

**BEIJING 2007**  
**IMC WORLD FORUM ON MUSIC**

**The RIGHTS OF MUSICIANS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
GLOBAL SOCIETY: Who? What? How?  
(An Asian Perspective)**

By

Ramón Pagayon Santos, Ph.D.

**Introduction**

This presentation explores the current issues in the musics of the world's cultures from the Asian perspective vis-à-vis the IMC thrusts to protect musicians' rights as well as promote musical diversity. As it is common knowledge that musical diversity exists in Asia through its pluralistic cultural traditions, one very basic issue that confronts this condition is the very diversity of the traditional functions of the musics themselves and the artists, in relation to globalized notions of classifying and utilizing musics according to the values of modern societies.

Today, the richness of a national heritage is measured by the number and variety of ethnic traditions and cultures to which its citizenry belongs. In the field of the musical arts, ethnicities have been re-defined as styles, some delegated as "national" and others relegated as "regional" or "local", and other categories based on modern academic hierarchic taxonomy. Furthermore, agencies, whether national or international, governmental and otherwise, and imbued with power and influence, have applied the democratic principles in the adoption and prioritization of traditions in the cultural agenda, as well as in the promotion of national symbols. Such national policies have resulted in the marginalization of "so-called" minority cultures, especially those whose aesthetic and social significance are deemed remote to the norms of western art forms or unusable to the prevailing entertainment industry.

The issue surrounding classification of expressive cultural productions is part of the colonial legacy that defined the significance of ethnicities and their expressive manifestations according to extra-cultural and sociological considerations, such as majority and minority, classical and folk, religious and secular, etc., which the nation states themselves have adopted and/or assimilated through the years. While musical traditions are considered a primary emblem of national identity, western paradigms in the

developing expressive cultures and modes of communication have been adopted as symbols of development, progress and modernity. The thrust to build modern societies necessitates to re-define social parameters in community life towards achieving political stability, economic prosperity, and the legitimacy of one's membership in the "civilized" international community.

From a wider perspective, today's globalization in music is merely a transposition of the hegemonic apparatus of the entire colonial era. Such an apparatus which has been subsumed by the political, economic, and cultural leadership of each nation-state continues to dictate its terms of reference based on uni-dimensional paradigms for all human enterprises and modes of production, globally, regionally, or nationally.

One of the most threatening effects of globalization is the imposition of a single set of parameters in ascribing value to expressive cultures existing in the world. Thus, even the notion of protection of traditional cultures by mechanisms and laws invented and formulated in the west or outside cultural boundaries, based on concepts of ownership, commodity, and economy, can actually abet the eventual destruction of the integrity and essentiality of non-western cultural practices which are fundamentally differentiated in concept, practice, and social significance to artistic practices and objects from and within the context of external (in most cases western) artistic values. These incongruities and irrelevances between the integral characters of Asian musics and the norms of modern urban life have generated new challenges to global organizations such as UNESCO and the IMC, suggesting new strategies in the process of pursuing their advocacies not only to protect and promote the interest of musical-cultural diversity, but also to provide mechanisms for creative interaction and dialogues.

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that Asian musics or any musical tradition for that matter can respond to change with or without the forces of intervention. The importance of ethnicity may be seen today as a negotiating capital in asserting one's distinctiveness and rights in the geopolitical and economic arena, and can be explored utilized to re-invent globalized processes of production such as music composition according to expressive paradigms outside its habitus. Furthermore, ethnicities provide their own unique ways of viewing universalist notions especially in expressive productions, by which such notions can be re-articulated or re-validated according to alternative, if not relativist, paradigms.

Before action can be taken to protect or sustain traditional cultures, such as music and other expressive forms, one must consider several important aspects and factors relative to the traditional cultures themselves, defining and understanding these intangible objects of human expression and communication in the context of their cultural habitus. It is therefore necessary that a codification be made of such traditional expressive practices in terms of 1) their significance to the cultures, societies and peoples and their material and spiritual existence; 2) the conditions, institutions and agencies that directly influence their dynamic existence; 3) the threats that could undermine their intrinsic value and essentiality; and 4) their significance to the collective expressive repertoires of peoples from other cultures.

