

Epilogue

In no way do we believe in a fine-arts system; we believe in very diverse problems whose solutions are found in heterogeneous arts.

(Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 1987, p.331)

We began our explorations by identifying and studying:

- Written sources as might be found in newspapers
- Written sources as might be found in historical data in Singapore
- Reports of societies, trusts,
- Magazines and monthly reviews
- Straits Settlement ordinances/Penal Codes
- Oral History Archives
- Dissertations on studies in Music as practised in Singapore
- Memoirs by those who had lived in Singapore in the past as well as those by private sources
- Payment records for services rendered by musicians
- Collections of photographs, private recordings, concert programmes, pamphlets
- Private collections
- Journals
- Oral interviews with practitioners

Our search in written sources yielded very little information at first. In some instances the writings presented the hazard of single monolithic view, bordering on hegemonic discourse. More information arrived by searching for music's complicity in beyond purely artistic events. By this stage it was felt necessary that oral interviews although more risky and uncertain might help shed light on scarcity of sources, resources and help build an understanding of each musical practice based on the view in the 'field' and an alternative reading of newspaper or particular discourse. A number of informal networks were built, based on word of mouth requests for information, building up network profiles based on interviews with practitioners who recommended other practitioners not only in their practice but in related practice as well. Our research involved collation of data and information on music/musical activities/activities in Newspaper collections which helped towards forming the basis for a comprehensive as possible yet concise account of the various music-making activities in Singapore through written

discourse including oral history archives, newspaper reports, programme leaflets, reminiscences, musical scores if made available to name a few. Every attempt had been made in looking through resources in Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, where possible, other than information in English.

There was also a network being generated by word-of-mouth in helping to corroborate written information with oral interviews. Given that the network was conducted by word-of-mouth, practitioners were at first resistant and reluctant largely out of fear (this was conveyed during and after the interviews) that their practice might be misunderstood or prejudiced in such research studies. However, with time and persuasion, oral interviews were conducted with practitioners who were involved with the various communities who contributed by participating in music-making activities. Interview transcripts were given back to the interviewees for their agreement to publish quotations which may be extrapolated from their interviews. It was also hoped that wherever possible, other forms of evidence may be obtained such as poster information, photographs, CD resources, cassette resources, video-taped performances and any other useful sources. This search was to yield material evidence which have become very useful in dealing with methods of teaching and learning particularly in the absence of evidence of documentation and writing. The data received had to be extrapolated into a more concise account of each musical practice. All the material arrived at was channeled inductively to enable an understanding of music-making in each community. If a practice had musical scores and such data, that can be used profitably. Should there be documentation surviving as recordings, copies of these recordings were made with the agreement of the owner or purchased with the view of serving as archival material for further research.

Our study reveals as much information as it has had with gaps in some of the information. Some other sources at the Archives have been discovered while some names have been identified or pointed to in relation to those with information on the practices, since what has been written or documented is insufficient and requires further information via written documentation and oral interviews. CDs and other related material are still ongoing as there are sources and scarcity of sources that are important to purchase for documentation purposes. Given the relatively scarce area of coverage for this project, the materials procured for this project rested on a number of areas including leisure activities and past-times in Singapore. This proved extremely helpful in corroborating information that we had only encountered anecdotally and in oral interviews.

What also emerges from these hidden practices, appears as well in Finnegan's preface.¹ If we understand music as John Blacking does, as both the observable product of human intentional action and a basic human mode of thought by which any human action may be constituted,² much of the practices we have explored provide us with clues to music's relationship with the various dimensions and domains of life in Singapore. If nothing else has been discovered, we have gathered sufficient evidence to refute any claim that Singapore was and is a cultural desert. Each practice informs us of the variety of ways and means it enriches an understanding of musical practices in Singapore.

What can we make of these various musical practices in Singapore in summarizing some of the issues emerging from the studies of each musical practice?

Bangsawan began as an Indian-influenced practice. When Shaik Othman wrote his essay in 1898 for the Straits Chinese Magazine, he felt that *the "Bangsawan" or Malay opera...as presented on the stage by the Jawi Peranakan Theatrical Company in North Bridge Road will be read by some with interest.*³ We are informed that pioneering actors and actresses in Malay film were recruited first from the Malay and Indonesia troupes who performed in sandiwara and bangsawan and later from the cabarets of Singapore.⁴ It is possible to suggest that with the proliferation and popularity of Malay film and cinema in Singapore, Bangsawan was likely to have been at the losing end. Peters informs us that one of the strategies employed in its re-introduction was the infusion of comedy, exemplified in the staging of Raja Dangdut by Sriwana, created by M. Saffri A. Manaf but by 1986, there was a consensus to return to more traditional forms largely because the comedy, which had been inserted to sustain an audience, was reducing the plot, the use of language and the music. As more recent attempts have been initiated by Sri Warisan to re-introduce bangsawan into the Singaporean consciousness, again, there needs to be a socio-historical understanding of its beginnings, practice, its role in society across a spectrum of participants – creators, performers and audiences not forgetting its transmission via teaching and learning as holistic engagement with the practice. If dealt with successfully, this endeavour by Sri Warisan might well be the appropriate response to Shaik Othman when he observed in 1898, *in the course of this sketch of the Malay opera, I have casually referred to the absence of Straits Chinese drama; but I do not forget that the local Malays themselves have nothing to show in the shape of a local operatic company. If the above remarks should lead my Malay readers to organize themselves into a dramatic company which would in time, win as great a popularity here as the "Bangsawan" has already won, my paper will not have been written in vain.*⁵

In the practice of Bhangra, it has been discovered that the distance between two components, music and dance, is the extent of the distance between Punjab and the UK respectively and with it notions of authenticity and a sense of Punjabi-identity and modernity. The version from Punjab is based on something more textual accompanied by a more rustic version of the dance while the practice as developed in the UK and gained greater international currency has developed Bhangra along disco-dance lines. The Singaporean preference has been the negotiation of the dance-version fast gaining popularity in discos and clubs with practitioners who are DJs and MCs as well as those working with Khalsa and other cultural organizations supporting traditional practice. For the moment, the dance routine and choreography seems to have caught the attention much more than the music largely because of its attractiveness for youth. The fragility of its practice, is to an extent its support systems elsewhere – given that the Punjabi community are a small community will demand greater levels of support by its members.

It is altogether contrasted in the practice of the Chinese orchestra because of a critical mass; there are reportedly over 200 active Chinese orchestras in Singapore spread out among the schools, community centres and civic organizations. In the school system, its practice is sustained by the Singapore Youth Festival – a competition in all but name. It is difficult to deny the practice of the Chinese Orchestra which comes alongside the practice of Chinese traditional musics, specifically those of the Chinese instrumental traditions.

While some take issue with an ever-evolving state that continues to challenge the nature and identity of a Chinese Orchestra as a parallel Western orchestral ensemble, the argument in favour is its means to keep a tradition, albeit newly formed and constructed. Another issue with both practices is a longer association. Questions of authenticity inevitably draw associations with courtesan practice or as an accompanying ensemble to staged or street-wayang or festivities or ‘sumbahyang’ rituals

Our studies have made it necessary to revisit “deviance” as an existence with its own logic and praxis; in contradistinction to deviance viewed from normative perspectives or canonic discourses. Paul Willis’s work has provided quite startling ways of viewing and coming to terms with marginal or marginalised groups. There is a powerful argument to be developed to explore the value of a practice being translated in cognitive terms. At the sensuous level, the practice of heavy metal and rock invites us to re-assess material/structural situations from the point of view of the viability of playing with different options. The argument that noise in rock music contributes to distortion has an alternative reading for subscribers to Mat

Rock culture or heavy metal – *a way of multiplying resonances*.⁶ There are a multiplicity of readings of rock music in site-specific settings which remind us to sensitise ourselves to the community in that contested site. For those who are unable to subscribe to this, the component parts and layers found in rock music act as ring-fences around the community, performing both centripetal and centrifugal forces depending on the levels of receptivity of apprehending the music in its totality. For the Mat Rock community, it may have been used to define a sense of collectivity. The argument that follows on from here is that once a connection has been made between the community and the music of choice, a meaning has been constructed and sustained at the sensuous level. There is clearly a tension here that draws in three social groups with different motivations, yet the musicians, motorcycle-groupies and ‘posers’ who hang out – are identified with the Mat Rock Culture. That these participants are almost always members of the Malay community in Singapore fulfils that communal cohesiveness, despite the less-than-convincing coherence.

Given that many of the musicians subscribed to groups well known in the international circuit of heavy metal and rock, one would have expected a subscription, similar to Willis’ study of the biker community of selecting an authentic source for their agenda.

For instance, mention of Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin would have implied the original cast of members turned icons. Upon closer examination, many of the Mat Rockers refer to these groups at the post-pioneer phase – the succeeding members of the group after personnel change.

What is curious here is a reshaping of form over content – it didn’t matter who comprised these two groups in the third or fourth phase – what was important was that it was a group still called Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. It could be that the Mat Rockers identified with these personnel at their initial point of contact, latching on to notions of Rock when they were growing up; not accepting them at an earlier or embryonic stage.

The influences for Indian heavy metal groups f/using English and Sanskrit as well but identifying their sound as a uniquely Indian sounds, albeit familiar soundscapes in heavy-metal, represent a gap. As they emerge in the public sphere, and that includes singles, internet interviews and reviews during the 1990s, there are gaps in the knowledge of and about such practitioners and the music they create and perform as well as their supporters. Practitioners are in their late twenties who share a subscription to a sense of Indian-ness in their identity. Many of these youth began in homes where the main discourse was music of South Indian film with

notions of music that bore affiliation with Hinduism – music of the Carnatic tradition. From their interviews, it is evident that music of South Indian film is one they seem to have reacted most strongly – criticising it for its endless themes of love and love songs and formulaic strategies. What is not revealed is whether it is the formulaic strategies in the films that cause this reaction rather than the music itself. However, when they have performances at pubs, there is a tendency to play the ‘party’ line by adding songs from South Indian film; to please the crowd and persuade them to listen to more creative work. Practitioners have a variety of educational backgrounds ranging from O and A levels to tertiary level diplomas. Many of them have full-time jobs. Heavy metal is a ‘side-line’ which seems, according to their responses, to sustain them in ways their full-time jobs do not. Musicians interviewed did not possess certified skills in instrumental facility – like ABRSM qualifications or local music school certification in pop and jazz studies. In this respect, oral and aural transmission has remained the principle mode of learning and teaching among band members. Interviewees came across as articulate and familiar with the Euro-American heavy metal and rock tradition and in recent years a growing attraction towards heavy metal from Scandinavian countries. It is their emphasis on creative endeavour in music which is significant. Perhaps further scholarship will help shed more light on this little known practice.

