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REVIEW

Maritime Mobility of Music Features within South and Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

The maritime routes in and between South and Southeast Asia were the main routes of the first interconnections leading to current globalization effects among different locations in the area using the sea as transportation basis. It is very important to not only follow migration routes, but mainly trade routes to understand these first steps. This joint paper is based on intense field and literature research on the given topic and various examples. It is rather describing the historical outline and gives an overview on existing statements. The main focus is the emerging transcendency between people living in this region and their deriving outcomes over a longer period of time.

1. Crossing the Sea and the Mind: Theatre Traditions between South and Southeast Asia in the Late 19th Century

Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda

1.1 Introduction

This paper-section is to give a short overview about different ways of spreading theatre traditions throughout the Malay world, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. It is using historical methods as well as the perspective of current musical practice. Historical awareness may play an important

role in reflecting on musical skills.

This paper is practice-based research that involves long term field work experiences, archival work and literature studies. It should help see historical developments and their current meanings for future performance practices that crossed the seas and the mind of the performers.

1.2 Historical Impact in Sri Lanka

Most music and dance practices which were confined and popular among nobles and aristocrats in North India became similarly popular among the upper middle-class population after the political and cultural interference of

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British colonial administrators during the twentieth century. Parsi theatre has been the most popular entertainment event for North Indian people of all social classes at that time in urban context and beyond^[1,2]. Some sources reveal that North Indian music was spread in Sri Lanka during the British Period through inviting Parsi theatre troupes which largely promoted Hindustani raga-based music, songs and instrumental skills alike. These Parsi theatre performances were imitated by Sri Lankan experts in the field by writing scripts and songs in Sinhala. The Sinhala version of Parsi theatre was expressed with the name “Nurthi”. Prior to this, the most popular music theatre being played in Sri Lanka has been Nadagam^[3]. It has a strong South Indian background. Some literature describes that Nadagam declined after the coming of Parsi theatre^[4] which has been nurtured with North Indian music and dance practices. Mainly, the dialogues were less important than the contents of songs in Parsi theatre scripts written, often using the ghazal poetic structure which has been widely popular in North India since the second half of nineteenth century^[5,6]. Mixed features of North Indian performing arts were included in Parsi theatre performances where skilled song-actresses and actors had inspired the Sinhala population to adopt North Indian performing arts. Wijethunge (=Wijethunga or Wijayathunga) commented respectively with admiration as Sarachchandra remembers^[7].

1.3 Temporary Enrichment in Myanmar

Yangon, the capital of Myanmar, was under British rule at the time when Parsi theatre troupes travelled there. The most popular theatre genre in Myanmar has been Zat Pwe which was widely spread in the urban surroundings of Yangon and Mandalay. The theatre road in downtown Yangon during the British time changed into Zi Wa Ka Street which has been once home to the last Mughal king of Delhi, Bahadur Shah Zafar. The author witnessed Zafar’s tomb and the Mosque where the Ulama provided some information on the last king, his poems, and some information of his descendants. The last king has been an enthusiast of poems who wrote himself many poems in Urdu Language. Even today, Qawwali troupes are occasionally invited from Pakistan and North India to perform.

The musicians in Yangon know very little about Parsi theatre activities which have taken place in Myanmar. The nearly 80-year-old Hawaiian guitar player U Thin could remember some performances he did with Indian musicians and an associated melody which he could still perform. U Thin passed away in 2020. More significantly, the Myanmar music instruments and related music repertoires are still famous among musicians and people there in addition to recent foreign music instruments and asso-

ciated commercial genres. The Burmese harp and drum circle are two of them. The author could meet musicians who professionally play them on a daily basis. Interestingly, the musicians said that they have special tunings of musical intervals which are not similar to tempered harmonic scales and perhaps also not similar to other types of interval systems practiced in the region. Another professional Burmese harp player also said that tunings have to be adapted to their current use. The Burmese piano player played piano as if he plays the Burmese xylophone (made of hard wood).

