

EVOLVEMENT OF SYNCRETIC MUSIC: THE AESTHETIC VALUES OF MALAYSIAN POPULAR AND TRADITIONAL MUSIC

MD JAIS ISMAIL¹, FUNG CHIAT LOO²

SUMMARY. Malaysian music was influenced by British, Portuguese, Indian, and Chinese cultures, which created syncretic music. Aesthetics values strengthen the existence of syncretic music by molding taste and interest among the listeners. It somehow creates various feelings whether to appreciate, accept, or against the music, further developing musical preferences among individuals. Exploring aesthetic values in popular and traditional music is crucial as many cultures have influenced Malaysia due to colonization, trading, wedding, and migration. This paper reviews on Malaysian syncretic music, the aesthetic values in Malaysian popular and traditional music, and the influence factors of Malaysian music. It is found that there was a confluence of various intercultural musical elements in the early era, while assimilation has taken place due to traditional Malay rhythmic patterns and traditional folk themes. This led to the Malaysian conception of music and musical composition, creating the idea that Malaysian music has drastically expanded its artistic resources since the pre-colonial era. We also found communities living in the pre-modern or modern era have different unique taste in the aesthetic characteristics. Despite this, most remote communities are compelled to participate in postmodernity in some way due to the globalization of media, capital, and mobile networks. These combinations result in many theories, concepts, and discourses that enrich aesthetic values in Malaysian syncretic music.

Keywords: Syncretic music, culture, Malaysian music, aesthetic, music assimilation, traditional music

¹ *Conservatory of Music, College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam Selangor Malaysia. Corresponding Author. E-mail: mdjais@uitm.edu.my*

² *Department of Music, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Sedang, Selangor Malaysia. E-mail: lfc@upm.edu.my*



Introduction

Music preference is related to the perception of music by the listener and the characteristics of music that contribute to its musical aesthetic. Music philosophy spans many topics, including ontology, morality, epistemology, and sociology, in its broadest meaning³. Traditional aesthetics is a subfield of musicology that studies traditional music's aesthetically pleasing characteristics and aesthetic value. Music from India and the Middle East, prominent during the trading period, and music brought in by colonial powers like Portugal and the British, have all significantly affected traditional Malay musical compositions. Malaysian syncretic music emerged by fusing indigenous music with influences from the musical and dramatic traditions of Western, Persia, India, and China to create a new genre.⁴ *Zapin*, *Ghazal*, *Dondang Sayang*, and *Joget* evolved during the colonial era in which the outside elements have influenced Malaysian music. For popular music, Malaysian contemporary art music is inspired by Western music and culture. One of the famous figures is Malay composer and actor known as P. Ramlee had collaborated with Malaysian musicians in the 1950s to compose and perform popular music by fusing traditional melodies with Western dance rhythms and Western Asian music.⁵

Malaysian traditional music is used along with other performing arts such as drama, martial arts, dance, and theatre. This includes *wayang kulit* (puppet show) and dance dramas such as *Mak Yong*, as well as music for religious activities and wedding ceremonies (Brennan, 2001). Folk music and dance mainly originated in the Kelantan-Pattani region of Malaysia, which has been heavily influenced by the cultures of India and China along with Thailand and Indonesia.⁶

As Chopyak (2007) mentioned, the colonization of the Portuguese into Tanah Melayu (Malaysia) in the 16th century profoundly impacted Malaysian music.⁷ Pillai (2013), on the other hand, claims that the presence of European military wind bands and British colonialism had a significant

³ De Assis, P. *Logic of Experimentation: Reshaping Music Performance in and through Artistic Research* (p. 260). Leuven University Press, 2018.

⁴ Matusky, P., & Tan, S. B. *The music of Malaysia: The classical, folk and syncretic traditions*. Routledge, 2017.

⁵ Johan, A.. Reframing the National Culture Narrative of P. Ramlee. In *Discourses, Agency and Identity in Malaysia* (pp. 367-385). Springer, Singapore, 2021.

