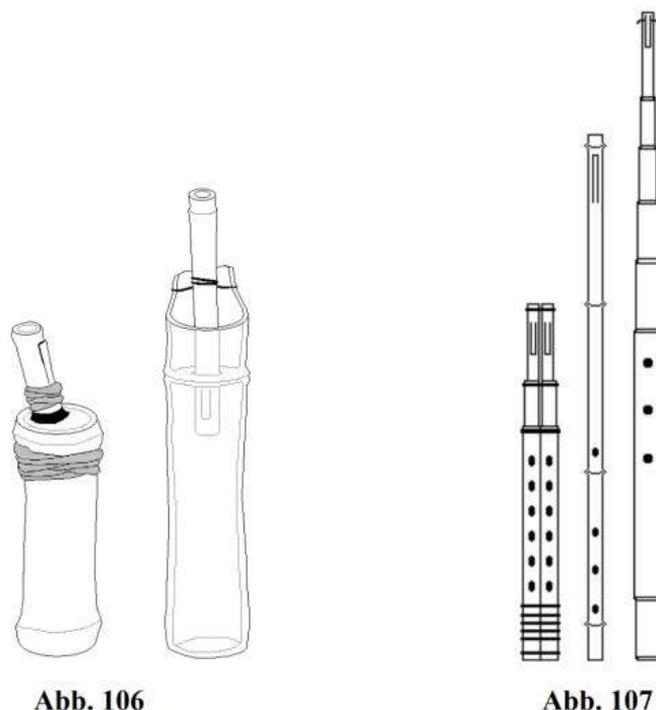


Figure 1: Various clarinets as presented in Jähnichen 2004. Drawing by the author.

The former presence of clarinets in Oceania (Fischer, 1986), which were mainly played for entertainment, was confined to a relatively small area in Micronesia and Polynesia. Here, in each case, the tongues were generally cut open at the top in opposite directions to the blowing direction (Figure 107, middle). The clarinets have three or four fingerholes, each at the front, and some specimens from two or more interlocking tubes can be pushed together like a telescope and thus change their tuning.

The same applies to the clarinets of some Mon Khmer peoples of Mainland Southeast Asia. They can consist of up to 7 parts, like those of the Khmu (Abb. 107 of Jähnichen, 2004, right). The finger holes are mounted on the second last part and the largest in diameter. A hair or a flattened straw is used on the one hand to lift off the tongue, which is open at the bottom, and on the other hand for tuning, and is left there during the playing.

EMBEDDED ANALYSIS

The clarinet played here in the photo (Figures 2a and 2b), which was taken by an unknown assistant of Sivilyay Sopha for the ATML, has only two parts. The stripe to be used for manipulating the tuning is still visible. The older one with more parts is not played anymore. These instruments were extinct at the time of recording. We could see this type of instrument in Bolikhamsay (Figure 3), a province slightly more to the South, where people were relocated among Khmu people from the densely populated North (Lindell, 1998; Jähnichen, 2011). Yet, there was no player alive and available. This leads to the assumption that the playing of this instrument is not practised as it was not played in areas that are not connected to the electric power network of the area.



Figures 2a (left) and 2b (right): Tha [m.58] plays ‘pi paoha phusao’ (Searching for a girl) on 28 August 2000 at Lak 8, Luang Prabang (recorded by Sivilyay Sopha, archived by Thongbang Homsombat, confirmed by Gisa Jähnichen, Photo by courtesy of ATML).

If electric power would have been installed and used, the entire village would have already switched to passive music consumption, and music cassettes would circulate with audio and/or video recordings as observed several times during fieldwork in remote areas. The distribution and existence of music cassettes and CDs were rather manageable and just occasionally at the beginning of the 21st century. However, practical observations and reports often do not match each other.

There is an analysis of the playing and the recording made on the same day and carrying the Code Number 602 of the 16th ATML-sound collection made in the area of Luang Prabang.

