

Full-Length Article

Cognitive Collaborations: Sounding Southeast Asian Sensibilities in Thai and Balinese RitualsMade Mantle Hood¹, Bussakorn Binson²¹Universiti Putra Malaysia Department of Music, Faculty of Human Ecology, Serdang Selangor, Malaysia²Chulalongkorn University Department of Music, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts Phayathai, Bangkok, Thailand**Abstract**

This article assesses the relationship between Thai and Balinese healing rituals focusing on music and indigenous explanatory models about emotional and cognitive processes. Emphasis is placed on how music and cognitive processes are conceptualised in both historical literature and contemporary interpretive frameworks in two geographically distinct areas of Southeast Asia. Both authors have spent decades observing rituals, performing music, and analysing musical structures. Yet there have been few opportunities to collaborate on a comparison of their findings. This essay will articulate how music is thought to have a direct physiological affect on its participants. The article first examines cross-cultural discourses in the literature that contain theoretical approaches to music and cognition. Then the article describes and compares Thai and Balinese healing rituals that address not only cognitive, but also corporeal and spiritual concepts that relate to broader Southeast Asian approaches to music and the mind.

Keywords: *Medical Ethnomusicology; Communal Healing; Thai Music, Balinese Music*

multilingual abstract | mmd.iamonline.com

Southeast Asian Sensibilities

In the title of this article, the phrase '*Southeast Asian Sensibilities*' references a region and its values and ways of understanding. Sensibilities are defined as, "*An understanding of, or ability to decide about what is good or valuable, especially in conjunction with artistic or social activities*" [1]. The reasons for highlighting the 'sensibilities' of a region stem from a recent 'identity crisis' experienced among colleagues in Europe in the field of ethnomusicology. In 2007, European ethnomusicologists held an international symposium at Cardiff University in the United Kingdom entitled 'National Ethnomusicologies'. This was undertaken because of the increasing supremacy of American ethnomusicology, which tends to theoretically and methodologically dominate discipline direction. In the symposium, participants argued for '...a distinctive disciplinary voice in Europe' [2]. Scholars such as Ursula Hemetek maintained that folklore still informs

Austrian approaches to the discipline and leading American ethnomusicologist, Philip Bohlman provided a post-modern critique of hegemonic discourses where the nation and the discipline are interdependent. In relation to music and the mind, authors of the current article observe that Western conceptions of the mind tend to dominate discourse as well. We are not alone in this observation.

Asian clinical psychologists recently drew their line in the proverbial geographic sand with regards to Western hegemony concerning matters of the mind. About the monograph, *Asian Culture and Psychotherapy: Implications for East and West*, Goffredo Bartocci writes:

It is a salient fact that the contemporary, formal mode of psychotherapy has been derived mainly from the West. The theories for understanding human nature that comprise the foundation of the clinical practice of therapy, such as those of human behavior, personality, psychological development [among others...] are based primarily on the clinical experiences and research of Western scholars and clinicians [3].

Korean psychologist, Kwang-Iel Kim, contributed a chapter entitled 'Culture-relevant Psychotherapy in Korea'. Although tending to polarize the issue into binaries, Kim does indicate that Western approaches are inductive and analytic while Easterners are deductive and value collective consciousness as an essential indicator of the 'self'. Whatever position taken along the continuum, it is clear studies of music and the mind will benefit from finding epistemological solutions to enhance our understanding of what may be called Freud's 'multicultural Ego'.