If Adam Krims is correct in his argument rap’s propensity of *the deep perversity of the economic process by which...rap music...amplified and emphasized and subsequently deployed as a use value for the production of new capital – especially though not only, record company profits, which are in turn profits of large entertainment conglomerates – that bring us to the new mutation of surplus value...commodity fetish*⁷...It would certainly negate Haikel’s pathways, musical and extra-musical into rapping. What Haikel found that so intensely attracted him to rap was the ability to re-create rap with very little effort and with admirable proficiency. More importantly, it gave him what he wanted in identifying with a personal voice through sound:

*I like the ideology of having music and being able to talk over the music and get the message across. ...this is Me!*⁸

This description puts into sharp focus the nature of personal adaptation and appropriation. Almost paradoxically, music opens up human experience to the potentials and potentialities of life but does not necessarily prescribe, proscribe or

even describe them. This point is made when practitioners reveal their attraction for the **secondary process of music** of protest-songs as the **primary** motivation for appropriating musical structures to suit their literary texts.⁹

Javanese gamelan has been present; implicit in the repertoire of the evening celebrations of the birthday of King George IV and ever present across schools, tertiary institutions, community centres and local groups dedicated to its practice. Yet what do we know of its practice in relation to its ‘source’ – central Java, or perhaps strictly speaking, musical practice in the courts of central Java. As a practice which has survived to become very much a part of the Singaporean landscape, very little is properly understood of its present practice, ideologically, creatively and recreatively – given the length of time it has remained in Singapore. Further scholarship needs to understand how its present practice represents convergence and collision in relation to its source and to critically examine the relevance of recognizing such a source for future reference in terms of cultural capital.

Given that 2002 marked the award of Cultural Medallion to Jeremy Monteiro, one of Singapore’s best known jazz exponents and internationally recognized, it is at least curious that in the entry on Singapore, **jazz** is mentioned only once and appears in the column on Malay community, with particular reference to the repertoire of the Singapore Malay Orchestra which reportedly includes *genres from jazz to dondang saying*.¹⁰ The practice of jazz in Singapore seems to have at root many sources, dance band music, Tin Pan Alley, Talkies – as opposed to silent film. The practice of Jazz was the practice of virtually every community in Singapore. It could be said that jazz was a practice where minority communities were over-represented – one only has to remember the Filipino community in this respect. Jazz in its more serious forms, like bebop were less popular to greater audiences than dance-band music, although more popular among performers and avid improvisers, especially because it gave local practitioners to ‘jam’ with internationally-renowned soloists and groups. As a commercial endeavour, it suffered at first as it was hardly, at least according to its practitioners, popular. It became less popular with the arrival of Carnaby Street, Flower Power, Beatles and pop and rock. Its current predicament is in Singapore a practice fast gaining currency as revered form for the educated, economically enabled audience, who find modes of improvisation as well as the acoustic phenomenon of trad-jazz, 12-

bar blues, bebop, hard-bop and standards a comfortably nourishing diet; not to mention the cool jazz, fusion and even acid jazz. Less is known of the practice of free jazz practice which gave rise to names such as Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Anthony Braxton to name a few. Also, anecdotal evidence points to the existence of a very small group which has long been practising intuitive music or free-improvisation. These are suggested routes for further exploration.

A keyword that emerges in cultural practices of the Southeast Asian peninsula would be syncretism. Keronchong, believed to have originated in 16th century Portuguese music of the Portuguese colonies in the Moluccas and Batavia. James Chopyak¹¹ informs us it is not so much a musical form as it is a style of performance. From a socio-cultural and historical perspective, we are informed that keroncong orchestras and recordings attracted both Malay and Chinese communities with a sensuous Portuguese-Indonesian musical blend originating in Java while *dondang sayang* either produced or consumed in some popularity in Melaka and western Johor seemed to bear resemblance to keroncong.

*In its heyday, Modern Malay “kronchong” orchestras, playing dreamy music similar to Hawaiian, record commercially in Singapore, and are a big draw with all communities. They specialise in sentimental songs that are firm favourites both in Malaya and over the water in Indonesia. It is anyone’s guess whether the kronchong orchestra is more popular than its rival attraction, the Western style dance band.*¹²

In the present context, what was identified as traditional practice, gained popularity has arrived, again, as traditional practice.¹³ Questions of what is traditional and what is popular become enmeshed in such a way as to problematise traditional and popular as mutually exclusive terms, let alone ownership; since the practice of keronchong has become the purview of either Malay or Peranakan communities in Singapore. The Musical practice of Keroncong is probably in a very fragile present, given that it is popularised by the Peranakan community, more than it is by the Malay community. For the Peranakan community, the practice of Keronchong, like *Bangsawan*, articulated as musical practice of its own community, better facilitates ownership and possible authority and authorisation of a unique cultural identity. More than understanding its present fragility and its past proliferation and anxieties of ownership, scholarship can help facilitate a deeper cultural and musical understanding of keronchong through an unraveling of its emergence across time, space and communal boundaries.

If there was another application of economic potential in the arts, apropos Adam Krimms, the practice of Malay film would certainly qualify. We are informed of the genius of the Shaw Brothers' venture built out of *inspired improvisation* in the face of a *lack of technical resources*,¹⁴ which grew to claim a unique place in cinematic history in Southeast Asian, making Singapore the centre of Malay popular culture and intellectual life well into the 1960s. What makes this venture all the more interesting is the way such endeavour cut across communal lines:

*Chinese bosses, Malay stars and staff from all over Asia—Indian, Filipino, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian and Japanese also—made films together. As S. Ramanathan said, “It was a really cosmopolitan atmosphere.”*¹⁵

Tamaki's research, however, uncovers an alternative reading behind the highly motivated Shaw Brothers endeavour, citing four reasons:

1. A much earlier developed Indian film industry;
2. Much cheaper to employ than Hollywood directors;
3. English as a language well-employed by the Indian directors; and
4. Familiarity with the Malay Peninsula because of the large number of Indian immigrants.

There are at least two areas which further scholarship can be most helpful. The brilliance of the Malay film industry, along with the Jalan Ampas location, remains largely unknown. With the exception of Sheikh Haikel's more recent rap on **Jangan Tinggalkan Daku** from the film **Ibu Mertua Ku**, creative work responding to the music of Malay film seems to beg the question of its availability, proliferation and permeability for a younger audience. Perhaps, this is one of the more powerful arguments supporting recreative activity in Music – there is an entire community of youth from the Malay conversant community who may not have had exposure to what was in a sense a practice truly 'asli'.

Many more questions come to light surrounding this practice. Apart from oral accounts by those close to the Malay Film Industry and their star- performers, much of this practice reveals the need for an in-depth analysis of the practice, photographs, films, contracts to produce music for film by the company for the musicians, letters and documents of correspondence, 78-rpm records, live recordings, recording in-situ, scripts, musical scores or whatever iconographical

aid towards the musical recordings, to name a few, will no doubt help to uncover and articulate a more comprehensive view of the musical practice of Malay film.

Like Malay film, music in Malay traditional practice is problematic because of a perceived lack of coherence. It is highly unlikely that the *joget* and *ronggeng*, known to law-makers of the Straits settlement in 1895 and *joget* and *ronggeng* in the 1950s that Joseph Peters describes could be the same. And yet their identities between 1895 and 1950s had rendered a change from traditional to popular. James Chopyak makes the point in his article which looks at these musical practices as popular forms in Malaysia yet these are promoted as musics of Malay traditional culture in Singapore. Orkes Melayu, formed in 1991, has been charged with the social and cultural responsibility of sustaining and experimenting with Malay traditional musics via performances, workshops and lecture demonstrations. Further scholarship is most usefully pursued here in examining the nature, role and identity of Malay traditional musics, as museum curator or as contemporary commentator, confronting the Malay community in a contemporary globalised setting. Much of these practices begin with the notion that they were extremely popular in a very distant past. Worthy of discussion is the notion of these practices as attractors for social cohesion or participation as communities. Another problem raised hinges on the notion of popularity of support and its correlation with popularity of traditional practice. Both seem to work on differing views of cultural praxis either as museum culture or evolving, adapting culture. Future scholarship should be able to revisit these issues, among many other issues.

The fact that it takes about a year to put together a National Day programme with the music is indication of the seriousness of intention towards national commitment. The planning is meticulous; from the ceremonial to the informal, including rock and pop groups and local pop stars providing entertainment and locally composed tunes together with martial music Kong and Yeoh have noted how spectators have become an indelible part of a co-optive process of national loyalty. According to Kong, four messages emerge consistently, even unfailingly, through the years;

1. Multiracialism, Multiculturalism, Multilingualism and Multireligiosity;
2. Youthfulness—as exemplified in the boundless energy, exuberance and vibrance. Participation of the school going population is nearly always a given.
3. Values like social discipline, efficiency and technological rationalism were actively promoted as necessary values for a nation to progress.
4. The importance of education and training as keys to a promising future

The National Day Parade is therefore seen as one propitious occasion to effectively enthuse and engage communities within a nation an ideological exercise in cohesive, convergent behaviour. Yet much of the analysis has come about from watching the emergent product. Much less is known about the concept building, the planning, the processes of identifying and piecing together of the myriad components that make up the parade. How is the music arrived at? Who arranges and writes the music? Who is responsible for the lyrics? Further scholarship is imperative if we are to come to terms with an event which makes considerable demands on resources.

When P.Ramlee formed **Pancha Sitara** hoping to counteract the influence of the **Platters** and revitalise Malay music by adapting Western influences to suit what he believed to be local needs and expectations, he was not alone in his reservations. Horace Wee and Sam Gan, well-known as jazz practitioners expressed their dismay watching persons identified in concerts as musicians – learning to control, tune and amplify their newly found guitar sounds or percussion sounds. To them this completely reversed the ways in which musicians of their generation were vindicated in their musical practice by searching for excellence in performance standards, understanding its necessarily hierarchical nature. Pop Yeh Yeh, arguably practiced earlier than its English counterparts, foregrounded the amateur in a way best described in a situated performance/concert by Foucault as an event which could be read *as a reversal of a relationship of forces...the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it...the entry of a masked 'other'*.¹⁶

There are at least two others, the amateur, looked upon with disdain and the cultural other – the non-Malays. Many practitioners of Pop Yeh Yeh were also musicians working in the English-speaking equivalent of Western popular culture, as much as their Mandarin-conversant and Tamil-conversant counterparts. Somehow the music-making served at one level to enable practitioners to the point where *musical ability as a biological predisposition in every human being* would have become difficult to refute, if the level of support was considered. At another level, the levels of support also entailed cross-community exchanges, economic opportunities for those who recorded this practice, which gave rise to the possibilities of national and international careers in music for those who excelled in quality of songs and performance standards.