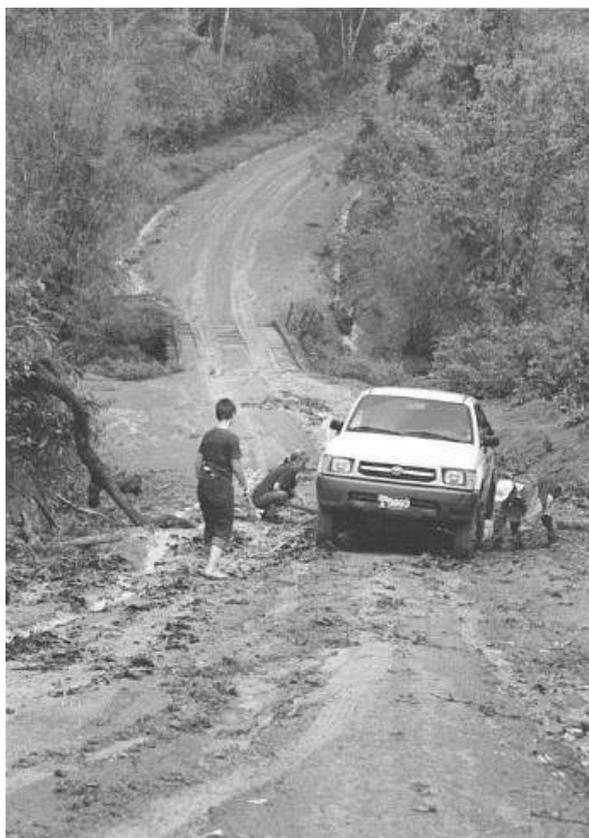


Figure 3: Example of a bad road into the border area. The used Toyota pick-up was not able to climb up the mountain on that slippery ground without putting wood and hard stones under the wheels. Recorded by Gisa Jähnichen, archived by Thongbang Homsombat, confirmed by Gisa Jähnichen, Photo by courtesy of ATML.

All melodic patterns played are derivations of these two approximately evenly long rows shown in Figure 4. Most transcriptions made in this context were done according to row lengths, and the end of a row often implies a stop in the breathing flow if blowing instruments play a role or a new thought starts if text is involved. The tempo is adapting to the length of exactly one breath, which makes doubting the circular breathing and blowing that could have been assumed. Also, this may indicate that the player is not a professional player of the clarinet and that playing the clarinet may have had another set of repertoires longer back. These possibly lost parts of the repertoire cannot be recovered even if they have been asked for. Now, the only people who dare to play try to obviously adapt to the tot Khmu, a flute that is mainly played by elderly women to teach younger women and girls and to shorten the time in field watch huts (Jähnichen, 2011). Back to the analysis. The analysis of the playing shows the following:



Figure 4: Transcribed excerpt by the author of the middle part in recording 602. Rights with the author.

There are two tonal centres, of which one is the lower D flat and one is its upper octave, tending higher in pitch. Here they are noted down as D. But they could have been in any other pitch. The musician is circling around these two tones as he tries to get a stable grip on the upper octave. The lower octave is rather to rest his breathing. Assumptively, one can say that the instrument might have been played with circular breathing after the reach of the higher octave. This is also a similarity this instrument shares with the pi Hmong, which was made of leftovers when constructing a khaen Hmong (queij). The pi Hmong represented mainly a toy. As such, it was a free reed instrument with fingerholes. At the same time, one can say that the Khmu were linking Lao and Hmong instrumental

techniques, which is tremendously important as it shows that both cultural centres were interwoven at one point in history.