PRODUCTION NOTES | Address correspondence to: Associate Prof. Dr. Made Mantle Hood, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Department of Music, Faculty of Human Ecology, 43400 UPM Serdang Selangor, Malaysia, Email: made.hood@gmail.com | COI statement: The authors declared that Chulalongkorn University and the Center of Excellence in Thai Music and Culture, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts supported the research and publication of this article. The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Closer to Southeast Asia, senior Indonesian music expert, Judith Becker has also critiqued Western-based ethnomusicology conceptions of music, trance and the mind. Her pioneering study entitled *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing* (2004) [4] evidences the psycho-somatic affect of music and emotion with examples from rhythm-driven gong cycles in Indonesia. In these musical frameworks, she highlights the importance of both collective and personal rituals as a means for participants to achieve altered states of consciousness, a kind of 'musical metamorphosis'. Her revelations about trance could only have been made through giving equal merit to Southeast Asian sensibilities, as well as Western cognitive sciences on issues of music and the mind. It is not our intention to polarize the issue but rather highlight the importance of a complementarity of approaches. As Bartocci writes, "Examining Asian experiences and perspectives will enable us to better compare them with those of the West, thereby learning from and complementing each other and leading to a more wholesome approach" [5]. With the surge of interest in Music and Cognition that coincides with the dawn of the 'Asian century', it seems pertinent to highlight distinctive disciplinary voices and look locally for sources that make a significant contribution to music and mind scholarship in Southeast Asia. One of these distinct voices comes from the Northern Issan region of Thailand where musical collective and personal ritual relationships between shaman, patient and community dictate curative methods in healing.

Curative Therapy: Visual, kinaesthetic and sonic approaches

Despite its omnipresence, music plays an ancillary role in the performance of ritual healing in Thailand. Its sonic attributes meld with visual, literary and extra-musical stimulus resulting in a holistic approach to treatment. In several examples of Thai Music and ritual healing, music perfects the aesthetic experience by announcing the arrangement of ritual to participants. It also amplifies notions of perceived sacredness as music mediates between healer, patient and spirits. However, music is not just limited to sonic aesthetics and aural elements of sacredness. It also provides accompaniment to kinaesthetic movement in ritual. Ritual music examples from Kong Puja drum traditions of Northern Thailand are designated as 'ritual supporters' utilized during the worship of the three gems of Buddhism and to notify monks to perform their religious devotion rituals. In Southern Thailand Phon drums signal events during religious ritual. These examples suggest a multitude of aesthetic experiences inherent in ritual music. Music allows a healer to amplify his supernatural powers and stimulate patients' minds and emotions through visual, kinaesthetic and sonic means.

Pre-Buddhist animism beliefs permeate present-day Thai ritual healing contexts. Temporal intersections overlap when shamans, patients and ritual participants convene during healing rituals. As social icons representing a continuity of past experiences, shamans predate Buddhist monks and have

animism-based counterparts in many other corners of history in the region of Southeast Asia [6]. In addition, the ritual economy of shaman-based practices suggests a continuity of patronage for shamans in the region. Across generations, patients and ritual participants have sought shaman. They enact prescriptive rituals to help placate malicious spirits and harmonize individual as well as intersecting emotional and social energies.

However, it is made clear in this article that although healing rituals have a continuity of presence, neither meaning nor music have been left unchanged. Rather healing rituals represent a syncretic blend of faiths fused in local and regional approaches to ritual. Furthermore semantic value changes with generational tendencies where meaning is derived through multifarious approaches to ritual, healing and music.

Northern Thailand Phee Faa Healing Ritual

One such case study demonstrating this multitude is the Phee Faa healing ritual from the Northern Isan region of Thailand. In the ritual, a medium facilitates healing with the aide of an indigenous musical instrument called *khaen*. The *khaen* is a kind of mouth organ constructed from eight slender bamboo tubes, each containing a brass free-reed that vibrates when air passes through a central hollowed out hardwood reservoir (Figure 1). A *khaen* player blows into the reservoir and controls air circulation with his fingers and thumbs, activating airflow to chambers via finger holes to facilitate melodies. Crucial to the discussion here is the use of breath and the indigenous explanatory model among Isan that the *khaen*'s melodies bridge the realms of perceived reality, ancestral domains, and cognitive realms.



Figure 1: Northern Isan Khaen player accompanying Phee Faa healer

Breath produces the *khaen*'s musical melodies that become a generative force for the Phee Faa healer to transcend into the realm of spirit possession. The physiological affect of lungs pumping air through the instrument drives melodic repetition and cyclical structural frameworks, key elements of trance

inducing musics in numerous cultures [7]. Because a *khaen* produces sound both during exhalation and inhalation, the physiological fusion of breath and sound results in a continuous melodic flow. In other words, musicians do not stop playing to take a breath. This means melodies flow in a repetitious, unbroken manner aiding the medium in accessing ancestral spirits through continual sonic engagement. Indeed much trance music relies on repetition and drone-like sonic structures. In the absence of *khaen*, healing could not take place, demonstrating the essentiality and fusion of musical aesthetic with curative modalities.