⁶ Tajuddin, T. I., Naili, R., & Ismail, M. J. Tracing Art Music Compositions and Composers in Malaysia. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 15(10), p. 542-560, 2021.

⁷ Chopyak, J. Globalization, westernization, and Islamic influence in music in Malaysia. Paper presented at Conference on Music in the World of Islam. Assilah, Morocco. 2007, 8–13 August. <http://www.mcm.asso.fr/site02/music-w-islam/articles/Chopyak-2007.pdf>

impact on the local music landscape.⁸ The primary purpose of these groups was to provide entertainment for the colonial officials and their families. Instead of fleeing the country, the band members, many of whom came from the Philippines and later India, chose to stay, and marry into the local community. After a while, the musicians got together to form dance and cabaret bands, which played in the *bangsawan* theatres as the background music. Some appeared in Chinese operas staged in their hometowns.⁹ Malaysian popular music has a history of globalisation and fusion since the late 1930s. Music at the local cinema (*panggung*) and joget dance hall are considered as popular culture, combined several rhythmic genres including Malaysian, Indonesian, Western, Indian, and Chinese.¹⁰ The *bangsawan*, *keroncong*, *ghazal*, and *asli* genres were the most famous traditional forms. There was a confluence of various intercultural musical elements in early popular music.¹¹ Most of the assimilation may have taken place due to familiar traditional Malay music styles, rhythm and melody being used in the music. As a result, the “musical palimpsest” at that time predominantly displayed a traditional Malay uniqueness, with syncretic elements blended into this prevailing, recognizably Malaysian music.

The Evolvement of Malay Syncretic Music

Malay syncretic music is found since the year of 1400 or known as the era of *Kesultanan Melayu Melaka* (Malacca Malay Sultanate). In this era, Malacca as a part of Malaysia became a significant and rapid progress state. Traders from Arab, China, India and Western countries came to Malacca and spread their cultures and ideologies to the local community. Syncretic music has evolved with the influence of various external musical structure and genre. Music and dance are popular entertainment to celebrate formal and informal events. It is also found that Malay music resembles *Melayu* dancing in that it uses pseudo-Western harmony.¹² Malay music sidesteps momentarily into

⁸ Pillai, S. Syncretic cultural multivocality and the Malaysian popular musical imagination. *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, 31(1), 2013.

⁹ Chopyak, J. Globalization, westernization, and Islamic influence in music in Malaysia. Paper presented at Conference on Music in the World of Islam. Assilah, Morocco. 2007, 8–13 August. <http://www.mcm.asso.fr/site02/music-w-islam/articles/Chopyak-2007.pdf>

¹⁰ Matusky, P., & Tan, S. B. *The music of Malaysia: The classical, folk and syncretic traditions*. Routledge, 2017.

¹¹ Johan, A., & Santaella, M. A. (Eds.). *Made in Nusantara: Studies in Popular Music*. Routledge, 2021.

¹² Benjamin, G. Music and the cline of Malayness: Sounds of egalitarianism and ranking. *Hearing Southeast Asia: Sounds of hierarchy and power in context*, 2019. 87-116.

different keys without modulating, much like how dancers' complicate transitions by repeatedly stepping forward and backward. As a result, while retaining the main Malay characteristics, the music also incorporated other musical aspects.

The rhythmic patterns of the local musical groups began to be influenced by Western cultural influences in subsequent years instead of remaining on the periphery.¹³ This merger resulted in local Malay musical bands using primarily Western instruments like pianos and drum sets, which eventually replaced traditional instruments such as accordions, *keroncong*s, and local instruments like the *rebana*. One major factor that sparked this shift was British colonization and the difference of the social hierarchy that existed during that era.