## **Musical Content and Structure**

The world of the expressive cultures in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, consisted mainly of performance repertoires that were mostly practiced in the courts and villages. The arts were either in the form of ceremonial activities and rituals or were part of larger celebrations that coincided with seasonal activities and events, ceremonies to honor deities, and rites of passage. The folk musicians used to live mostly by other occupations, as farmers, shop keepers, etc., while their life was generally controlled by the seasonal cycle. The principal function of the artists was to provide aesthetic and spiritual nourishment to their community, many of whom also served as shamans or dukuns who possessed extraordinary powers. Theories of performance, concept of style and aesthetics, were transmitted from master to pupil through actual performances that occurred as part of ordinary everyday life or in highly informal, if not improvisational, mode of pedagogy. Children and the youth were naturally exposed to their practical idiosyncrasies, which they learn and absorb through observation, participation, and discipleship (usually within one's own extended family), which might involve living as wards in the masters' abodes.

## **Contexts and Constructs**

In the field of the performing musical arts, the vestiges of the colonial era are manifested in the conceptual and institutional constructs such as music itself as a distinct art form (now objectified and commodified), the theory and practice of western music, diatonic scale, harmony, counterpoint, music literacy, music education, conservatory of music, composition, composer vis-à-vis performer, concert, popular music, modern music, contemporary music, ethnomusicology, commercial music, religious music, secular music, recordings, etc. Many, if not all, of these norms and notions have been adopted into the mainstream social consciousness and mores of peoples and cultures around the world, basically as symbols of modern life and as new resources in achieving material and economic progress especially among "developing" nation-states.

## **Audiences, media and market**

Two basic dangers exist: commodification and appropriation of traditional forms of expression. The issue is contextualized in the tension between mainstream society and its acculturated social values (drawing power and cultural ideology from the global market and the national government agenda) and local traditional cultures. The latter fall prey to appropriative and commercial agenda of mainstream art, entertainment industry and pop culture media. The tourism industry has wrought its negative effects in the emendation of the character and essentialities of traditional cultures; e.g. rituals, theaters, epics, etc. in the process of catering to the taste and "artistic orientation" of modern audiences. Such audiences have imposed their own aesthetic demands on these forms and on the artists whose material remuneration is dependent on the pleasure of foreign audiences.

The dynamics of globalization draws its essence from the materiality of human production, creating new valuations of both the tangible and intangible modalities and mechanisms of music and other expressive practices. As the prime emblem of cultural uniqueness and exoticism, traditional art forms have become a productive source in attracting western market to come and contribute to the economic growth of different nation-states. Hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, and other public venues including temples and even old palace grounds, are now exhibiting traditional performing arts as an alternative experiential commodity to foreign visitors. As the traditional artists have joined the ranks of the professional community, the art forms themselves have undergone drastic changes in their aesthetic and intrinsic functional value.

In today's musical discourses, the issues of political capital, power brokering and negotiation are topics often taken up in the academia and socio-cultural activist dialectics, all in reference to traditional musical productions vis-à-vis physical and material survival or the marginalization of culture bearers. In the context of "protecting" or "conserving" the intrinsic value and integrity of traditional repertoires, how can a global organization like the IMC restore fundamental values to expressive genres that have been "tainted" by "market" values? Can further erosion of the non-material valuation of existing traditional practices be prevented?

### **Infrastructure and Regulations**

The concept of ownership from a multi-cultural dimension must be more closely studied before imposing one set of rules. Copyright laws designed and promulgated according to one specific social standard cannot be expected to work in other socio-cultural and economic environments. There must also be a clear distinction between ownership, authorship, and the public domain according to each culture's traditional wisdom, rather than by world treatises that are based on and induced by capitalist wisdom. [A sample question of morality: what gives the right to an ethnomusicologist or any scholar for that matter to sell knowledge (musical and otherwise) and earn and even establish ownership for something that is not really his nor hers to begin with? Wasn't s/he already rewarded by the very fact that she has been allowed to acquire that knowledge for his/her own personal growth?] And who has the right to set moral standards for peoples of other cultures, even within the territory of one political community?