Dancing treatments in the curative process

The study of Phee Faa ritual of Roengbuthra & Sumrongthong describes that kinaesthetic movement is also a generative force for a Phee Faa shaman to access ancestral spirits for the healing ritual [8]. A single *khaen* mouth organ accompanies Phee Faa ritual dances that invoke healing spirits such as Phee Faa the 'heavenly spirit' and Ern Kwan the 'guardian spirit'. The following table lists the sequential events of a Phee Faa ritual where kinaesthetic movement and drone-like melodies induce trance and healing. Six functional dances and corresponding *khaen* melodies organize the ritual into divisions of functionality.

Name of Dance	Sequential Function in Treatment
1. Phee Faa	healer's invitation dance to Phee Faa as 'heavenly spirit' and generative force in the internal body of the practitioner
2. Saung	'Look Through' Diagnosis
3. Ern Kwan	Guardian Spirit Invitation
4. Pua	Healing/treatment
5. Sangson	Instructions to patient and his/her relatives on proper conduct
6. Soong	Farewell to Phee Faa

Table 1: Ritual dance sequence of Mor Lam healer in the Phee Faa North Isaan regional healing ritual

The first dance evokes the heavenly deity who bares the name of the ritual itself: Phee Faa. In this preliminary dance, the healer herself is called Mor Lam who makes invitation to the heavenly spirit to literally enter her body. Acting as a vessel for the supreme spirit, Mor Lam then conducts a diagnostic dance called *Saung* to determine the illness of the patient. During this 'diagnostic choreography', pha kai or a tray of ritual implements including a bottle of talc, a small mirror and a jar of pomade aide the medium in 'looking through' the patient. Not unlike a village x-ray, the medium views internal images through the mirror to diagnose the extent of the illness and its cause. It is not uncommon for the medium to recognize symptoms caused by malicious spirits or whether or

not the patient has consciously, or unconsciously been disrespectful to any spirit. Accompanied by the continuous melodies of the *khaen* mouth organ, a raw egg is hurled against the floor and the shaman reads its abstract splatter pattern.

Inevitably, treatment requires the performance of the Ern Kwan dance to call upon the patient's particular guardian spirit. After summoning the guardian spirit, another dance called Pua heals the patient's ailments, balancing his/her energies and placating any mischievous spirits. The final choreography instructs (Sangson) not only the patient, but also the immediate relatives of the patient as to the proper way to conduct themselves in relation to the patient's illness.

This last stage of consultation with family members is telling. It indicates that an individual's illness is remedied not just in the immediate context of a ritual, but through the ongoing maintenance of the household environment. Family members share responsibility for an individual's health and well-being. In the system of communal ritual healing, it is the community that contributes to the problem/illness/imbalance and therefore it is the community that aides in the healing process. In addition, calling upon the patient's guardian spirit further confirms a broader Southeast Asian healing concept where a homology, or what Marina Roseman observes about the Temiar of Malaysia as an 'essential sameness' that exists between man and spirits [9].

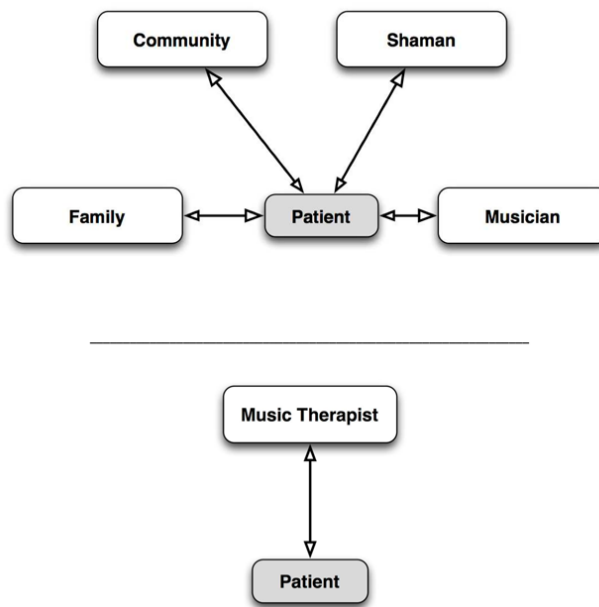


Figure 2: Cognitive collaborations between multiple stakeholders versus singular relationships in Western-based music therapy treatments