Hansen points out that the Burmese Zat Pwe was much stronger in attracting the Burmese audience in urban areas. Therefore, Parsi theatre could not survive or influence aesthetic preferences of the average urban Burmese audience. Hansen assumes that Parsi theatre troupes have shared the same stages that were used by Zat Pwe theatre practices^[8]. The already established theatre halls have been the ideal place for Parsi theatre performances as Hansen writes “It was home to the Jubilee Hall, a well-appointed theatre that seated nearly 800 patrons, as well as hotel ballrooms, clubs, and cabarets. Theatre, opera, ballet, and circus professionals regularly stopped in Burma on their tours out of Europe, Australia, and the United States. This terrain was also frequented by artists from India, notably the Parsi theatre companies that called around the Indian Ocean”^[8].

Baliwala (1852-1913) and his theatre company known as Victoria Company travelled to the court of King Thibu in Mandalay for theatre performances where he could make some profits. By the second half of the nineteenth century, there has been a much larger Indian influx who could lead to watching theatre performance in Mandalay and Yangon. Thus, Baliwala continued staging theatre in 1881, 1883, 1884, and 1885 making probably different tours to Mandalay^[8].

1.4 Parsi Theatre Re-modeling in Malaya and Indonesia

Parsi theatre became popular even in the Malay world during the last third of the nineteenth century through creating many imitative theatre genres such as ‘Bangsawan’ in Peninsula Malaya and Komedi Stambol^[9-11] on Java. Long-established genres and practices of India must have been introduced to the people in the Malay world through Parsi theatre. It favored Hindustani music forms such as thumri, ghazal, dadara, and diverse folk songs in the performances. The literature provides some evidences for the adaptation of Hindustani ghazal in the Malay world through Parsi theatre activities. There are a number of previous studies on the impact of Parsi theatre, namely Ghulam Sarwar’s theatre research and later Tan Sooi Beng’s descriptions of the Malayan Bangsawan^[12-15]. Bangsawan

can be identified as one of the successors of Parsi theatre. It was extremely popularized compared to other theatre genres in the Malay world. The Malay version of Parsi theatre, *Bangsawan*, was known as *Tiruan Wayang Parsi* in its first days^[16,13].

In some other areas of Southeast Asia, Parsi theatre was known as *Komedi Parsi*. The term *Komedi* is a generic Malay term for entertainment. The stories performed in Parsi theatre were familiar to the population in the Malay world. Translations of these stories from Urdu works were already available in the Malay world before the Parsi theatre arrived^[17].

Many following studies took up some ideas from these writings yet without any profound addition to what is found in older literature. A reliable source of information was Rahman B. living in Kuala Lumpur and collecting different artifacts from his time within *Bangsawan* travelling troupes. Rahman B. reveals what he heard from early dramatists of *Bangsawan* that “Parsi Theatre is an Indian theatre that came to perform in Pulau Pinang. But a lot of people liked it because at that time there was no other entertainment.”^[18].

1.5 Conclusions

The early urban theatre entertainment through travelling Parsi troupes and the following re-localization in various places of Southeast Asia is fascinating and points towards future developments. The Parsi Theatre appeared in all the described contexts as an arts channel between South and Southeast Asia. At the same time, this channel was indicating a speedy differentiation in urban music practices that took place along important trade routes and in centers of modern power. Possibly, the promptness of urbanization caused different approaches to urbanized entertainment. Another interesting observation is the destruction and remodeling from immigrated theatre performances such as the example of Malay *ghazal* or the mixed way in composing stage plays. These facts give an impression of an early globally expanding performance practice that was only later reinforced through technological means. Hopefully, future studies may lead to a clearer picture of the crossed mind that started with the physical movement of theatre troupes.

2. The Sea-Gypsies’ Mobility and the Transfer of Music along the Andaman Coast of Thailand

Rewadee Ungpho

2.1 Introduction

Sea-Gypsies is an ethnic group who usually live a sea-borne lifestyle and now settle down mostly on the islands

along the Andaman Sea (Figure 1) coast of Thailand, Malaysia and Myanmar^[19]. This group is distinct from others with excellent skills in maritime livelihood and a nomadic way of life in the sea. In the Area of the Andaman Sea, the Sea Gypsies may refer to Sama-Bajau peoples of the Philippines and Malaysia, Moken in Thailand and Myanmar, Orang Laut in Malaysia and Indonesia and Urak Lawoi in Thailand and Malaysia.