There is an ease with which Pop Yeh Yeh melded into technology, Vespas and Lambrettas and fashion, which has yet to be explored. If Cliff and the Shadows were sufficient encouragement, why was Pop Yeh Yeh a necessary phase since the

practice of the English-version of rock n' roll was equally enthusiastic in its emulation in Singapore? Not yet discussed is the implication of the dissenting voices from the Malay community with regard to this infiltration. P. Ramlee may have been the most significant voice but his concerns were likely to have shared sentiments from less audible voices. This is an area, among many related issues of religion, culture, sites of contestation, technology, economics and politics, which bodes much potential in further scholarship.

Shiyue's presence in music of popular folk culture has been somewhat understated and this exploration can only serve as a preliminary view to its understanding. Its historical position, unfortunately, is that of a slightly poorer relation next to the Taiwan college songs – Mingge – which had commercial and more concerted air-space, reaching out to aspiring pre-Xinyao practitioners before Xinyao was identified in 1982. Strangely the strongest defence via its accounting for it exists alongside Xinyao; one view of Shiyue holds it as a predecessor to Xinyao.

However, in the course of our research we are informed that, *the 1970s saw the golden period of Taiwanese popular songs among Chinese communities in Asia. Most of these Taiwanese songs were Mandarin covers of Japanese enka (urban nostalgic and emotive songs) or kayokyoku (early Japanese pop). They were very popular among the ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Chinese Singaporeans became familiar with Japanese tunes, although few realised that their favourite Mandarin songs [were] borrowed from Japanese tunes.*¹⁷

Shiyue was being developed and practiced parallel to the Taiwan campus song movement which represented in *Taiwan... a sense of awakening. Prior to that, music of this domain from Taiwan was based more or less on Japanese tunes; they had 50 years of Japanese influence. The youth, university undergraduates in Taiwan turned to writing their own material and songs; that's why they called it College Songs.*¹⁸

There were a number of levels at which Shiyue shared the same aversion to songs of Taiwanese popular culture. First it was identified as unrefined. Secondly, music of Taiwanese popular culture or Taiwanese popular songs were fundamentally Japanese transplants – hence the ideological aversion. Third, there was an American model in the musical protest – the music of Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, Don Maclean among a host of others, for whom the guitar became a symbol of camaraderie, a portable music-machine and a social symbol where there was virtually no gap between performer and audience – aiding the sense of intimacy. There was also a symbiotic relationship between audience and performer – the performer was not charged with the authority to emote while an audience

participated passively – here the performer was authorized by the audience to turn the “I” into “We”.

In the face of an ideological rejection, it is now possible to understand the reaction against sounds of music of Chinese popular culture (Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien dialects), and an emulation of Taiwan campus songs, whose style was described as more *refined* and fit in well with Shiyue practitioners in the Singapore context. This of course was to impact Xinyao practitioners a little later. Until further research explores this musical practice in greater depth, **shiyue** seems destined to remain an enigmatic practice with allegedly apparent links to Xinyao.

Members of the Indian community in Singapore articulated a different sort of cultural and ideological negotiation and practice with ‘home’ in India. In an article on the Anglo-Indian community and western ballroom music in Lucknow, Bradley Shope,¹⁹ citing Erasmus,²⁰ suggests ways people produce their own identities within the context of their relationships to contrasting groups between which they are considered situated. For Shope, *there is an emphasis on the production of identity that is marked simultaneously by continuity and change and the power of individual agency in its construction.*²¹ What appears in Shope’s argument is the notion of performance as identity; “this is what we do” lays claim to “this is what we are”. Because of their choice of repertoire, which consisted of western ballroom music, the Anglo-Indian community in Lucknow arguably created a distinct identity for themselves. What emerges from Shope’s argument is first the choice of repertoire; Indian musicians in Singapore performed music of South Indian film which was familiar to all those who consumed South Indian cinema. By performing what they performed, musicians of south Indian film musical practice could be said to be affiliated to a sense of being Indian – not only as individuals but as part of a diverse community in Singapore. The affiliation to the practice of music of south Indian classical tradition and south Indian film expressed an affiliation to the South Indian classical tradition and south Indian film respectively. By extension, these performances which acknowledge their respective identities and traditions acknowledgement of India as a source of such cultural sustenance.

This subscription to Indian identity in the Singaporean context leads to the second aspect which concerns transmission. Indira Arumugam²² draws on V.S. Naipaul’s observations of Indian immigrants out of India:

It was astonishing what they [the indentured labourers] did bring; but they were going to the end of the world and they came prepared for the wilderness; they brought holy books and astrological almanacs, images, sandalwood, all the paraphernalia of the religious shrines, musical instruments, string beds, plates and

*jars, even querns, even grinding stones...as it was, they carried India with them and were able to recreate something like their world.*²³

Naipaul's observations have ramifications for the ways in which affiliation to India, being Indian, and notions of Indian-ness was and is *carried* and *re-created* in an immigrant Indian community in Singapore. Gayatri Spivak articulates the concept of burden of the teaching of English in India but has special relevance in this context: *I use the word 'burden' in at least its two chief senses. First as the content of a song or account (...) second, as a singular load to carry, in a special way.*²⁴

Material possessions taken from home would have been most helpful in re-creating or even re-placing home in an overseas context. This material re-possession in Singapore, drawn along political lines, vis-à-vis the Tamil language and literature, may have helped but there is a cultural line here which was to become more powerful, particularly in the 20th century: south Indian classical music traditions and South Indian film. In any case, the experience from oral interviews is that early films, particularly the mythological films affirmed their audiences in Singapore in relation to their religious and spiritual identity.

At the same time, Sara Dickey's exploration of the significance of Tamil cinema for its urban poor viewers in Tamil Nadu reveals their consumption as an escape constituted through utopian fantasy and a form of soothing of social and psychological stresses of real-life through melodramatic resolution of these crises. While films themselves are remembered for and with varying levels of intensity and interpretation, I argue that engagement of this consumption of film culture is most effectively sublimated through film music, particularly songs in the film. Not surprisingly, Dickey's observations of everyday practice in Tamil Nadu include the way *movie songs blare from horn speakers and cassette players at weddings, puberty rites, and temple and shrine festivals.*²⁵

It is my view that under these circumstances, musical practices of south Indian film in Singapore have remained for its community of supporters, more a re-creative gift and less a marketable commodity. In re-creating a sense of home, these musicians were able to gift an Indian community in Singapore through music of South Indian film. This goes some way in explaining the presence of at least twenty-five music parties not long after the formation of the Tamils Representative Council and the linking of the Festival of Tamilians with Pongal (Harvest) festival.

One has only to recall the various Fine Arts organisations set up in Singapore to cultivate and sustain the practice of south Indian classical traditions, including those in music for a community that felt it of the utmost importance. In relation to the Indian classical tradition, there was a decided reliance on cultural sustenance from ‘home’. Till this day, the tutors engaged in the Indian practice at SIFAS, one of the many cultural organisations promoting Indian cultural practice, the one from India has been ‘certified and graded’ according to All-India-Radio audition criteria. That traffic has increased significantly in the last ten to fifteen years and there are indications that it will continue to grow.

Consumption of South Indian cinema by a demographically larger South Indian immigrant audience in Singapore conveys a sense of immediacy and affirmation of home, imagined or otherwise. Additionally, consumption of songs of South Indian film allows for the song to impact a subscribing community in a special and meaningful way. Ron Eyeran²⁶ draws attention to the fact that songs are more than texts (...) they are also performances, a form of ritualised practice in and through which meaning and significance is embedded. This gives more force to music as a carrier of collective memory, tradition, in that music is pregnant with meaning at more than the cognitive, literal level. Music embodies tradition through the ritual of performance. It can empower, help create collective identity, a sense of movement, in an emotional and almost physical sense.

Songs, like the films that contain them, acquire iconic value, transcending the iconicity of the film itself, transformed into sacrosanct spaces in time, even transcending time. Songs fulfil the two chief senses of the word “burden” used by Spivak and have relevance for the perception and reception not only of the *music* of South Indian film *within* the Indian community in Singapore but also *among* the diverse communities in Singapore.

What emerges from the oral interviews is the way these musicians of south Indian film practice were able to venture *beyond* the practice of south Indian film into the musics of north Indian, popular culture of the Euro-American practice as well as musics of the various communities in Singapore. From the sense of an enthusiastic and heady beginning to the fragile present, music of South Indian film was not the only repertoire these musicians had come to learn and perform. Dance-band music was already being performed by local and international musicians in Singapore from the late 1920s in major hotels as well as cabarets and was sufficiently popular to be advertised in local newspapers. Singapore was a centre for a blossoming Malay film industry, financed by Ho Ah Loke, Loke Wan Tho and the Shaw Brothers. Tamaki Kanda²⁷ informs us that the cultural exchange between India and

Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s was most prominently articulated through film: Chinese bosses, Malay stars and staff from all over Asia—Indian, Filipino, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian and Japanese also—made films together. The same diverse Asian collaboration is true of music-making.

Given this situation, the attractive forces of ‘western’ pop, jazz and musics of the various communities in Singapore may be seen to feed back into their musical practice of south Indian film in Singapore. The Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir is one ensemble that continues to challenge the notion of Indian-ness while being involved in Indian classical traditions. The strategies for emulating practices in India still continues to this day, divided between a penchant for past and present. It has pervaded much of the traditional and contemporary performing spaces, in terms of personnel, musical resources and musical instruments and has more recently included the technological convenience of sequenced music.

On the other hand this subscription and participation beyond the specificity of practice also acted as a catalyst for what some might consider an erosion of its site- and practice-specific context and sets the cultural dependence in question. Reviews of the Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir have described their efforts in adding to their concert repertoire excerpts from Mozart’s G minor symphony K550, alongside Vivaldi and jazz selections, as ‘embryonic’. Interviews with practitioners indicate participation in this musical practice of South Indian popular film by members of the Chinese, Malay, Eurasian, Caucasian, Singhalese, and Goan communities in Singapore, whose repertoire would not have been solely music of Tamil or Hindustani film. Moreover, among practitioners of Indian film were a group who, in performing musics of western popular culture, jazz and rock, rediscovered western sounds (as they would have been played in practices of western popular culture). This re-discovery enabled them to re-assert and re-place authenticity in sound in south Indian soundscapes in Singapore.