Further, it also comes with the observation that the free reed pi was played in a similar way and that the instrument had rather a reputation as a toy. The free reed pi of the Hmong, Lao, and the Khmu was possible only when played by very young boys who could not yet operate a queij or khaen. It was to stimulate their sense of melodic variations. Unfortunately, there are only few recordings, yet all recordings show this circling around easily produced and straight unembellished pitches, like here the upper octave of the D flat with a tendency to go higher and the D flat as the third tone in the upper row (if translated into absolute pitches). The first G flat is produced without strong blowing and is a point from where the melodies start. European-trained ears may recognise a kind of tonal centre. It may have been rightly chosen as a melody departure as it was also confirmed through other findings in Southern China and shows some late tuning standards (Liu Xiangkun & Jähnichen, 2024). Another possibility is the imitation of the previous recording made on a flute called tot Khmu, which had added a voice at some places. The recording was a toem tot Khmu (toem is a specific free metric and lyric genre with many couplets, which was modified according to different language particles). This recording was transcribed earlier (Jähnichen, 2011: 142). The voice added there made up for the rather less stable pitches in this context as it was the vibrating part of the melodic line and not the missing pitch in a technically possible scale. A similar idea might be the upper tonal centre that could only be reached through a very strong blowing. Considering the necessity of circular breathing, this kind of blowing becomes rather complex and hard to learn. After all efforts, playing a khaen or queij was much easier.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The gender and age aspects (Warner Schaie & Abeles, 2008) are present as the toem tots were all executed by elderly women, while the pi-playing was a business of the young boys. Some elderly, former young boys, and now experienced men may have thought of playing better than a female toem tot on the pi Khmu, which was represented on this telescope clarinet. But this is still an unproven issue and needs further investigation. It can be an individual ex- or impression. It can also be the forced adaptation of the known toem tot.

At this point of the study, it was already known that the team members of the ATML were searching for males to represent the melodic ideas of a place. For instance, they asked for lullabies among all villagers, knowing that men were the main singers of lullabies and other songs. Women were only later being accepted as singers. Until the beginning of colonialisation and the presentation of recorded singers on various analogue carriers such as gramophone records and cassettes or on some private stages, female singers were seemingly not included as voice character.

All khaen players could sing the songs they accompanied. The female voice was tolerated mainly for its high pitches and the beauty of high-pitched singing, which might suggest strong projection. This practical idea might have been the source of beauty as ethnographers may report from other areas in the world that high-pitched voices were the normality when electric amplification did not yet take place. Justin Timberlake or Axel Rose may know things that are possibly not so needed anymore. An old-fashioned compliment addressed to a woman will have always included her voice character. For example, women were identified as soft speaking and speaking in high pitches. The louder and lower voiced a woman spoke, the less attractive she might have been. This tendency can be observed in the entire Lao society until nowadays. Finally, male voices were the normality of the place. They were not especially beautiful, which also shows the self-positioning of male musicians and singers as entertainers of as many as possible unspecified people who fit, for example, in a large music hall or a sports stadium. Further studies in this direction may have to follow soon. I can say definitely that the hierarchies of beauty ideals found through observations of musicians and age groups are real in remote villages.

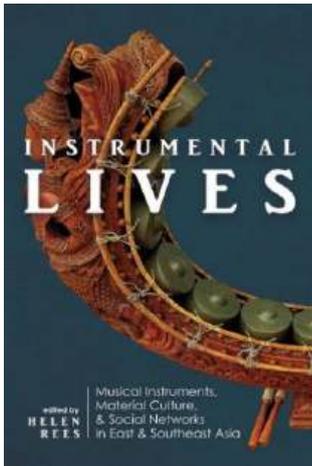
REMARKS

All depictions are made by the author, if not mentioned otherwise, owned by the author or obtained by the author as staff member and as head of the ATML. Drawings and transcriptions are entirely made by the author. Also, there are no conflicts of interest to be observed. I am aware of missing out a large literature review, as many books and articles appeared in this century. However, this is not a literature review.

Interestingly, the co-existence of two personally owned musical instruments in the village context can cause the survival of that musical instrument that is played for non-entertainment purposes. In other words, the social function of a wind instrument in the ritual context may not change, although rituals may have changed. Further studies are needed to confirm that.