According to hearsay and documentations, the musical culture and performances of the Sea Gypsies are correlating with their journeys. That means the journeys of the Sea Gypsies leads to cultural learning, especially of music and general performance culture. The music and performing arts of the Sea Gypsies are closely related to Rong-*Ngeng* or Rong *geng* which can be found in the Southern region of Thailand and also in the upper part of Malaysia^[20] (Lawrence Ross, 2020). In the meantime, the singing language of the Sea Gypsies is also related to Malay and Burmese in some parts. In addition, the music and instrument of the Moken and Moklan Group can also be related to Central Burmese music^[21].



Figure 1. The picture shows the travelling direction of the Sea Gypsies to settle in Thailand. (Map and modification by the author of this section).

The traditional way of life of the Sea Gypsies is always live in the boats. There is always a migration trip for the existence of daily life by relying on the sea as a source of livelihood. Their migration takes natural conditions as a prerequisite for migration decisions, such as the season or the topographic environment. If natural changes occur that are not suitable for living Sea Gypsies will temporar-

ily migrate to other places to allow the nature to recover. Living in a boat with the sea, wind and sky has made the Sea Gypsies skilled at catching sea creatures with their bare hands or traditional equipment, watching the tides, observing the wind, and observing areas with abundant sea creature, worshiping sacred things related to the sea. These talents are passed on from generation to generation when they settled in Thailand^[21].

There are 3 groups of the Sea Gypsies in Thailand. There are Urak Lawoi, Moken, and Moklan. The Urak Lawoi people live mostly in the lower part of the Andaman side of southern Thailand. These include the islands in Satun, Krabi, Phuket and Trang provinces. The important ceremony is the boat floating ceremony. It held every day of the 13-14th waxing moon, 6th and 11th lunar month of every year, although the details of the ritual have changed according to social and environmental conditions. But the ritual also shows the persistence of the culture and identity of the Urak Lawoi group and is often mentioned.

In the upper southern region, there are 2 groups of sea people living in it, namely the Moken group who reside on various islands such as Koh Phra Thong, Koh Surin in Phang Nga Province, Koh Lhao, Ranong Province and some parts of Phuket There is an annual ceremony that is the celebration of the ancestral spirit pillar. A group named *Nia En Lor Bong* and another group of sea people is the Moklan group who currently live along the coast and around *Phra Thong* Island, *Phang Nga* Province and in some parts of Phuket Province, still believe in spirits, ancestors and have a big celebration in *Bang Sak* District *Phang Nga* Province every year”^[21].

Sea Gypsies music and performances are based on music of Rong-ngeng performances and some southern folk songs. Each group of Sea Gypsies retains their own uniqueness in their performances as the following details.

2.2 Urak Lawoi

The performances of the Urak Lawoi group are reflected in three forms of performances, which are used for performances, ceremonies and entertainment purposes as follows:

1) Singing Rong-ngeng in the Urak Lawoi language. In some areas, it has been converted into Thai or Southern Thai for the understanding of Thai people. The main musical instruments are the violin, rebana, cymbal, and other rhythmic instruments used to accompany the Urak Lawoi Rong-ngeng dance.

2) Rebana or Rammana band (one-sided drum with shallow body) consisting of rebana unlimited number and other rhythmic instruments. The rebana band is used to sing and play along with fun in various events, especially

in the boat floating ceremonies.

3) Gayok martial arts is a performance based on the Pencak Silat with different music from other performances of the Urak Lawoi. There are important musical instruments, such as Pi Gayok (reed instrument), rebana, gong, wooden clappers, cymbal, which rhythm and melody are completely different from Rong-ngeng and the rebana ensemble.

2.3 Moken

Moken (Figure 2a and 2b) performances are mainly composed of singing with rhythms. The band has no definite composition. The traditional ensemble consisted of vocals, Ka-ting (two-string fiddle instrument), and rhythmic instruments. The original rhythm apparatus was assumed to be from wood, stone, and cooking tools, or tools used in daily life Moken people’s songs refer to their way of life such as places they have traveled to, bird names, fish names, which can be divided into two main categories:

1) Nursery rhymes, it is a song that the Moken people sang to the children. This type of music is often performed by improvisation or perhaps the lyrics were memorized. But nowadays there is no lullaby singing anymore.