The diagram in Figure 2 depicts the interdependencies in and the belief system in healing rituals. As opposed to a unilateral relationship between a single music therapist and a patient,

Southeast Asian healing rituals involve multiple agents. The community assists in enacting in ritual preparation. Immediate family members subscribe to a Shaman's prescriptive remedies as key players in therapy. Music envelops a soundscape and meanings, both visual and sonic, latch on to the sonic stimulate. Therefore collaboration between multiple cognitive forces is an approach to treatment that best describes music and healing rituals.

We now turn to the Indonesian island of Bali to look locally at a Hindu-Balinese philosophy about music, the mind and a preventative approach to healing. Here research draws on historiography and ethnography rather than musical analysis of sonic structures, which have been undertaken in previous studies [10]. Rather than quantifying musical modes or analysing melodies, our gaze falls upon an ethnography of performance to prevent the escalation of aggressive and amoral behavioural tendencies caused by being born during a particular week in the Balinese calendar. As with the Thai example above, cognitive collaborations from multiple participants provide numerous pathways for a patient to alleviate symptoms.

Preventative therapy - performing shadows and literary epics

The island of Bali is a Hindu enclave in Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population in the world. However in Bali, religiosity permeates in, and through pre-Hindu social networks that drive communal approaches to faith and worship, even in modern times. It is this drive in community, this strength-in-numbers attitude that creates the dazzling and colourful displays of ritual offerings at temple ceremonies. Equally significant to the ornately prepared offerings is the firm belief in causality and birth-related predispositions toward behavioural abnormalities.

One such preventative ritual safeguarding against this is *sapu leger*, a healing ceremony for individuals born during a spiritually dangerous and unstable week in the Balinese calendar called *wuku wayang*. The culturally constructed notion of most Balinese Hindus is that a baby born during *wuku wayang* inherits *watak keras*, a character of emotion described as impatient, easily angered, socially removed, and aggressive. For the unfortunate, *sapu leger* becomes an obligatory healing ritual that must be enacted within the life cycle of that individual. Most parents fulfil this obligation six months after the birth of their child as a complement to name giving ceremonies, first clipping of the hair and fingernails, after-birth blessings and other life cycle rituals. Others who may not be able to afford the extra expense associated with the *sapu leger* postpone the ritual. However, the longer the ritual is postponed, the more embedded the notion of spiritual torment becomes in the cognitive workings of not only the individual, but in the family and community of that individual. Therefore the multiple proponents involved in healing continuously reinforce the *sapu leger* music-infused healing ritual as the culturally appropriate remedy.

Music offered during *sapu leger* draws from the shadow puppet repertoire called *wayang kulit*, a shadow puppet theatre with one puppeteer and up to four musicians. The repertoire is not ritual specific. However, when coupled with the *sapu leger* context, its potentiality expands to become an interdependent sonic link between the cognitive mind frame of participants and the pantheon of Hindu deities. As 'cognitive collaborators', musicians play percussion instruments made of bronze metal keys suspended over bamboo resonators.



Figure 3: bronze keyed metallophone used during Balinese *sapu leger* healing ritual

Keys are struck with soft wooden mallets that produce bright and resonant tones and melodies. The puppeteer called *dalang* narrates stories from the Mahabharata Indian epic through song and heightened speech. Both the music and singing accompany a specific set of puppet characters and prescribed scenes in a night-ritual presentation of the shadow puppet play.

Mythology and philosophical mediation

In the play, music, theatre and a specific storyline are combined as an elaborate preparation for the principal purpose of the ritual: the consecration of healing holy water. The story retells a myth about the origins of the shadow play itself and the origins of *wuku wayang*. The mythological origins of *wayang* allude to the performing art's transformative power in relation to a human being's mental, emotional and spiritual states. Furthermore there are indications that the performance of *wayang* to heal individuals born during *wuku wayang* mediates philosophical concepts found in *lontar* palm-leaf manuscripts with ethnographic accounts about music and emotion.

