How music is conceptualized in three different cultural contexts.

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To many of the world's peoples, it is self-evident that music is an integral part of lived experience. In fact, it is so deeply intertwined with other parts of human experience that it becomes almost impossible to understand music without, at some level, partaking in the rituals surrounding it. Ethnomusicologist Christopher Small (1999, 12) advocates for the verb *musicking*, to the effect that the focus within a conceptualization of music is not only the sounds of the music, but rather along with the ritual in which the sounds are situated. The goal of this paper is to survey 3 musical traditions to attain a glimpse into how peoples of the world's different cultures believe their musicking affects their lives and how they organize sound to achieve their preferred ways of musical performance. The 3 musical traditions covered in the scope of this paper are Jiangnan Sizhu, Hindustani Raga, and Indonesian dangdut. We will see, for example, the differences in rhythmic and melodic systems between the traditions and explore their contextual bases to explain how the differences produces the desired effects on those participating in the performance.

We begin by comparing the differences in the technical elements of the music which comprise the sonic essence and the overall structure of the musical styles. To better illustrate the sounds produced we will illustrate the types of instruments employed in each musical tradition, with a focus on their role in the music rather than on the details of each instrument.

Starting with the simplest setup, Hindustani raga uses three instruments with distinct purposes: the sitar which plays the melodic lines, the tabla which produces a drone, and the tambura which establishes the rhythmic framework. A *raga* is a melodic system that underlies a raga performance, and which has characteristic features which, in short, restrict the melodies to a predefined path via melodic ornaments, motives, set compositions, and extramusical associations. In a raga, there is a slower improvised section at the start called the "alap", that is free from drumming, meter, or set composition (Bakan 2012, 134). A distinguished ability to improvise in ragas is the hallmark of a performer's musicality and it is presented clearly in the alap. The rhythm is set by a metric cycle called the *tala;* the *sam*, the first beat of a cycle, is an important concept in that the music must “return with a climax to sam” (Bakan 2012, 127).  The resulting overall texture of ragas can be categorized as homophonic, with the melodic focus being the sitar.

In Jiangnan Sizhu music, or just "sizhu music", there is a variety of instruments which are categorized as being made from silk or bamboo, one of which is the transverse flute called the *dizi*; the dizi player often names the piece to be played. Apart from the *erhu* (two-stringed bow), there is only one of each instrument played in a performance, but since there is often 4-10 players participating, the layering of the variety of instruments creates a characteristic timbre of sizhu music. The pitches in sizhu music correspond to certain anhemitonic pentatonic scales that flow with a rising and falling melodic trajectory, often with stepwise movement, and often with ornaments that are associated with an instrument. The form can be described as repetitive and varying “short motivic ideas”.

The central repertoire is the Ba Da Qu ("eight great pieces"), which are based from old folk melodies known as *qupai*, and each piece is uniquely expanded on with each instance the piece is performed. Although qupai dictates the skeleton of melody and can be roughly written using notation, any player that wants to learn the tradition must learn by playing with and listening to more skilled members of sizhu clubs. The melodic phrase lengths are often irregular, which seems to disrupt a constant meter in the music.

Dangdut is an acculturated dance music with roots extending to Indian and Western music industries and possibly a Javanese tradition called *ronggèng* (Miller, Terry E., and Sean Williams, 1998, 126). Dangdut features vocals with support from traditional instruments such as gendang (drums), lutes, bamboo flutes, but in the extension genre *dangdut* *koplo*, modern instruments such as electric guitars, bass, and synthesizers may also be used. The key element in this music that makes it "danceable" is its rhythm emphasizing the fourth and first beat of the 4/4 meter. It is thought that this rhythm stems from a North Indian meter often heard in Indian film music, known as *kaherva* (Miller, Terry E., and Sean Williams, 1998, 126). The genre is defined by such *kaherva* or *dangdut* beat, traditionally played on the tabla, but has no set restrictions on the pitch, texture, dynamics. However, dangdut songs usually have a repeating A and B section form with intros, outros, and a long interlude (Wientraub, 2013, 171). They may also begin with a refrain, which is an homage to Indian film songs. Only three to five chords are used, and the harmonic rhythm for these chords are relatively fast.