2) Singing songs are songs that are used to sing for fun, festivities, and sung during the ceremony.

2.4 Moklan

Moklan music in the past was used for performances and singing which was a cultural performance similar to southern folk performances. The performances of the Moklan people in the past included Manora dancing, Rong-ngeng performance and Bok song. Currently, there is only Rong-ngeng singing which is Moklan’s unique melody. But Moklan’s Rong-ngeng melody in each area may have slightly different details according to their memories and skills. However, the current melody of Rong-ngeng is characterized by hundreds of lyrics in one melody. The lyrics can be changed according to the changing situation.

After the tsunami, various agencies have come to help and involve the Sea Gypsies ethnic group in many ways, including the environment that changes naturally, social change, affecting their lifestyles, occupations, and their music and performance culture. However, changes in music and performances may have started to change before the tsunami. But after the tsunami, the way of life of the Sea Gypsies has changed more apparent sequentially until now. A summary of the changes in music and performances of the three groups of Sea Gypsies can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Modifications observed in the music of the Sea Gypsy (table provided by the author of this section). The unknown elements cannot be filled in, as nobody can confirm modifications.

| Urak Lawoi | Moken | Moklan |
|--|--|---|
| 1. Music and performances are used for entertainment. For example, in the ‘boat floating ceremony’ and other festivals that are enhanced by environmental context, such as ‘making a votive offering’, ‘Chinese New Year’ or ‘Chinese Ancestors’ Day’. | 1. The number of lyrics is limited because of the oral tradition, and sometime the song faded from the memory of a person. | 1. Moklan group play <i>Rong-ngeng tan yong</i> or also called <i>ton yong song</i> . |
| 2. Music and <i>Rong-ngeng</i> performances are used as part of cultural events for tourism. | 2. <i>Ka-ting</i> is the only musical instrument which is no longer produced and no one can play this instrument anymore. | 2. The <i>Rong-ngeng tan yong</i> becomes a part of the service culture and tourism. |
| 3. Music and <i>Rong-ngeng</i> performances are used as part of the work, music and performances are included in the local education curriculum. But there are also irregular practices and do not cover all areas of the Urak Lawoi people. | 3. Unknown use of those performances. | 3. The Moklan music and performances are one of the tools of social empowerment. |
| 4. Musical instruments (violin and clarinet) have a limited number of players. This is affecting the exchange of knowledge and the melody of some songs disappeared. | 4. unknown players of musical instruments. | 4. Music and performances serve to communicate with people in society. |
| 5. The costumes of <i>Rong-ngeng</i> performances change according to the presence of tourists and the context of each show. | 5. Unknown impact. | 5. Unknown impact. |

3. Maritime Trade Routes between China and Sarawak’s Inland Communities from the Perspective of Music

Gisa Jähnichen

3.1 Migration over the Seas

About the publication (Figure 2a) on the picture below is said by the National Library of New Zealand: “The book, that looks very self-published, is the travel journal of two families, the Chans and the Kongs. It traces the first movement in 1907 from Guangzhou, China, to the jungles of Borneo^[22,23]. It is a six generational record with the second wave of movement to England, Canada, Japan, Singapore, Australia, USA and New Zealand.”^[24,25]

In other words, Borneo (Figure 2b) was for many just a station in the generational spread of Chinese from different areas as it was Spain or Portugal for migrating travelers to the later US.

Chinese routes into the South are not so well known as those to the West. Yet, a remarkable number of Chinese settlers came to the shores of Borneo, gave the basics to cities such as Pontianak that is now part of Indonesia, Kuching, Bintulu, Miri and Sibiu in Sarawak, Kota Kinabalu, and Sandakan in today’s Sabah. Sarawak and Sabah are both states within the Malaysian Federation^[24,26-28].