This crossing of soundscapes also made musical practice of south Indian film susceptible to secretions from other spheres. For some, the issues of authenticity in an Indian sound, imagined or solidified through convention, had already taken root and were treated as sacrosanct. This solidification of notions of authenticity had negative consequences for those who sought to re-place authentic ways of playing non-Indian instruments in both south Indian practices. Apropos south Indian film, in my view, the conflict in issues of authenticity lies in the transmission lag; not of the latest fashion, cinema and music, but of a mindset. Such a mindset was convinced that creative and performance standards in Singapore could not hope to

compare qualitatively with that in India. On the other hand, when the latest fashion of rock, rap and techno sounds in the latest South Indian film soundtracks by A. R. Rahman found favour among local South Indian youth, it was criticised for a lack of authenticity. The comparison here was made with songs by established South Indian film music directors like M. S. Viswanathan and Ilayaraja. With regard to the Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir, perhaps only time and experience will indicate the level of success attained – depending on how one defines success in such experimental endeavour.

Gayatri Spivak informs us *certain practices of...arts in the broadest sense are said to inhabit the private sector. But institutions of...art, as well as the criticism of art, belong to the public...*²⁸ Multiplicity of artistic endeavour has distinguished participants of the Band in Singapore throughout its presence visually and sonically. Throughout the 19th century, musicians of the Band entertained not only at official functions but also at external functions, fund-raising concerts, amateur orchestral concertising, children's concerts, and even at one stage a Town band. The performance of Handel's Messiah organised by St. Andrew's Cathedral was in no small way assisted by musical forces of a regimental band. Dance-band music was already available in Singapore from the late 1920s in major hotels as well as cabarets and sufficiently popular to be advertised in local newspapers. Diversity of collaboration and participation notwithstanding, musicians like the Punjabi bandmen of the Straits Settlement Police Band were able to play for funerals and other such activities among the various communities in Singapore. Singapore was a centre for a film industry, financed by Ho Ah Loke, Loke Wan Tho and the Shaw Brothers during the 1950s and 1960s. We are informed that the first Band of the Armed Forces set up in 1958 comprised musicians whose prior musical experience was in cabarets, keronchong or Hawaiian bands or in musical practices of popular culture.

Alec Dixon's amusing account of Punjabi Police Bandmen playing selections from Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore and 'Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes' at funerals for some extra earnings take us beyond suggestions of adaptation. Here is where one locates the inversion of form over content but no less an indication of a symbiotic relationship between music and social settings. In Karl Mannheim's words,

*Each idea acquires a new meaning when it is applied to a new life situation. When new strata take over systems of ideas from another strata, it can always be shown that the same words mean something different to the new sponsors, because these latter think in terms of different aspirations and existential configurations. This social change of function, then, is ... also a change of meaning.*²⁹

Here it is not the words but the sounds that are the subject of this transformation. By performing what they performed, these musicians, the Band they were affiliated to, and by extension, the Band movement, in whatever state of being, all acquired a distinct nature and identity, *transcending* their cultural identity.

In a sense, from its reported presence in 19th century Singapore, via Indian Native Regimental or Royal Regimental or even visiting bands in the 19th century, the Straits Settlement Police Band (Punjabi in all but name), the Syonan Police Band, Band of the Singapore Police Force and later the Band Project, brainchild of the Ministry of Education, is that the Band was and is, to most intents and purposes, an institution which transformed its participants, albeit varying degrees of adaptation. Its chosen medium of expression, in this case, music, rendered it the authority of an artistic institution which historically found favour with political and military institutions. This is significant, given the variety of communities, variety of participatory strategies throughout the processes of colonisation in Singapore. Despite the changes in adapting to political, social and cultural realities, the Band in Singapore seems to have survived, if not thrived towards its prominence. I believe this is because the Band as a political and artistic institution was accorded, has been accorded and on balance deserved its spatial prominence, pervading and permeating much of the traditional and contemporary performing spaces, in terms of personnel, musical resources and musical instruments.

It would too hasty and simplistic, if not erroneous, to draw direct link between the early bands of the infantry and the band today. There is no clear line of influence although if one does trace the history of the presence of Bands in Singapore, there emerges a "concept" or "notion" of a band, how it functioned and functions in society in site-specific ways.

What was the nature, role and identity of the band – a political phenomenon mediated through music or was it an artistic phenomenon mediated through a political esprit des corps? The gaps left behind especially between the Madras Native Infantry, Straits Settlement Police Band with all its evolution till one suspects 1958 and the Band Project inform us of the necessity of robust patronage for sustainability of the Band. Given the relative success of such patronage – was the Band a colonial gift so powerful that the only strategy to sustain its practice would have been to render it a political commodity in contemporary history?

There is so much more that needs to be articulated with the acknowledgement of a presence. What was the repertoire, how was it sustained, how did teaching and learning take place? What was the repertoire representative of? An analysis of the repertoire, the arrangements and transcriptions of the pieces would begin to address a correlation between the nature of such arrangements and transcriptions and the depth of available resources, instrumental and musical resources as well as skill levels of musicians, bandmasters, and possibly creative work. This research continues to redress the scarcity of photographs, concert programmes, taped recordings of concerts, financial records, letters of correspondence, among the few. Presence begs, even more questions, require far more explanation and another barrage of questions but provides the motivation for future and further scholarship.

Like the practice of the Band, a vast array of themes become evident in the discourse on music of the European art-music tradition, which began more British at first, then Japanese constructions of a Euro-centric (excluding practices in Allied European countries) for a brief period and presently to a global outlook in the present. What is evident is also the way Euro-American art music has permeated the social fabric of those who lived in Singapore.

It is not enough to discuss the impact of Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian communities throughout almost two centuries when we learn of contributions, both social and musical by German, Filipino, Japanese, English, Armenian Portuguese, Arab and Indonesian communities towards a Singaporean social and historical fabric.

If nothing else, Dixon's comments on the 1920s are worth a repeat for the gaps created:

*Singapore's most notable achievement in the field of amateur entertainment was, of course, the annual production of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera by the city's **Amateur Operatic Society**. It is interesting to recall that, when the Society produced the *Mikado*, the Japanese Consul-General and other members of the **Japanese community** were most helpful in the matter of costumes and stage settings.*³⁰ Yet, from a musical perspective, the **Amateur Operatic Society** in the 1920s seems to have little or no information about the society, members, instruments, modus operandi, support systems, repertoire, leaders, to name a few. Moreover, the chasm between the Amateur Operatic Society, the Scene-Shifters who permeated public space during the 1960s and 1970s and the Singapore Lyric Opera warrants research into a specific genre such as this.

Like the Filipino community who rose to prominence in the public sphere, paradoxically, during the Japanese Occupation, the Japanese community is one which there is considerable lack of information. There are some issues which emerge from a study of these musical practices which lead the way to further scholarship. Benjamin Wai-ming Ng informs us that “Japanese popular music has a relatively long history in the Singapore. It was introduced in the late 19th century following the influx of Japanese karayukisan (Japanese prostitutes) and traders. However, it was only performed in “Little Japan” (now Bugis Junction and its surrounding areas in downtown in Singapore) and was not popular among the locals. The earliest Japanese community has been defined as a community of prostitutes. Japanese songs, such as the national anthem, military songs and traditional folk songs, became popular in Singapore and Southeast Asia during the Japanese Occupation (1942-1945) and were actively used by the Japanese for political purposes. Many remembered the tunes “Aikoku Kyoshin Kyoku: (Patriotic March) and “Sakura”.³¹ Some interesting issues turn up in this instance. The location of the karayukisan around Bugis Street, Malabar, Hylam and Malay Street is probably accurate but Kevin Blackburn’s research³² into what is known as Little Japan in pre-war Singapore (adapted from Gubler 1972) comprised a Miyako Hotel along Beach Road, and a substantial portion of Middle Road which included a school along Waterloo Street, department stores at the intersection of Waterloo Street and Middle Road, two temples on either side of Bencoolen Street, a hospital between Princep and Short Street and even a Japanese Club near the intersection of Middle, Wilkie and Selegie Road. It is disputable as to whether Japanese popular music found favour with *locals*, since Ng does not inform us who locals consisted of. However the department stores were known. Tony Danker remembers his father purchasing musical instruments from the Japanese store, *he [my father] started me off with a Japanese instrument which I don’t see nowadays...its like a piano...a long thing...and there are keys and strings across and for every number that you press there is a different tone coming out...and you play sounds on this thing and you rattle the strings with your right hand....and you play songs like that....now that’s how I picked up music...I used to learn this Japanese instrument....we used to call it the lang-ting-tang...don’t ask me why but that was what it was known as...you play it horizontally across your lap and then you press the keys, you get the notes and you get songs going and that’s what started me off....then you have of course what you call the ukelele...He bought these instruments from shops...my first guitar was a three dollar guitar which he bought along Middle Road...along the 10-cents stores along Middle Road...they had a lot of those Japanese shops...they were very cheap...they [the shop-owners] were very polite*³³

Ng's accounts of a Japanese community of Karayukisan do not tally with a Japanese community found in Alec Dixon's recounting the early 1920s.

The emergence of a relatively silenced community in Singapore is particularly startling and poignant when we are not only given details of how music emerges in the public sphere but communities, in of all moments, the Japanese Occupation:

*Members of the local Filipino Association will give another musical and variety performance at the Syonan General Hospital today to entertain the sick and wounded Nippon servicemen on the occasion of Tentyo-Setu. The Filipino entertainers made a hit with their initial show last Saturday and will present an entirely new programme specially prepared for the occasion. There will be a musical concert by the Association's Orchestra, which will feature several musical numbers by leading Nippon composers, followed by a variety show consisting of comedy, acrobatics and animal circus. The show will commence at 5pm. The sick and the wounded servicemen at the hospital were full of praise at the hospital for the fine show given by the Filipinos last Saturday and formed the opinion that it was the best performance seen in the hospital so far. Today's show is by special request.*³⁴

Alfredo (Fred) Libio and his all-star Filipino Swing Band was a hit in late 1930s and 1940 at the New World Cabaret.³⁵ Fred Libio, it seems, went on to become the music director of Shaw Brothers films.³⁶ Sam Gan and Horace Wee remember their impact in the musical practice of dance-band music/jazz in Singapore:

*In those days the Filipinos and those of Filipino heritage were kingpins because they could read music and basically the Filipino trait was the ability to copy exactly, the notes, the feel and whatever else. The first generation of Filipinos....they were supposed to be the studied ones...many of them had classical training...they were multi-instrumentalists. in the Singapore context, I would say that pianists here in those days that could play jazz, were me, Jose Darroya, Albert's uncle Lionel Ventura, in that period...we had in those days very good soil...when I joined the band...with the Filipino musicians...[there were] Malay musicians...we had Johari Salleh's father playing first trumpet...Johari was fresh from school playing third trumpet... but the best exponent of jazz music, to my mind, at the time in Singapore was Ernesto Daroya...he had this uncanny ability to listen while washing his car...he would listen to a track and by night he could play the damn thing...*³⁷

Many more musicians from a variety of communities remain single entries and or silenced in the entire narrative. Oral interviews relate to the presence of Goanese,

Indonesian Dutch, East European communities in addition to the Japanese and Filipinos and German and French communities in the previous century. Further and future scholarship will go some way in redressing the assumption of the population of Singapore emphasising Chinese Indian, Malay, and Eurasian communities more than the other communities who are equally deserving of mention for their contributions.