In this next section, we will compare each tradition based on how people who participate in performances believe their music affects their lives. We explore how these perceptions are related to the technical structure and rules of the music being played.

We begin this discussion by examining movement of the players in each genre. In both sizhu and Hindustani raga, the movement of the players are subdued - the focus is the sound itself. Although they share the same level of motion in their performances, they may not necessarily be influenced by the same reasons. Sizhu music is often played in social places, such as public teahouses and community centres, around a table with 4-10 players. These players are often friends or other amateur players, so it is *out of the ordinary* for one to excessively dramatize their playing with exuberant movements. In Hindustani raga, the three players performing a raga intend to induce a transcendental spiritual experience through the embellishment of the ordinary moments of everyday life. Like sizhu music, here, the virtuosity speaks for itself. The listening needed to fully experience this music is fully open and mindful, and so dramatized movement may detract from this experience. Also, it is important to note that these two styles are played sitting down, so there are restrictions to the freedom of movement. On the other hand, dangdut is primarily a dance music, so expressing oneself through movement is strongly associated with the music.

We now talk about what musicality means in each genre. Dangdut, being a popular music of Indonesia, may have more variability with how they would judge a performance’s level of musicality. It is not so much a discipline or a *school* of music, but rather a genre which many Indonesians seem to enjoy in their lives. Popular songs typically evoke a desire in the listener to move, or *goyang,* to the sounds (Wallach 2014, 276). The combining and contrasting of Arabic, Southeast Asian, and Western style musical elements are to be desired, and it seems that this amalgam of culture is an important feature for musicality in dangdut. Virtuosity and restrictions on the music’s technical elements may not be present in dangdut, but in both sizhu and Hindustani raga, there is a journey of advancement and learning, whether it is in the context of a single performance or in the greater scope of the entire tradition. Sizhu music plays a limited repertoire with careful and subtle changes with each iteration; Hindustani raga is restricted by melodic and rhythmic, and by extra-musical associations (e.g. time of day), yet the mark of an expert is their ability to improvise and *grow* the raga (*barhat)*, despite the rigid framework.

The ambiguity of dangdut’s identity has resulted in many songs to be categorized as such, simply because of their characteristic dangdut rhythm. The genre was once considered to be *kampungan* - a derogatory term meaning vulgar or low-class, but after political revolution in 1998, the middle class’ interest and public acceptance grew. Now, it is considered as a music that unites ordinary Indonesians through its universal appeal as a *groovy* music; it has powerful social levelling effects (Wallach 2014, 278). In sizhu music, there is also a social levelling effect in that all players that come to sit at the table are expected to assimilate or submit themselves to the social and musical customs that take place in that club. They do this through following social etiquette, actively learning the art, and by gracefully blending your own individuality with the commonality of the music. It can be argued that a social levelling effect is also produced in Hindustani raga, in that every person participating in the performance experiences, or seeks to experience, a transcendental spiritual experience. The music is for anyone who is willing to listen and be open to such profound emotions and sensations.

We have compared 3 traditions with unmistakably important effects on certain cultures of the world. Just as humans are complex with many functions, musicking may serve more than a single purpose in a person’s life. It may be a sign of the growth of a nation into becoming a more unified society, as with the once low-class music, dangdut. It may, on the other hand, reflect the daily life and virtue in being a well-behaved social being, such as in Jiangnan sizhu. It may serve as a reminder experience daily life to the fullest, to advance through life despite the restrictions imposed upon people by their mere existence, as in Hindustani raga. We find that there are different relationships being expressed in the music of each of the traditions, but somehow these relations are characteristic and indicative of the culture to which the traditions belong to.

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