However, the large island also had to be explored and tested for economic growth. So, it came that Chinese settlers in the coastal areas started trading and exchanging goods with inland people, among them the Land Dayak, to which the Bidayuh people belong. They still live in long-

houses or scattered community houses and in very remote areas. Some had to be removed to lower grounds due to water regulation works and dam-buildings.

Here, the hydro power station project of the Bengoh dam is not far from the border to Indonesia but still on Malaysian territory^[29]. I walked that orange path through those by now submerged villages until I reached the village (Kampung) Semban. The village elders have shown me around and explained their treasures^[30].

3.2 Treasures

Chinese groups settling on Borneo came over the sea from various places in China and also second-stop places on the Malay peninsula with a wide range of dialect groups such as Shanghainese, Hainanese, Fujianese, Minnanese, Foochow, and Puxian Min, Chaoshanese, Hakka, Teochew, originating from Guangxi and speaking Pinghua, and general Cantonese. In mainland China, they also belong to smaller groups within larger territories, for example the Hakka in the interior of Borneo came mostly from Jieyan and Guangdong, and the Kwongsai came mainly from Guangxi. There was no strong national bond among them in the first place, which is important to point out as this was later often taken as a proof to wrongly group them into one category and make them being ‘the Chinese with their musical traditions’. Joint traditions were formed only later. Borneo was the place, where Chinese settlers were often shaped through local understanding of social roles. This, diversity continued to exist on another level.

My journey along the routes of early Chinese settlers led me to Kuching (Figure 3, 4a and 4b) and upriver into the water system of the Sarawak River, which has two

tributaries, the Kanan and the Kiri River. I followed the Kiri River up to Padawan county, in the village Annah, called Annah Rais. From there, I explored the territory. The smaller tributaries of the Kiri River were going to be dammed up in the Bengoh area which submerged a number of former villages. Before this happened, I had the opportunity to walk there and to observe their dealing with

historical encounters and objects of memory regarding their music and dance habits^[31].

I was presented the most auspicious collection of valuable items the Kampung Semban had collected over the centuries. The treasury room was located at the backdoor to the community house of the village and only the village elder had a key. Among them were teeth of bears and

From China To Borneo



and Beyond

Ann Kit Suet Chin-Chan

2a

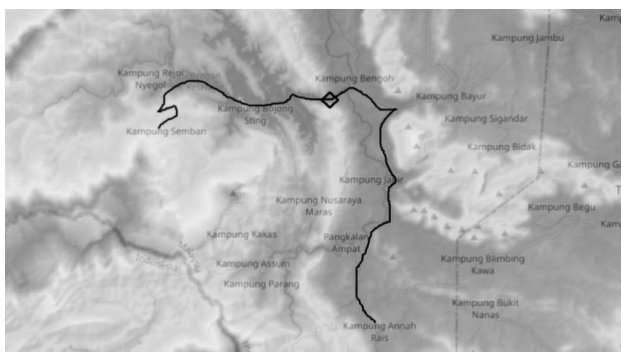


2b

Figures 2. a. Book by Ann Kit Suet-Chin-Chan, published in New Zealand, migration story of two clans from Guangzhou (left; public promotion picture); b. A vessel sails past the river camp. Note the hangar with windsock and S-39 in the background. Camp Abai, Borneo. (Photo by courtesy of Martin Johnson [1884–1937] in 1935).



Figure 3. The entire map of the Sarawak River Basin with Kuching in the north and county Padawan in the south.



4a



4b

Figures 4. a. The map of the walk (black trail on the left) from Annah Rais to Semban village. b. the walking profile regarding heights of this walk. (Map modifications by the author of this section).

tigers (Figure 5) that roamed the area many decades ago, but also small bells with Chinese inscriptions that could be read as Xi'An or An Xi engraved in small zinc-copper vessels. Could it indeed mean the city name of Xi An? Does this city name stand for prosperity and bells? Or is it just ornamental or symbolic for "Chinese"? Xi An is also far from the usual places of migration. If so, it must have been already magic when taken to Borneo during migration. These small bells with similar inscriptions were scattered all over Southeast Asia and are also known on the Philippines and on other Indonesian islands.