Regulations are not only relevant to the issue of ownership but also on theories of musical performance that is a much more difficult domain to penetrate and understand from the outside. In simple reality, only the culture bearers can possibly transmit that privileged knowledge, preserve it and ensure its continuity through practice and appropriate modes of pedagogy. To propitiate such condition from the outside, relevant infrastructure and social environments must be put in place and protected by appropriate social programs. There are many social programs that are already in place (e.g. in Thailand and Indonesia) as instigated by the artists and culture bearers themselves in village communities and even in urban suburbs. They are usually supported by the local communities or local governments or by local school authorities. Most of the time, the

initiatives are locally generated in the smallest political units and not by central governments nor on national platforms.

### **Modern Education and Traditional Cultures**

Modern arts education in Asian societies has transformed the entire pedagogical system in the teaching and learning of traditional arts. Based on the highly compartmentalized notions of the arts in the west as well as the notion of difference between theory and practice, Asian traditional art forms have been reevaluated and dissected to fit into the academic framework of western music education. Practical skills, aesthetic consciousness, canonic intuition, repertoire, notion of style, and creativity, which were all part of the integrated process of oral pedagogy and oral practice, have now been reconfigured as separate abilities and instructional areas, such as theory, reading, notation, practical, aesthetics, literature, methodology, and composition.

As a prescriptive instrument, the curriculum embodies the vision of each institution not only of the kind of graduates that it expects to produce, but also of their role in society as well as the role of the institution itself in contributing to the cultural and economic development of their region and the entire nation. Under these conditions, modern educational structures have created an interesting field consisting of two types of artists: 1) the academic artists and experts composed of formally trained graduates of higher education, many of whom have extended their academic experience abroad and have also acquired some material gains; and 2) the village-bred artists who developed their expertise through direct participation in village traditions and who identify themselves as “natural” artists.

### **Role of Artists and Culture Bearers**

While debates rage among the modern literati community (just like the exercise that we are now engaged in) regarding preservation, sustainability, and protection of traditional music from global capitalism, such well meaning advocacy sometimes fails to realize that there are other hidden dangers than the overt effects of global capitalism. Most of the time, the changes that bring about the immediate sufferance of traditional forms of expressions are not necessarily caused by outside factors, either within one’s social environment or from a totally alien and differentiated cultural domain, but rather by the modern culture bearers themselves who have undermined and transformed the essence of their practice by incorporating or assimilating new values, mostly extra-artistic, to their expressive productions. Because of their deep-rooted familiarity with the traditional practices themselves, they have been able to devise ways by which forms can be visually preserved for the unwitting but paying market. On the other hand, extra-artistic values have been superimposed over the traditional metaphysical essence and the social significance of these traditions.

The following may be considered as substitute- or counter-mechanisms that can protect and sustain the essentiality of the traditional practices and empower the artists and culture bearers, that the cultures themselves have generated according to their own

paradigms: the re-invention of traditional pedagogy, competitions, involvement of the community, and bestowing of honors and privileges to the artists, especially where environments have been urbanized and modernized, and traditional venues and occasions have disappeared (e.g. agricultural lands and observance of the agricultural season) or have been replaced by new social calendars (concert season, academic year, feast of saints), and infrastructure - concert halls, classrooms, cultural centers, etc., vis-à-vis courts, temples, open spaces, artists' homes and local community centers.

In this regard, the human resources, the artists and culture bearers, as well as the modern institutions of learning, become the focal point as the ultimate repository of power and the main instrumentality by which the canons of transmission and learning may be ideated, formulated, transformed and practiced. In spite of the many changes in learning traditional music within the formal setting provided by modern educational institutions, it is imperative to put in place continuing effort to sustain, if not nurture, the links to the past or to extant social institutions that provide the fundamental resources (human and technical knowledge) to mitigating threat factors in the domain of change. These "extant" social institutions include the family, community, social infrastructure such as temples and palaces, ceremonies, seasonal celebrations, the youth, as well as traditional forms of transmission of learning and pedagogy outside the modern classroom.

Institutional and formal modes of transmission and learning are predictably going to be the way of the future. Change exacts sacrifices and even loss, as well as gains and profits on the part of the larger domain of tradition. It shall therefore depend on the artists themselves, to effect a balance between what is lost and what is gained and accordingly exercise their power and imagination in using the institutional machineries within their access, authority and influence to determine the parameters of change through which and by which they can exercise the license to create and innovate, in the process of sustaining, perpetuating and enhancing tradition.