Very little is known of the recording industry when it would help locate and redress the long held silence of many practices that written and oral discourse would benefit much from. Tony Danker's experiences with the David Lincoln Orchestra are only remembered in photographs and recordings noted by Tan Sooi Beng in her article on 78 RPM recordings in Malaya in the pre-Japanese Occupation. Much of her article corroborates a very commercially vibrant recording industry in Singapore in the inter-war years.³⁸

At another level, musical cultures are also seen to interact and influence musical practice. It is not possible to deny the correlation of regimental bands and the orchestral tradition in Singapore. Similarly, it is not possible to deny a correlation between the role of Christian missionary work and western art music, as much as contemporary composition has become more sensitive of an Eastern if not more Southeast Asian context.

At the epistemological level, there is a problem in identifying musical works that articulate the difference between western music and western art music as well as the Euro-American tradition. The nature, role and identity of this musical practice help raise questions about it in a way that an examination of capitalist modes of production, division of labour, among others can provide explanations to justifying cultural capital alongside financial health and wellness. At the heart of this practice, there is an aspect of this study which Phan Ming Yen has simply identified with silence, in fact many forms of silences.³⁹ There was at one level, silences in narratives and silencing in narratives; events brought to light that had never been discussed since their taking place and since their being recorded for the first time in the newspapers. Another level of silence emerged as a prerequisite of the performance and enjoyment of music and the practice of music as a necessity to silence. Perhaps the most subtle and telling act of silencing is the way in which the Esplanade was built to justify scientifically and technologically that, *good acoustics for Western music are good acoustics for other genres*.⁴⁰ In encountering and breaking through these levels of silences, it was and still is difficult to refute a view that the remembering and practice of Western music represents a means for the European community to recreate a sense of their home in a colony of the

Empire. This process was seen as necessary because it worked alongside the assertion of power and superiority by one culture (the coloniser) over another (the colonised) in the face of the fear of the loss of the self-respect, pride and identity of the coloniser.

Does an equal-tempered tuning system, set with A=440 Hz as the universal marker for all musical traditions around the world as well, make an unchallenged assumption that musical practice of the Euro-American tradition can now be justified economically and politically as a universal? This question of spatial imperialism, like other questions raised are useful when they invite future and further scholarship in understanding what appears before us as a rich, diverse and diffuse narrative in this musical practice in Singapore.

There are problems in considering Song Ong Siang's efforts towards the Straits Chinese Magazine in Singapore around the turn of the 19th century to provide sufficient impetus for a later group to appropriate the activities of the Minstrel party. The Peranakan community was reported to be so well versed with keronchong, asli, pantun and dondang sayang. Why was there a need to engage in activities of a Minstrel party when keronchong, asli, pantun and dondang sayang would seem so much second nature? Or by engaging in the Minstrel party, were practitioners revealing something of their Chinese-speaking audience? Is it possible that a Minstrel Party was considered prestigious enough for a non-English conversant community as "Western music"? Or perhaps was it such that no non-Chinese participant in the Minstrel party would have access (or choose not to have access) to a Chinese-conversant community?

In the present context, the Minstrel party might be frowned upon for its potentially racist and demeaning content. Its use in practice by the Peranakan or Straits Chinese society functioned as a 'gift' to the non-English conversant Chinese community as well as fund-raising and charity events.

In his work *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Jurgen Osterhammel identified three basic elements of colonialist thought: the construction of inferior "otherness"; the belief in mission and guardianship and the utopia of non-politics.⁴¹ Charitable aims and acts notwithstanding, activities presented by the Peranakan community would have to consider that these music making activities first lent their services, upon invitation, towards fund-raising activities for the non-Anglicised Chinese community and assistance towards a home called China; secondly, marked the line quite clearly between Anglicised and non-Anglicised Chinese communities; and thirdly, all too easily lent the impressions of utopian non-political motivation,

considering that for services rendered, appreciation could arrive in the form of trophies, momentos, food and transportation. The extent to which benevolent colonialism was being practiced will need a more critical examination in relation to the innocuous practice of musicians of the Minstrel parties. Insufficient material at this stage makes this once most popular practice among many communities in Singapore the subject of future research and scholarship.

Just as the Band and Euro-American art- music practices indicate a long-standing history in discourse on music in Singapore, the wayang, both street and staged, represent religious and cultural sustenance which was hard-fought and tenaciously maintained. Much of the discourse provided by Lee Tong Soon is built on an understanding of street opera/wayang and a view that ‘amateur’ performing groups are somehow seen as a privileged group, certainly over those ‘professionals’ whose opportunities do not extend beyond the temple grounds. That is not to suggest Lee does not appreciate the amateur presence. While accepting not to disagreeing over the commendable standards of performance of amateur groups, the imputed judgment of parity, inequitable funding and support of both groups only serve to mark a divide between the two instead of reaping a dividend from their joint presence.

Further scholarship will have to critically examine, the nature, role and identity of professionals and amateurs as well as the nature, role and identity of street and staged wayang. An interesting corollary of this process will also have to consider tactics and strategies of mark wayang troupes, cultural associations in the convergences and collisions of tradition and modernity. There also needs to be a critical examination of the ways in which the performances by these ensembles, as creative and re-creative endeavours, identify and indemnify them; both within the discourse of tradition and modernity as well as the formation of a Singaporean identity, constructed or evolved out of necessity, within local and international settings.

If there is a way to come to terms with Music of Western popular culture in the English-soundscape, it was always surrounded by controversy, fights, stabbings and occasional deaths. If that was not enough, there was always the problem of drugs and the association with pop music. From a wonderfully enthusiastic beginning with support from the British forces stationed here to its resurgence in the late 1970s after the Singapore government intervened in certain types of live performances, much of its practice went from a mixture of creative and re-creative to primarily re-creative work – to the extent that playing covers became a full-time profession with specific instructions from pub and club management.

Herein lies some clues of the range in public reception of him; from considerable support from university and polytechnic students who appreciated the novelty of his hybrid pop-jazz to critics' scathing reviews and an English speaking middle class who think Dick is not serious enough to a Chinese speaking population who feel he is using their culture inauthentically.⁴² It is in appropriating and reinterpreting cultural practices which had acquired boundaries, that has resulted in this mixed reception of Dick Lee's creative work.

One can add to the discourse speculation of a shrewd sense of economic potential to be garnered from what Karl Marx defines as the mistaking of an object for a social relation, or vice versa - commodity fetish. Adam Krims explains the process in hip-hop, particularly the ghetto as source of despair and economic potential:

*The commodified image of the ghetto forms a libidinal object...leads...to a surplus value generated from the commodification of a lack of value...the music industry has found a way to refold some of the most abject results of world economic production, through a direct transformation...to multibillion-dollar wealth...this refolding...that constitutes hip-hop's own mutation in the workings of surplus value...without...materially changing the living conditions at either end.*⁴³

Chua Beng Huat's recent chapter discusses ways in which the Singlish-Singaporean is identified more specifically in the realms of the Hokkien-speaking community and connotes *the positioning of Hokkien speakers as low life...in a country where forty years of continuous economic growth has engendered a substantial middle class...dependent on academic and professional achievements.* Therefore, in the view of an educated middle-class Singaporean, *Hokkien is being thus positioned, in representation and social reality as the language...laughably low-class ...not a serious language for the civil community.*⁴⁴

At the same time, Chua also notes attempts in popular culture in Singapore to glorify the essence of Singlish Singaporean Ah Beng and his feminine counterpart Ah Lian, through the lens of middle-class educated Singaporean consumers, *for whom switching code from Standard English to Singlish is a marker of 'authentic' Singaporean identity.*⁴⁵ Nowhere else is more amplified than in a recent and hugely popular sitcom series Phua Chu Kang, which makes the everyday existence of a poorly educated but economically successful renovation contractor (a phrase - *nouvo riche* – comes to mind here).

Applying the arguments of Trudgill and Krims, Singlish 'emerges', in the process of economic growth and prosperity, as a ghetto-language with its *authentic* users

forming its cultural ghettos. As a cultural commodity in televised theatre, it has become since the 1990s, something hugely popular within Singapore, to the extent of becoming an internationally marketable asset. The fact it is frowned upon in the recent Speak Good English Movement campaigns has only increased its value.

Applied now to Music, Dick Lee's creative works arguably contain, together with the use of hybrid pop-jazz musical elements, the use of Singlish (in contradistinction to Singapore English) as a *lower-prestige* mode of communication. When capitalized upon as a commodity fetish – the notion, which according to Marx,⁴⁶ both results from and reinforces the more general tendency in capitalist societies to mystify social origins – such strategies become successful in marketing a Singaporean identity. It is difficult to deny the success of Dick Lee in the Japanese markets, made particularly so when the use of Singlish in music. One also needs to consider that much of Lee's success preempts the successes in theatre-spaces of local film and television in Singapore.

More recent scholarship on Dick Lee is likely to generate further interest and research not only on his music but also of the socio-cultural circumstances of what might best be read as one of the many independent and successful routes taken in the narratives of music of Western popular culture in Singapore. Additionally, there has been very little done in terms of an analysis of the music as well as its complicity or conformity with the textual considerations, whether it is the main, meta- or sub-texts.