In the origin myth of *wayang*, a widespread pestilence spreads throughout the world after the God Siwa transforms into the evil demon Kala Rudra to court his banished wife Durga (Parwati). The mythology centres around the Hindu

pantheon of deities becoming the puppeteer and musicians in order to pacify troubling demons wreaking havoc. In the myth, Brahma and Visnu become the puppeteer's right and left hand assistant and Iswara becomes the dalang himself operating puppets and narrating stories. The four gods from the four cardinal directions, Catur Loka Phala, become the musicians of the gender metallophone family called *gender wayang*. After enticing Kala Rudra and Durga with the shadow puppet theatre and music, the two demons are reminded of their origins and transform back into their divine states [11].

The Tripartite Formulation of the Psyche

The key word in this mythology is transformation, a generative force still associated with the music and performance of shadow puppetry. Remedying illness and correcting predispositions requires the transformation of an individual's character attributes that reflect the binary of good and evil in human beings. In the Hindu *panca-sradha* philosophy, good and evil energies abound and have direct affect on the character attributes of the psyche. Just as Freud's tripartite formulation of the psyche into a super ego, ego and id, Balinese character attributes a trilogy of interdependent constituents called *triguna* that make up the psyche. The three constituents are *satwam*, *rajas* and *tamas* [12]. *Satwam* may be described as a person's ability to create and maintain notions and ideas that are benevolent, pure and virtuous. In contrast, *rajas* is the human quality of 'passion, emotion, motivation and desire'. The third *guna* is *tamas* for when the mind is weak, it brings about those qualities that reflect, 'mental darkness and the cause of heaviness, ignorance, lust, anger and sorrow' [13]. According to the *triguna* concept, all three *gunas* exist in each individual in varying degrees.

This comparison between Eastern and Western approaches to the mind yields aspects of Southeast Asian sensibilities under purvey here. As a framework for decoding causality in illness, indigenous explanatory models such as the *triguna* provide insight into how music and character are interlinked, especially in ritual contexts where music functions as a religious offering. It also relates directly to the therapeutic aspects of the shadow play. As the Balinese arts researcher Nyoman Sedana writes, "*Both western psychology and Balinese conceptions of the spirit world see the human being as vulnerable to numerous unconscious motives. In order to win favor from spirits, humans need to appease them by offering the best treatment possible. Art is the best product of a human being and thus becomes the ideal antidote to evil. The philosophical basis of wayang by using music, song, dance, and narrative is to exorcise the demonic, showing us what it looks like and returning it into its divine form*" [14]. Sapuh leger shadow theatre is limited to those puppeteers who have studied sacred scriptures (lontar Darma Pewayangan and Lontar Sapuh Leger) and are able to recite the necessary mantras for the blessing of holy water (*pangruatan air suci*). An accomplished puppeteer must navigate scriptures and

anoint offerings dedicated to Dewa Siwa, the demonic manifestation of a principal Hindu deity.

In order alleviate psychosomatic disturbances associated with being born at the wrong time, "...traditionally healed patients' experiences are restructured through a culturally validated system of symbols and meanings" [6]. In the story of *sapu leger*, these symbols manifest in the theatrical presentation of Dewa Siwa's son Dewa Kala who devours babies born during the *wuku wayang* week. Usually performed in the household of the individual on his or her Balinese birthday, the puppeteer often personalizes the story, using the person's name in the context of the story while performing the rite. This is of particular note because articulating actual names in the context of *wayang* creates a direct link between the real-life world of a Balinese and that of his or her gods.