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REVIEW ESSAY OF
REES, HELEN, ED. 2024.
INSTRUMENTAL LIVES: MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND SOCIAL NETWORKS IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA. URBANA & CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS

Xiao Qinbei [肖沁蓓]¹

Abstract:

This short review essay focuses on the recently published collection *Instrumental Lives: Musical Instrument Material Culture, and Social Networks in East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Helen Rees and published by the University of Illinois Press. The essay engages with the volume's core themes, particularly its reimagining of musical instruments as dynamic, culturally embedded entities shaped by human-nonhuman interactions. Bridging ethnomusicology, anthropology, and museum studies, the anthology advocates interdisciplinary engagement with instruments' lifespans, agency, and socio-political embeddedness.

Keywords

Book review, musical instruments, editing, multi-focus research, organology

Instrumental Lives (short for *Instrumental Lives: Musical Instruments, Material Culture, and Social Networks in East and Southeast Asia*) provides a multi-dimensional perspective on musical instrument ethnography, bridging the material culture studies and critical issues involved in recent topic to the relationship between instruments and humanity. This well-structured volume contains seven chapters by experts from diverse countries, encompassing music scholars from diverse interest backgrounds. Drawing on Helen Rees's experience managing UCLA's collection of instruments in 2013 and her sustained engagement with Chinese music traditions, these chapters, undeniably, focus on non-western regions, including Mongolia (Chapter 4), Japan (Chapter 1), China (Chapter 3), Thailand (Chapter 6), and others, to decenter European narratives in organology. Each chapter employs case studies to reframe organology-unravelling what it means to the life of the instrument and how they embody cultural society, which is mostly distinguished from other volumes referring to Organology.

In her introduction, the editor, Helen Rees, clearly outlines not only the historical development of organology in the 21st century but also the academic landscape of organological studies in East and Southeast Asia. Rees establishes the volume's critical lens through a set of conceptual frameworks that guide the volume's critical perspective such as human-nonhuman dualism, slow event, personhood, and entanglement (p. 34). Central to her argument is that instruments are not passive artifacts, but dynamic entities with life trajectories that are shaped by materials, environments, human engagement, and time. Based on this conceptual foundation, the volume is structured into three thematic parts: Part I, 'Instrument categories'; Part II, 'Individual Instruments'; and Part III, 'Instrument Collections'.

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Part One, *Instrument Categories*, consists of two chapters, each illustrating a different form of disappearance. In Chapter One, *The Aesthetics of Koto Strings: Materiality and Physical Sensation in Performance*, Terauchi Naoko explores how ecological sustainability and traditional aesthetics have influenced the material transformation of the koto's strings. Drawing on the auditory and tactile impressions of six professional koto players, she compares silk strings with Tetoron (a synthetic fiber), concluding that the instrument itself is a living entity, which means it is sensitive to even subtle changes in material (pp. 68–69). Once a koto adapts to Tetoron, she argues, it may no longer respond to silk in the same way, raising a pressing question: how can traditional aesthetics survive in an ecologically shifting world? Chapter Two, *The Călâpitâ Past the 'Dull Edge' of Extinction: A Shaggy Dog Story of Repatriation and Refusal in Bali* by Tyler Yamin, presents another kind of disappearance: deliberate forgetting. Yamin's ethnography focuses on the loptia, a Balinese clapper that has fallen out of cultural memory. Rather than celebrating revival or resilience, Yamin challenges the dominant term of vitality. He attempted to repatriate the loptia was met with pointed refusal by Balinese practitioners, forcing us to confront a question: is being alive always desirable or meaningful for an instrument? And how, we define the end of an instrument's life? This case reveals the conflict between Western ethics, which advocate for the preservation of everything, and Balinese cultural sovereignty, which may consider the disappearance of certain elements as reasonable and self-determined. This prompts us to reconsider whether "extinction" could be an expression of indigenous agency rather than merely an absolute loss.