Yusnor Ef's observations summarise the position that Singapore was the centre of the Malay peninsula from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. Today he laments that popular and promising artistes in Singapore are eclipsed by their Malaysian counterparts. Ramli Sarip is the only representative in the rock and popular culture domain alongside a handful of others. Anita Sarawak is known not only in the Malay community but internationally in music of popular culture in the English speaking world. Iskandar Ismail, who began his life as Hangloose Iskandar in the jazz world, is today demanded as an arranger. The list is small but growing and he claims pride in the Malay community for them: Indra Shahril, Jan Johari, Reduan Ali, Nora Ismail, Bong Shaaban, Ismail Marzuki, Nazim and others.⁴⁷

Many practitioners have emerged since but remain known to their audiences and contemporaries within the Malay community. What will be most helpful here is to widen the circle of scholarship beyond the Malay community. Besides the inimitable Najib Ali, who seems to have straddled across a number of musical practices, a number of performers in the Malay community in pop, jazz, heavy metal and hip-hop circles remain anonymous largely because they perform in

spaces which do not resonate with the Malay-conversant communities. One notable example is the late Bani Faruk [sic] guitarist who played with Jive Talking at the Hard Rock Café. Contemporaries nicknamed him the George Benson of Singapore.⁴⁸ Other examples include Sheikh Haikel, formerly of Construction Sight, arguably Singapore's first rapper, Triple Noize, the youngest rap group after Construction Sight and Urban X'change, and many heavy metal musicians who prefer their practice in the English conversant domain. Yet there are those who suggest that in the domain of the Malay music industry, Singaporean artists pale in comparison to their Malaysian and even Indonesian counterparts. Yusnor laments the divide between Malaysian and Singaporean artists in Music of popular culture in Malay has now grown beyond geographical distance to reach the point of stratification, with a cry echoed in the English music industry with respect to creative work:

*Musicians claimed that Singaporean audiences were not supportive of local talent.*⁴⁹

The influence of popular film and cabaret from Shanghai and transported to the different **Worlds** found greater support among the Chinese community who were not much more resistant to dance music and popular songs than the other communities in Singapore. Of the popular form of music-making and dance in cabarets and dance bands, arguably the most popular entertainment during the 1950s in Singapore was to be found in the New World, with **getais** enjoying the best business. There was the **Man Jiang Hong Getai, Shangri-La, New Nightclub, Feng Feng Song and Dance Troupe, and Broadway**.⁵⁰ The **Man Jiang Hong Getai** was used by the famous **Zhang Lai Lai Song and Dance Troupe**, which met with enthusiastic crowd response. Part of the show included the performance of a series of love ballads between **Zhang Lai Lai** and the male lead, which was a crowd-pleaser. **Zhang** eventually moved to the Hong Kong motion picture scene. Despite her considerable success and fame as a singer locally, the troupe was subsequently dismantled. The **Man Jiang Hong Getai** was then replaced by the **Dong Fang Getai**.⁵¹ Audience fascination for love ballads made famous names such as Huang Qing Yuan and Qin Huai because of their vocal timbre and rendition of ballads. Eventually they lost their popularity to younger 'pop idols' like Sakura Ting, whose gift was to be able to entertain audiences with wit, humour and a lot of dancing; a trait seriously lacking in Huang and Qin. Sakura Ting made a big appearance in the Agogo era, was well known for yodelling in some of her 'country' style, western songs which set her apart from the rest of the singers at that time including Pang Xiu Qiong. Sakura was a known

entity in Hong Kong and Indonesia. Unlike Sakura, Zhang Xiao Ying focussed more towards ballads and other slower tempo songs. She appeared very much prim and proper, unlike the dynamic Sakura but Zhang was more popular in the late 70s and early 80s. Sisters Deng Xue Hua, Miao Hua, and Gui Hua were popular from the late 70s to the mid 80s. Deng Miao Hua is the most popular of the trio, but she started off as a solo act. She sang the theme song of the TV drama serial **Xiao Fei Yu** (Little flying Fish) and acted in it as well. Deng Miao Hua was, also one of the products of singing classes organised by SBC at that time. It also produced a handful of singers who performed regularly on the Mandarin variety shows such as **Xing, Xing, Xing** and **Bin Fen Ba San Series**.⁵²

What raised Xinyao to a level of prominence never before achieved in the Mandarin-speaking world was the creative energy which I believe spilled over into the recreative Mandarin-speaking community. It should not surprise us that from the late 1980s towards the beginning of the 1990s, the world of Mandarin pop seems to have had either collisions or mergers with Xinyao. At one level, Xinyao lyricists and songwriters were preparing their material for Hong Kong singing sensations, while at another level, certain names seemed to appear at Xinyao festivals, linked with Xinyao events yet were not considered bona fide Xinyao practitioners. While the separation is made clear, it wouldn't be difficult to envision an identity crisis with the entertainment industry. One observer noted how much the songs of Liang Wern Fook, Eric Moo and Loi Fei Huay had created the impression that Xinyao had really gone pop largely because the musical arrangements seem to be ready to compete in the Mandarin pop market. Here is where opinions differed as to Xinyao's directions. Looking at CCA school activities from 1993 -1997, Xinyao had virtually disappeared. Coincident with this was the emergence of Kit Chan, who was discovered and groomed by Ocean Butterflies. Stephanie Sun, pop or otherwise, came from the Li Wei Song School and yet again was confused with the practice of Xinyao. Doubtless there will continue to be the greying of domains long regarded as sacrosanct between the various musical practices.

However, it cannot be denied that the recreative world of Mandarin pop finally reached a different plateau through a uniquely Singaporean expression, Xinyao. When exactly this meeting of recreative and creative energy took place (if it ever did meet)? How did the two activities seem to converge into a Mandarin pop scene?

According to composer/singer Liang Wern Fook, in an article *Xinyao - The Catalyst that brought about Singapore Mandarin Pop*, Liang suggests that *people*

*became conscious of local music after Xinyao started.*⁵³ Paradoxically, what we do know about Xinyao is more of what it does much less what it is. What was the role played by Xinyao in its community of believers? Was the music the easiest vehicle for transmission of Mandarin youth concerns? Moreover, while Xinyao provided opportunities for school garden song amateurs with undreamed of professional recording contracts, focussing on the power of exquisite Mandarin poetry riding on the directness and immediacy of musical material, it was to become by the 1990s an entrepreneurial package and commercial endeavour. By 1994, *the term 'Xinyao' no longer means the raw, folksy and school-like songs that guitar strumming students sang in the past. It has now come to encompass a varied and sometimes more sophisticated range of songs that even Taiwanese and Hongkong stars are crooning to.*⁵⁴ Much of the nostalgia for the past both in spirit and sound can only be recovered in select Music lounges. On the other hand music of present popular culture in Mandarin cannot deny the influence of nor avoid reference to Xinyao. At the same time, Xinyao seems to have had two more directions; a desire to take on a frame more amenable in popular culture as well as a desire for nostalgia for those involved when they were growing up; one which has two sides, those who wish to partake of raw, folksy, school-like songs by curating them in lounges and other reunion concerts, while another side wishes to use the creative spirit behind the raw and folksy ballads for more creative activity. This is perhaps worth its time and effort in future scholarship.

One of the most telling observations about Xinyao was that it *was supported by a very niche group of young people – not very big, but definitely very enthusiastic and committed students from about 16-20 years of age, mainly JC and tertiary...The youngsters today have no idea what Xinyao is. The use of the old term Xinyao is the work of former members of Xinyao and their nostalgia for the past.*⁵⁵

This loss of spatial practice has created opportunities for those who wish to revisit their ideals in representational space. Henri Lefebvre tells us that every society and mode of production produces its own space.⁵⁶ Social practice draws to attention use of the body, its sensory organs, gestures, and representations of the body which link the body's relations with its milieu. Bodily lived experience...filtered through cultural intervention ensure and insure mobility of the individual member/s of a given social group, without confusion...constituting a coherent whole by establishing a common language, a consensus and a code.⁵⁷

In this respect Lefebvre's triad of spatial practice, representations of space and representational space become instructive not only by what solidifies into a convention in a practice but also what is dynamic and fluid, given the nature of

change within the community. What will emerge as most fruitful will be the research into the Hadrahmi community in Singapore that makes detailed observation of the processes of the nature of change and how that change correlates with a changing and dynamic social, cultural and political situation. To quote Bradley Shope⁵⁸ and Erasmus,⁵⁹ suggesting ways people produce their own identities within the context of their relationships to contrasting groups between which they are considered situated. For Shope, *there is an emphasis on the production of identity that is marked simultaneously by continuity and change and the power of individual agency in its construction.*⁶⁰ What appears in Shope's argument is the notion of performance as identity; "this is what we do" lays claim to "this is what we are". Because of their choice of repertoire, which consisted of devotional hymns in the Sufi tradition and practice, the Hadrami of Yemen distinguished themselves, as distinct from the Malay community who subscribed to Islam with slightly different value- and belief- systems, no doubt the outcome of their own cultural negotiation with Islam, and distinguished themselves among the myriad diversity of immigrant communities in Singapore.

What emerges from the oral interviews is very rich data that only succeeds in provoking more questions. Between 2004 and the records of the formation of the Arab club in 1896 and the Arab school in 1898, there are massive gaps that have not been accounted for. How was this community sustained? If these were traders, what was the role music and culture played in their lives and those of their families? Who was responsible for the dissemination, teaching and learning of this practice? What was the perception and reception of Arabs living in the Southeast Asian region, quite far away from Yemen and what was their view of home?

We are informed that the repertory in the Arab community in Singapore is based on devotional text supported by the music. What is considered different is the use of musical rhythm in creating a physiological and therefore spiritual rhythm in an effort to achieve communion with God. The devotional lyrics hardly fit the context of performance at samras; to all intents and purposes, secular spaces. Notions of acculturation notwithstanding, Philip Bohlman's study of the role of chamber music in the lives of the Yekkes, German-speaking Jews in Israel, observes how the music, in this case absolute music, becomes ethically (even ethnically) binding:

*Viewed from a performative perspective...practice reflects different attitudes towards both the repertoire and the communities that lend the music its distinctive functions and form its different histories.*⁶¹

One way to understanding musical performances of devotional texts in secular spaces is the way it serves to reach out to the Yemeni community in Singapore.⁶² By performing what they perform, the Hadrami community whose repertoire of devotional songs at a Samra act as a fishing net for its members:

*There is a samra...and for the Arab community, everyone in there knows this...it's a code of behaviour that invites them into the process...this is what I mean by formalisation...By and large in the Arab community, there is a tendency...a tacit agreement that samra...if someone is getting married, basically the whole village will get involved...that notion was brought here when they migrated here...[the samra]...is not extended to everyone but only the Arab community.*⁶³

While it may be true that the motivation is to reach out to the Arab community, its derivations are a little more surprising:...*For those who experienced living in a Malay kampong from young have this sense of an open house. The question is whether was it also the contribution to the Malay culture that the Arabs had engaged in that sense of continuity...It is possible at one level to think that the Arabs have adopted the Malay way...the berinai...only the samra is separate...actually its most of the music.*⁶⁴

Quite a number of the songs in the repertory seem to originate from Indonesia (or sometimes Malaysia) rather than Yemen. Here is a significant point: while the distance in both chronology and geography is an issue that further research requires in terms of cultural sustenance, Indonesia, particularly Java, has been identified as the closest default setting for cultural sustenance for Arab immigrants like Bagushair. The location of Indonesia as the next most feasible centre for cultural sustenance by the Arab Community in Singapore is telling in the ways the distance from home is replaced by a satellite centre.