Since then, the Malay melody and rhythm were gradually influenced by western tones.¹⁴ The breadth of this cultural hegemony over the local music scene culminated in the 1960s influence directly on Malaysian music's genre. For example, the 60s music genre or named *Pop Yeh Yeh* which includes many components of worldwide musical traditions could be seen as a manifestation of the cultural competency that relates to cosmopolitanism.¹⁵ Instead of avoiding Western genres altogether, music has recently tended to borrow substantially from them while still preserving *asli* music elements and accommodating them into the Western styles. *Pop Yeh Yeh* was a pop modern genre that accelerated the process of musical merging between cultures. When it comes to Western music, this age marks the beginning of a cross-cultural exchange that will continue for decades to come. Jazz and other hip-hop icons found their way to Malaysian shores in addition to the Beatles. Music videos, or short films that portray the creative imagery of a song, began to have a global impact on Malaysian popular culture in the new century, as opposed to living performances or recordings.

Due to the rise of music videos, cosmopolitanism's effect has widened significantly, especially with easy access to the Internet and video-sharing websites like YouTube. With dynamically smooth process of music composition and improvisation across cultures, cosmopolitanism demonstrates the extent of listeners' perspective from an initial presumption about the music art to an understanding of the diverse musical meanings that develop over time.¹⁶

¹³ Jiayang, L., & Jia, L. Localization and Westernization of Popular Music in Malaysia in 21st Century. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 2021, 3(8).

¹⁴ Johnson, W. A. (2017). Sedap cycle: a multi-movement 'compositional tour' of Malaysian cuisine. *Malaysian Journal of Music*, 6(1), 73-97.

¹⁵ Hussin, H. *Cosmopolitan Intimacies: Malay Film Music of the Independent Era* By Adil Johan. Singapore: NUS Press, 2018. Pp. xxvii+ 387. ISBN 978-981-4722-63-6. *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 2020, 17(2), 185-187.

¹⁶ Collins, S., & Gooley, D. Music and the new cosmopolitanism: Problems and possibilities. *The Musical Quarterly*, 2016, 99(2), 139-165.

The significance of the process depends on the emergence of local identity that is closely related to individual beliefs including the emotional and spiritual factors. It somehow resonates with the musical preference of an individual molding the musical identity and taste of music. Contemporary Malaysian popular music has potential deal with all these concerns.

Besides, the ideology of cosmopolitanism was detected through audio-visual compositions, with particular attention paid to popular music. For instance, Point Blanc is a Malaysian singer has released his most well-known song entitled "Ipoh Mali" in 2007. The lyrics reflect a more cosmopolitan perspective laced with multilocality and intertextuality. The presence of numerous additional inflections inside the song demonstrates a firmly localized ethnic-musical cosmopolitanism, even if this reference may on one level imply an overt Western influence. Many inflections of "Black American hip hop nation linguistic variants" can be observed in the lyrics such as "yo," "holla," and "y'all". However, the cityscapes elements written on the poet's poetic lyrics by the hip-hop musician reflect a profoundly localized consciousness.

Aesthetic Values in Music

It is found that most parts of popular music have been influenced by postmodernist music practitioners who majority focusing in the music aesthetic elements.¹⁷ Migrant subcultures as one of the urban culture orientations, may be predisposed to postmodern aesthetics while maintaining connections to modern and premodern cultural concerns. Subcultures' syncretic popular music which combines postmodern and more traditional traits may reflect these various cultural orientations.¹⁸ Hence the combination of postmodern pastiche tactics with modernist socio-political protest may be seen in punk rock and rap music. Similar scopes can also be identified in the music of various metropolitan migrant cultures or syncretistic music. It includes perceptions of social identity or blending classic traditions with the most modern cosmopolitan styles and structures. Interpretations of such music may necessitate a particularly detailed understanding of the different aesthetic styles that may reconcile within music piece.^{19 20}

¹⁷ Lochhead, J., & Auner, J. *Postmodern music/postmodern thought*. Routledge, 2013.

¹⁸ Ingalls, M. M. Style matters: Contemporary worship music and the meaning of popular musical borrowings. *Liturgy*, 2017, 32(1), 7-15.