Figure 5. Part of the treasures with the small metal bells, which still have some sounding rattle elements inside. They could be found all over the paths of Chinese settlers in South East Asia. In Semban, they symbolized a communal treasure. (Photograph by the author of this section).

Plates and bowls were communally owned items to be shown to rare guests. Plates do not carry anything and they are not used for eating. They simply represent a communal value similarly to the teeth and bells found there.



Figure 6. The eagle dance in the house of the village chief where two men are dancing, one of them is from Annah Rais. A man on the ground plays a smaller tube zither by hitting the strings that were cut out of the bamboo skin. (Photograph by the author of this section).

Also, the ladies with the rings, the female dancers, wear their leg- and forearm-rings from small age and often in a painful way to just exhibit their personal possessions and to appear attractive during dancing. The rings are made of a similar material as the bells using just a slightly different percentage of zinc and copper, giving an expensive compound and being always cleaned through wearing them (Figure 7b). The technology must have come from the metal working areas South and East of Padawan, the county in which some of these Bidayuh villages are located, in Central Borneo on the Indonesian side, where also gongs and gong sets such as *kulintangans* (set of bossed gongs played mainly for dance and songs) are produced for some wealthy people. While the bells must have come from the northern shores of the island out of the pockets of travellers on Chinese vessels. They look rather like a money kind of tool and are owned by the entire village. By the way, real currency was only introduced by 2005 in these villages. Before that time, money did not play a role as a tool for universal exchange. People traded what they had and what they could serve and afford.

The most intriguing part of the treasures are joint dances and music (Figure 6). While the eagle dances by the men are to find a mate among the female dancers^[32], I remembered some features of this dance. This very special dance is extremely tiring as it is requested to keep both arms stretched out to the side while the feet have to move the entire body in footlong small steps that resemble eagle steps. Alternately, toes and heels are lifted and, while creating a triangular shape between them through outward pointing toes or heels and alternative touching toes and heels of both feet, moved to one side forth and back without leaving the ground. The trick is to remember the right order of lifting and pressing them down as they also work as pivot point for the triangular shape of steps. The man with the least 'mistakes' is the winner and can challenge a lady to join the dance. The female 'victims' are sitting in one row at the side and are carefully watched during the performance by the remaining audience. This watching is conducted by the parents of the males and their friends. This way attraction can be detected. The way of choosing mates through dancing and playing goes many decades back and is said to be a memory of the past. Interestingly the past is not that past as one could assume, it is also a symbolic time that refers to pre-missionary activities. The erection of a small wooden church for the inhabitants of Semban could not change the mood of the villagers in this regard. The church was not working in the period we went to Semban before flooding. The building was seemingly abandoned, green plants were growing through the entrance platform and the inside was covered in dust. Practi-



7a



7b

Figures 7. Master Abas constructs a new drum for Semban (left); The last three ring ladies from Semban on a terrace in Taba Sait, a village that was already flooded (right). (Photographs by the author of this section).

cally, this was not the place where weddings were held.

The drum in Figure 7a is the one that was created in Annah Rais by master Abas after I reported to not have found such a drum in Semban^[32]. The drum gifted to the visitors from Semban became another treasure of the community as things can only be used when individually owned, but cannot be used if the entire community is the owner. In that case, items have to be kept safe even at the costs of their usefulness. In occasional music evenings or dance sessions, an old hollow pumpkin was beaten like a drum. This dark pumpkin was owned by the father of the village chief, therefore, it was possible to use this pumpkin as a drum.

3.3 Conclusions

Learning about the fact that drums cannot be gifted to the village for musicians but only directly to a specific musician gave me an insight of how these small Chinese bells could be found in such an incredibly good shape far from their place of original production and why they were kept for such a long time without being ever used as dance utensils or as signal tool. The way up to Semban was not meaningless, the way taught me to acknowledge other ways of respecting local thoughts and how arriving settlers were transformed.

Finally, we may ask ourself, how many things of our presence will be one day covered by water, forgotten, re-discovered, or asked for? The reason for the division of goods was clear. It had social reasons of how gifts to communities and individuals were differentiated. The mu-

sic played and the produced dances only changed much later through similar trade structures in the state unit of an independent Sarawak as part of the Malaysian Federation.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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