Nevertheless, it will be observed that practices of the Arab community here, from performing music with devotional texts beyond samras, outside of the usually established comfort zones of houses into cafés, performances at secular functions among others arguably serve the dual function of establishing their identity and using these events as fishing nets to draw in the Hadrami community members towards a sense and experience of the collective.

Much of this exploration is still at the initial stage. Despite this aural interview, the period spanning 1896 and the present is virtually devoid of written accounts, documentary evidence or documentation. Perhaps it is this absence and silence which will provide the motivation for further research into the musical practices and by extension the sociocultural practices of Zafin.

What can we make of these various musical practices in Singapore? In the preface to his novel *Nanjing 1937: A love story*, Chinese writer Ye Zhaoyan states how his gaze had been caught on that *particular era of the past* but, as a writer, found himself *unable to truly understand that history that historians call history*. All Ye could see was the *shattered pieces, broken fragments, and a handful of melancholic stories destined to come to naught, all quietly playing out upon the grand stage of history*.⁶⁵

Closer to home, Horace Wee and Sam Gan articulate a similar line:
Singapore's history is actually rich but ragged...because there has been no focus.⁶⁶

This research has only begun to scratch the surface of a rich history – it will remain ragged for some time not because of a lack of focus but rather that the danger focus tends to bring with it – an account of practice which may be flawed in its construction of foundations.

Perhaps the most amenable way to come to terms with musical practices in Singapore is to begin with the outcome of musical practice – music. That may seem blindingly obvious to all. Yet our research has uncovered ways in which some musics were blatantly discriminated against, derided in local magazines. While W. G. St.Clair he felt that there was "fairly general taste for music" among the European community, there were only a few who "take a very high place, either vocally or instrumentally."⁶⁷ This, St Clair reasoned was:

... no doubt partly due to constant subjection of the young people to the constant hideous noises made by Asiatics, from the Malay, Chinese, or Madrasi ayah of

*infancy upwards on to public wayangs, cacophonous street cries of hawkers, and private musical orgies of Chinese servants. To counteract that there is often a certain amount of home music, good, bad or indifferent; there is the music, if nay, and such as it may be, picked up at school; there are the weekly Church and Sunday school services: and the rare opportunities of hearing the military band, this itself perhaps hardly ever accessible to the younger folk of Singapore.*⁶⁸

Writing in the Straits Chinese Magazine in 1898, Edward Salzman had written an article on Chinese music for the magazine as well as made no apology in attempting to harmonise a Chinese melody: *It is well understood that Chinese music is, as music, in quite a rudimentary state...the European orchestra of the present day...must be allowed to be a most beautiful combination of musical sounds, even if the music played be beyond comprehension. Judged by this standard, Chinese music cannot stand...it must be admitted that no beauty can be claimed for Chinese music at the present time...in the opinion of many people competent to judge, there is plenty of talent in music among the Chinese, if they were properly trained. Should they be begin to study the western system, there is little doubt but that before long a very great improvement would be heard.*⁶⁹

Yet if one reads his sources of inspiration for composing, Leong Yoon Pin includes in his personal journey a range of possibilities:

*A strong desire to be our own masters after World War II...instill a sense of pride through singing songs of a non-decadent nature in the advent of self-government and eventual independence to an expression of my country's environmental and historical sounds...in my first symphony, I looked at the early days when the Indian labourers were working in the streets. I was fascinated by their labouring chant and I put that into the final movement. Later on, Dayong Sampan for instance referred to our Malay heritage, and so does Lenggang Kangkong.*⁷⁰

Leong's compositions are striking because they are at one level outcomes of composition, a technique Leong acquired as a musician, training, some of which was local and some when he was abroad when he studied with Nadia Boulanger. Yet, for Leong, describing his musical works does not mention influences of the 'great' composers or some of the works studied that would become points of homage and departure. Rather it becomes the means and medium for which Leong would remember a considerably diverse communities living in Singapore. His compositions, at another level, reflect the sound-worlds created by the various communities.

Leong's notions of musical worlds in his personal musical practice resonate with the suggestions of John Blacking who admitted to a deliberate use of inverted commas with the term "music":

*Although every known human society has what trained musicologists might recognise as music, there are some that have no word for music or whose concept of music has a significance quite different from that generally associated with the word music... "Music" is both the observable product of human intentional action and a basic human mode of thought by which any human action may be constituted. The most characteristic and effective embodiment of this mode of thought is what we would call music.*⁷¹

Blacking reasoned that if music was understood from such a perspective, *we ought to be able to learn something about the structure of human interaction...by way of the structures involved in music, and so learn more about the inner nature of man's mind....observation of musical structures may reveal some of the structural principles on which human life is based.*⁷²

In Leong's descriptions comes something more profound:

*Expression of my country's environmental and historical sounds...*⁷³

When one begins researching the diversity of musical practices in the diverse communities in Singapore, where or how does one begin with an understanding of sounds? For Bruce Smith, it begins from the psycho-acoustic entities:

Sound is at one the most forceful stimulus that human beings experience and the most evanescent. Periodic waves of air molecules strike against the listener's eardrums and set up vibrations inside the body...for an historian, interested in sounds of the past, there would seem to be nothing there to study, at least until the advent of electromagnetic recording devices in the early 20th century.

Yet the impossibility of having access to these sounds can be recovered and re-constructed. While the possibility of reconstructing spaces dedicated or amenable to performance remains another issue for another time involving far greater resource, both of architectural and engineering expertise, let alone financial resource, there are allusions to sound as Bruce Smith suggests, implied by fictional texts, if not represented in those texts. It is descriptions about practices of each community – judgments of musical/unmusical notwithstanding- that provide us with the best possible opportunities of uncovering their presence and practice. Scholarship can be meaningful and relevant when used to identify what has been written, implicitly and explicitly, *about* the sounds of these diverse musical

practices – to facilitate a reasonably and historically informed performance *of* a musical practice no longer available in the present context.

An understanding of musical practices as practices involving sounds also helps to understand behavioural patterns of those who created, performed and attended to them. As with those who were at the periphery of such practices, a range of receptions ranging from centrifugal to centripetal responses would have engendered commensurate behavioural decisions.

This goes some way in understanding why ‘music’ and its participants may be found in a plethora of situations in every aspect of life and living in Singapore. Michael Bull and Les Back inform us that *the experience of everyday life is increasingly mediated by a multitude of mechanically produced sounds. Waking, walking, driving, working and even falling asleep are all done to music or some other acoustic accompaniment...Sound thus has both utopian and dystopian associations: it enables individuals to create intimate, manageable and aestheticised spaces to inhabit but it can also become an unwanted and deafening roar threatening the body politic of the subject.*⁷⁴

Together, Bull and Back invite a mode of apprehension they refer to as deep listening. Four modes of experience are suggested:⁷⁵

- Sound makes us re-think the meaning, nature and significance of our social experience
- Sound make us re-think our relation to community
- Sound makes us re-think our relational experiences, how we relate to others, ourselves, and the spaces and places we inhabit
- Sound makes us re-think our relationship to power

The argument is that those in the process of making music, whether individually or together, are involved in the fundamentally social process of human being itself, that they are:

*Tuned-in to one another, are living together in the same flux, are growing older together while the musical process lasts...not only...the...measurable outer time required for the performance...but the coperformance in simultaneity of the polthetic steps by which the musical content articulates itself in inner time.*⁷⁶

For Schutz, this relation between inner and outer time ‘pluridimensional time’ which is simultaneously lived through when two or more individuals are making music together. As he notes:

*Making music together occurs in a true face-to-face relationship – inasmuch as the participants are sharing not only a section of time but also a sector of space.*⁷⁷

The sharing of time and space is a crucial factor for it identifies participants in a variety of ways from the die-hards to “wannabes” - those who want to be associated with that contested space. Shirleen Noordin identified three groups associated with the Mat-Rock practice - music, motorcycles (Mat Motor) and DXLN – the posers who simply hang out to be part of the crowd. Nor should it surprise us. Not all who attend ‘classical music’ concerts do so with the intention of appreciating the music performed.

What is striking is the way in which our research yielded diverse musical practices and the way these practices cut across communal lines in music-making activity. On the other hand, only a few of these practices are known. Our study of the various musical practices in Singapore uncovers a silence. As a noun, silence we found ranges from ignorance to intolerance. As a verb, silence involves the behaviour of selection by criteria and operation unknown. Again, we need to examine the behaviour in relation to the role of a silencing individual, first as individual, then as part of a series of collectives which build on levels of authority. Even in the best interests, in the making of his-stories, her-stories and other-stories, there is a range of representation, from exclusion to saturation, from factual to almost fictive. On balance, Trouillot argues that silences are necessary for the burden of fully comprehensive facts would be incomprehensible.⁷⁸

Silence can also emerge as a form of obtuseness. Praxis was obvious to its participants and practitioners but not much made of in terms of transferring activity from the domestic to the public sphere. One possible justification would have been the notion of what is referred to as gifting a community. Secondly, very little was retained or documented in terms of written or reproducible media, hence the very ephemeral nature of the practice. Thirdly, the notions of practice themselves might have articulated tensions within the practice; that of Bourdieu’s identification of tradition versus heresy.⁷⁹ Fourth, each practice, as part of a collective of many musical practices in diverse communities, become subject to a process of selection/exclusion depending on a more unified agenda of representation. Fifth, if there is an institution, private or public, there is the question of ideology of the institution, its socio-cultural, political and financial resources, its patrons, its practices; all implicated, directly or indirectly in articulations as well as silences. This is also true not only of diverse practices but also of a tension between amateur and professional factions within each practice. Consequently a silencing, intentional or otherwise, of any musical practice, size of community

notwithstanding, makes painfully evident not only a dominant discourse but its authorization as well.