Sapu leger treats a distinct socially defined group of individuals born in a specific time period deemed spiritually unstable. That said, the ceremony is enacted by the broader community for the benefit of affected individuals. Despite its somewhat esoteric associations to ancient Hindu epics, philosophies and folk beliefs, both rural and urban populations regularly enact *sapu leger* as a preventative therapy to curb negative behavioural tendencies. The personalization of community ritual where healer, musicians, and family members cognitively collaborate for the benefit of the patient has significant ramifications in the healing process to alleviate stress and anxiety associated with the condition of being born during *wuku wayang*.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined Thai and Balinese sensibilities in matters related to the mind and music. As 'an understanding of, or an ability to assess artistic values', we have framed these sensibilities as distinct paradigms from Western approaches to music and cognition. The indigenous dance of Mor Lam called *Saung* places emphasis on interdependency in Thai curative methods. Music as a sonic force penetrates and has a physiological affect, propelling a healer's kinaesthetic movement towards his patient's troubled psychosomatic state. In both Thai and Balinese rituals, the essentiality of sound reverberates both in the exterior physical sound scape as well as the internal, corporeal realm of the patient. This 'culture-specific conceptualization' sees cognitive, corporeal, and emotional realms of inquiry as intertwined elements that are not easily separated. The multiple agents involved in healing represent a cognitive collaboration in the healing process.

Social, religious and contextual sensibilities in music and healing are actively engaged in therapy in both Thai and Balinese ritual healing ceremonies. Social sensibilities mean a patient's illness or condition implicates family, friends and community members. Healers regularly associate psychosomatic illness with unresolved tension among family members. Having them involved in ceremony integrates them

either passively or actively as agents in the healing process. Religious sensibilities also play out in Thai and Balinese healing ceremonies where the sonic aesthetic of *khaen* and *gender wayang* instruments invoke a sonic aesthetic of spiritual stimulation. Unlike many other music therapies that utilize generic New Age Music, the specific sensibilities of these two musical forms entice, promote, and invite collaboration between members of community, family, musicians and healers who bring benefits to the patient in the healing process.

References

1. Cambridge online dictionary. [\[LINK\]](#)
2. Cardiff University website. [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Bartocci G. (review article). Asian Culture and Psychotherapy: Implications for East and West. Tseng WS, Chang SC, Nishizono M (Eds). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005. In WCPRR. 2006;1(2):102.
4. Becker J. Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion and Trancing. Indiana, Bloomington: Indiana University Press; 2004.
5. Bartocci G. (review article). Asian Culture and Psychotherapy: Implications for East and West. Tseng WS, Chang SC, Nishizono M (Eds). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005. In WCPRR. 2006;1(2):100-105.
6. Becker J. Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion and Trancing. Indiana, Bloomington: Indiana University Press; 2004.
7. Lemelson RB. Traditional healing and its discontents: efficacy and traditional therapies of neuropsychiatric disorders in bali. Medical Anthropology Quarterly. 2004;18(1):48-76.
8. Roengbuthra W, Sumrongthong B. Phi faa ritual music of the northeastern part of thailand. Voices: A World Forum of Music Therapy. 2006;6(1):
9. Roseman M. The social structuring of sound: the temiar of peninsular malaysia. Ethnomusicology. 1984;28(3):411-445.
10. See Hood MM. Gamelan gong gede: negotiating musical diversity in bali's highlands. Musicology Australia. 2010a;32(1):69-93 and Triguna: A Hindu-Balinese Philosophy for Gamelan Gong Gede Music. Germany, Muenster: LitVerlag Press; 2010b for a detailed color analysis of modal tendencies in the Balinese religious instrumental repertoire.
11. Sedana N. Kawi dalang: creativity in wayang theatre. Dissertation Thesis, University of Georgia; 2002.
12. Hood MM. Triguna: A Hindu-Balinese Philosophy for Gamelan Gong Gede Music. Germany, Muenster: LitVerlag Press; 2010b
13. Zoetmulder PJ, Robson, SO. Old Javanese English Dictionary. (2 vols.) The Hague: Nijhoff; 1982.
14. Sedana N. Kawi dalang: creativity in wayang theatre. Dissertation Thesis, University of Georgia; 2002

Biographical Statements

Associate Prof. Dr. Made Mantle Hood researches musical diversity and the negotiation of traditions at Universiti Putra Malaysia and is honorary teaching fellow at the University of Melbourne.

Associate Prof. Dr. Bussakorn Binson is currently teaching at the Department of Music, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University and is a founding member of the International Association for Music and Medicine as well as the Thailand Liaison Officer for the International Council for Traditional Music.