Perhaps some answers to these questions can be found in part two, *Individual Instruments*, which contains two chapters, each offering a full life history of a particular instrument. It is worth noting that while Bell Yung's case study centers on a renowned instrument in China, even all over the world, Jennifer Post focuses on a relatively obscure end-blown flute in West Mongolia. Despite these differences in visibility and cultural prominence, both authors illuminate what it means for a musical instrument to have a life. In Chapter Three, Yung traces the life trajectory of his qin, spanning from its creation in the late Qing dynasty to its current state. By examining physical markings such as inscriptions, seals, and notes left by former owners, he constructs a biography of the instrument from the qin's own perspective. Through this lens, the qin emerges not just as a material object but also as a witness to Chinese history and a symbol of shifting cultural identity. By contrast, Chapter Four, *Making and Growing End-Blown Flutes in the Mongolian Steppes* by Jennifer C. Post, takes us into a different context. Focusing on an instrument known as shoor or tsuur or sybyzghy, Post engages with Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Gold's theory of "making and growing" (p. 189) and Tim Ingold's conception of "correspondence" (p. 190). Through extensive fieldwork in five areas of Bayan-Ölgii (Deluun and Ölgii, Tolbo, Altansogts, Besbogda, and Oygor), she illustrates how these flutes are not static artifacts but are shaped by a network of human and nonhuman actors (p. 229). Her ethnography reveals how the lives of these instruments are co-developed by makers, players, environmental conditions, and social dynamics, thereby emphasizing their embeddedness in both past and present cultural realities.

Taken together, the two parts illustrate different conditions of instruments in the contemporary world. The first part takes a broad perspective and focuses on the current status of instruments, exploring whether they are being replaced, forgotten, or at risk of disappearing. In contrast, the second part adopts a more detailed and localized view. Through rich fieldwork data, it traces the full life journey of a single instrument, from its making to its present use. In doing so, it shows how instruments, like people and other objects, are deeply represented in social structures, aesthetic values, and historical change.

Part Three, *Instrument Collections*, shifts our attention to museums considered static or archival. Yet in this volume, they emerge as dynamic arenas where instruments are not simply preserved, but reactivated, recontextualized, and even reanimated through human interaction. Chapter Five, by Marie-Pierre Lissour, focuses on the exhibition *Voices of the Wind*, which featured traditional wind instruments from some minority groups in Laos. In this case, museum display becomes a mode of reverse cultural transmission, as these instruments travel back to their communities, sparking intergenerational engagement and musical revitalization. In Chapter Six, Supeena Insee Adler recounts how a forgotten Thai instrument collection at UCLA was rediscovered during conservation efforts. The process of cleaning and restoring these instruments not only returned them to functional use but also

affirmed their continued cultural relevance. Finally, in Chapter Seven, Helen Rees puts these within a broader context, linking them to questions of policy, identity, and institutional relationships. Through these three chapters, the museum is no longer portrayed as a site of termination, but rather as a space of transformation. Furthermore, instruments do not die in collections, and they migrate, adapt, and reemerge with new significance.

In sum, *Instrumental Lives* is the first volume to systematically address the question of what constitutes an instrumental life. It engages with key topics such as actor-network theory, and material culture studies, situating musical instrument research within an interdisciplinary paradigm. The volume moves beyond traditional organology's focus on physical attributes, instead emphasizing instruments as dynamic "social actors" embedded in relational networks. This collection is highly recommended not only for students and scholars of Asian studies and ethnomusicology but also for practicing musicians and researchers across broader fields of music studies.

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The journal provides a forum to explore the impacts of post-colonial and globalizing movements and processes on these musics, the musicians involved, sound-producing industries, and resulting developments in today's music practices. It adopts an open-minded perspective on diverse musics and musical knowledge cultures.

Despite focusing on traditional and popular musics, relevant themes and issues can include explorations of recent ideas and perspectives from ethnomusicology, social and cultural anthropology, musicology regarding these issues, communication studies, media and cultural studies, geography, art and museum studies, and other fields with a scholarly focus on Asian and European interconnectivity. The journal also features special, guest-edited issues that bring together contributions under a unifying theme or specific geographical area.

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