A number of organizations appear as footnotes in the oral interviews as well as musical practices. Much of our work reveals further scholarship in addressing these gaps. A study of the musical activities of the Peoples Association alone reveals their hand in virtually all the known musical practices in Singapore. A study of the role the Peoples Association has played in promoting music in the late 1950s up to the present will be significant for a cultural and historical perspective that is crucial to understanding its role in supporting many of these musical practices between the domestic and public sphere. The same too is observed in organizations like the Music and Drama Company of the Singapore Armed Forces, The Singapore National Youth Orchestra (Ministry of Education), Singapore Wind Symphony, Philharmonic Winds, Metro Philharmonic Chorus and many other groups who are not classified as professional but have performed in the public sphere and have acquired a reputation for performances of creditable quality. The same too may be applied for a number of ‘cultural’ groups like SIFAS, Sri Warisan, Siong Leng, The Eurasian Association to name just a few.

Much of the musical repertoire itself, aurally and orally transmitted, was transcribed out of practical necessity. An analysis of oral performances may provide clues to practice in Singapore. Just as obvious is the absence of a discussion of the music in each practice; something analytical studies can redress in further and future scholarship.

Where does our study of musical practices lead us?

One more keyword emerges from Leong: that Lenggang Kangkong and Dayong Sampan were referred to as *our* heritage. We begin with some fundamental tenets that lie at the heart of a Singaporean identity. Koh Tai Ann makes this point in a discussion of cultural identity – that more often than not, we identify with our ethnic heritage first before identifying our Singaporean heritage.⁸⁰ The ideal of a national culture in Singapore was envisaged as one that transcends the respective ethnic cultures that constitute the population. Koh drew on a statement from the Prime Minister’s Office in 1986:

*The government’s policy was not to “assimilate”, but to “integrate” our different communities, in other words, to build up common attributes such as one common working language, same loyalties, similar values and attitudes, so as to make the different communities a more cohesive nation.*⁸¹

We are informed that even up to 1987, there were four distinct educational systems even past independence, each using the official languages (English, Malay, Chinese, Tamil) as the major medium of instruction. English was instituted as the sole medium of instruction in 1987 to ensure national cohesiveness through the use of “one common working language”. At the same time, a second language that is the ethnic tongue, was retained and made compulsory for students for the purposes of retaining ethnic identity through language. More importantly, there was a gradual emphasis on ethnic traditions, in terms of language, religion, customs and other expressive forms:

There is encouragement not only of traditional religion but also of the so-called traditional arts to remind the different communities of their cultural roots; to express individually the identity of each community and collectively to express Singapore’s multicultural identity; and as a means to create culture in itself.⁸²

The notion of a Singaporean identity bring us back to the whole notion of not so much a Singaporean identity but identifying a Singaporean identity. The 2002 population census reminds us that one in every four persons living in Singapore is not a Singaporean. To understanding the ‘distance’ of twenty-five years, between a community in Singapore in 1987 and 2002, is to come to terms with a diverse, changing community, not only in national and international configurations but also in ways in which these have had an impact on a Singaporean identity. Arjun Appadurai refers to a variety of dimensions of global cultural flows which he uses a suffix, -scape⁸³.

He identifies five:

1. ethnoscapas
2. mediascapas
3. technoscapas
4. financescapas
5. ideoscapas

Larry Hilarian points out that globalization and international trade is much older than its much talked about present. In his research on the Gambus Melayu, he suggests that the barbat, quanbus and ūd could have been introduced as early as with Persian and Arab trading in the Malay Archipelago *as early as the 9th century AD.*⁸⁴ In his study, Hilarian points out that *musical instruments have always journeyed along the grain of politics, conquest and economic exploits amongst the communities so linked to trade, mercantilism, adventure and their source of entertainment. The study of musical instruments brings us to the intersection of globalization and diaspora, not in the commercial sense but to the close affinity of*

*intercultural aggrandizement and adaptation.*⁸⁵ What is true of musical instruments is also true of musical practices.

What are the prospects and challenges in encountering cultures, global and local in a historically immigrant and cosmopolitan Singapore? Our concerns surround a potentially unidirectional pathway in the arts via the same panoptic mechanisms or what John Blacking refers to as one system of symbols applied universally.⁸⁶ Universalized systems of symbols potentially impute particularized expectations and value judgments on ways of knowing and learning in the multitude of cultures around the world. Silence or silencing is only one of those consequences.

Is it enough, therefore, to suggest that a solution lies by articulating discontent? Can a potentially hegemonic discourse be ‘subverted’ for positive gain? Are there alternatives other than competition to dominant forces? Bourdieu⁸⁷ cites Max Weber’s reminder that in the art of warfare, the greatest progress originated not in technical inventions but in transformations of the social organization of the warriors.

First there are ways in which understanding the form and content of discontent needs to be challenged. An excerpt by Sir Stamford Raffles is particularly instructive for us as a lesson:

*Our civil institutions and political influence are calculated to increase the population and wealth of these countries and cultivation of mind seems alone wanting to raise them to such a rank among the nations of the world as their geographical situation and climate may admit. And shall we who have been so favoured among other nations refuse to encourage the growth of intellectual improvement or rather shall we not consider it one of our first duties to afford the means of education to surrounding countries and thus render our stations not only the seats of commerce but of literature and the **arts**? Will not our best inclinations and feelings be thus gratified at the same time that we are contributing to raise millions in the scale of civilisation. It may be observed that in proportion as the people are civilised, our intercourse with islands will become more general, more secure and more advantageous; that the native riches of the countries which they inhabit seem inexhaustible, and that the eventual extent of our commerce with them must consequently depend on the growth of intellectual improvement and the extension of moral principles. A knowledge of the language of these countries considered on the most extensive scale, is essential to all investigation, and may no the acquisition of these be pursued with most advantage in connexion with some defined plan for educating the higher orders of the inhabitants? May not one*

*object mutually aid the other, and interests of philanthropy and literature be best consulted by making the advantages reciprocal?*⁸⁸

While a paragraph of this length is worthy of much more detailed analysis, we would like to briefly discuss this in the context of our study. Like all other authorial discourses, this is superb in its exhortation to use literature and the arts to contribute to the civilization of millions. It is instructive for us that the notion of civilization as an act is derived from being civil; civilization is a process by which one becomes civil. It is difficult to deny Raffles' understanding of civilization as a unilateral and unidirectional process. Not one reference is made to learn from the millions about their state of civility. Raffles' exhortation makes clear that commerce is not the answer to civility, hence the recourse to Imperial literature and the arts. But the full scale of irony appears in the implication that when these millions have been civilized through literature and the arts, so too the commercial intercourse, forming loops of greater prosperity presaging Keynesian economic thinking.

Can we actually believe that a widely-practiced culture of business that valorizes English and modes of thinking from a society that has many business practices in English can engender a utopian global village in a cultural field? Is our understanding of administration and governance in the arts one built on financial or cultural capital? How is music understood in a larger context? Whose music? Music for whom? Why Music?

None of these short questions will elicit short answers. But the questions themselves have fuelled our study of musical practices as scholarship. Like all scholarship, the knowledge gained *of* and *about* these musical practices go some way in beginning to address these issues. We may save ourselves the embarrassment of ignorance of musical practices within our own environment but not by ignoring them. Curricula may be disseminated from one remote source to another but do we really know if the recipient understands what is said, how it is said? Can we really say we know how this recipient learns or what meaning learning holds in the recipient culture? There needs to be an understanding of the dimensions of learning to critique knowledge *of* and *about* the arts. Education in the arts needs to consider issues of content and context (not to mention sub-text and super-text) more critically.

How is a multicultural strategy in education in an environment of **assimilation** similar to that in an environment of **integration**? Just as Blacking suggests the problems of a system of symbols applied universally, it needs to be understood that

a variety of cultures and practices around the world do not understand or appreciate such value systems in the same way that businesses do. Although new media enables immediacy with sound worlds or visual worlds which bypass issues of physical engagement and has gained currency not all cultures around the world are understood in this way and not all cultures are able to transcribe or translate their learning activities and experiences in the arts onto new media. The discourse that attends universalisation in artistic worlds potentially creates asymmetrical mechanisms for teaching and learning and compounds, in its wake, opportunistic strategies that privilege some cultures more than others. There is nothing more debilitating for multicultural education than the combination of ignorance, intolerance and arrogance supported by the greatest ease of dissemination.

Just as Blacking suggests the problems of a system of symbols applied universally, the notion of being informed needs to understand a variety of cultures and practices around the world that do not understand or appreciate such value systems in the same way that businesses do. Blacking suggests a method which is fundamentally anthropological. Since definitions of music and non-music vary with different cultures around the world, he suggests the surest way to understand music, for instance, and discover its uniqueness is to incorporate all 'ethnic' perceptions of all available musics and to find out on what points they agree.⁸⁹

A few organisations have, by virtue of their leadership, occupied a dominant position in the local arts environment. Would this dominant leadership take on projects that involve Southeast Asian traditional practices/narratives in the arts, for instance, not for the sake of profitability and established track record but as a matter of addressing a social responsibility which is at the very fabric of understanding the diversity and heterogeneity of the arts?

Our explorations have convinced us that a study of music would be interdisciplinary in nature, it was guided by a fundamental assumption that each musical practice was to be viewed from its own culturally situated and practice specific context. Teaching and learning would gravitate towards being informed of any of these musical practices. A worldview of music practices supported by a philosophy of music education would resonate well with an overview of musical practices.

Any musical experience in any musical practice or tradition is worthy of reflection, analysis and the teaching and learning of concepts within that particular context. The lack of literacy and/or verbalisation about music in other practices is not simply the result of a less sophisticated or civilised tradition. Are resources being

developed for the medium to long-term, in terms of artistic materials, trained expertise and curricula that together are able to do justice to an evaluation of these knowledges? Are institutions equipped with sufficient depth and breadth of human and technological resources to incorporate such traditional and contemporary world practices in learning programmes through undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum?

Edward Said points out beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows from them.⁹⁰ But as Said reminds us, without at least a sense of a beginning, nothing can really be done, much less ended...and the more crowded and confused a field appears, the more a beginning, fictional or not, seems imperative. A beginning gives us a chance to do the work that compensates us for the tumbling disorder...⁹¹

Our discovery of musical practices and a wealth of data can only prompt us to admit to a beginning. It is a position we have not been disappointed by; only overwhelmed by. A beginning...is a problem to be studied, as well as a position taken...as a problem beginnings seem to have a sort of detachable abstraction, but a beginning is already a project under way.⁹² If nothing else has been achieved, knowledge *of* and *about* musical practices in Singapore creates open sites for awareness, documentation and discussion. As with Foucault in *The Order of Things*, our strongest motivation remains for:

*...this work to be read as an open site. Many questions are laid out on it that have not yet found answers; and many of the gaps refer to earlier works or to others that have not yet been completed, or even begun.*⁹³

Ma fin est mon commencement—Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377)

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