¹⁹ Manuel, P. Music as symbol, music as simulacrum: postmodern, pre-modern, and modern aesthetics in subcultural popular music. *Popular music*, 1995, 14(2), 227-239.

²⁰ Razali, C. S. M. M., & Salleh, M. Composing Music for Puisi Melayu: Exploring the Music Composition of 'Prosa Air Mata'. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 27(S1), 35-44.

There is a large body of critical music and aesthetics materials, but it tends to fall into two distinct groups, leaving the expressive parts of pop music unidentified. Postmodernism with emphasis on contemporary art's historicity and ironic detachment, as well as depictions of postmodernism as a global condition that effectively abolishes all senses of metanarrative, pre-modern and modern uniqueness, and practice. Musicologists and ethnomusicologists have looked at extra types of traditional musical meaning, including the expressive traits of abstract songs, meters, and melody, and how music serves as a platform to portray social identity in a variety of ways.²¹ These different analytical methods may be regarded as conflicting, but it is believed they have all neglected the nuanced interactions and coexistence of postmodern and pre-modern meanings inside current urban popular music. A different approach involves using musical genres and elements for purposes other than music, in which case their extra-musical, referential linkages are usually ignored. For example, jazz musicians play bossa nova songs doing a counterpoint to songs in swing rhythm to imply images of Brazilian beaches. Contemporary pop musicians can also include reggae, samba, and salsa rhythms in their performance, although these rhythmical styles do not necessarily carry any sensitive socio-musical elements. In the other hand, classical musicians from the northern India borrowed South Asian rags like *Keeravani* and *Vachapati* do not do so to arouse images of the Southern music, but rather to render these modes for their own values for example the use of unique scales that are not found in northern classical music.

It is found that musical borrowing can be divided into two categories: embodied and referential.^{22 23} In general, it would be unnecessary to mix the idea of embodied and referential as these borrowing forms may naturally overlay, coincide, and interact in a variety of elusive and intricate ways depending on certain factors such as performance, authorial intent, and the audience's profile and outlook. However, all the kinds of appropriation are modern or pre-modern in the sense that the borrowed features or styles are woven into the top of the host genre to make it remains coherent and continuous. For example, the North Indian musicians mix their music with the South Indian rags would make the rags lose their unique identity. Similarly, Glinka's use of folk songs is not meant to be an imitation or fake but rather an enrichment and evocation of national identity within the circumstances

²¹ Wanjala, H., & Kebaya, C. Popular music and identity formation among Kenyan youth. *Muziki*, 2016, 13(2), 20-35.

²² Kozak, M. *Enacting musical time: The bodily experience of new music*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

²³ Manuel, P. Music as symbol, music as simulacrum: postmodern, pre-modern, and modern aesthetics in subcultural popular music. *Popular music*, 1995, 14(2), 227-239.

and basic aesthetic boundaries of European art music, rather than a pastiche. Musical meaning is defined as being emotionally expressive when both embodied and referential effects are present.²⁴

Type of Fusion Music Between Popular and Traditional Music

Research on popular music genre that fuse with traditional from different ethnic groups were conducted since 80s.²⁵ Malay world are popular with a variety of membrane drums such as *kompang*, *hadrah*, *rebana*, *jido*, *gendang*, and so forth. On top of the different types of drums, there are also violins, flutes (seruling), gong and serunai instruments in Malaysian classical music. When performed with skits or plays, royal events, festivals or other ceremonial events, Malaysian music imparts a story of happiness and excitement through dynamic expression.²⁶ The Malay classical ensemble is completed by Gendang or drums and a variety of flutes and stringed instruments. *Gendang* is one of the essential percussion instruments (drum) in Malaysia and the Asian region. At least fourteen distinct types of Malaysian traditional drums are identified, including the *kompang* and *hadrah*. These traditional percussion instruments are constructed entirely of a membrane (animals' skin) or bone-like materials. While *nafiri* and the *rebab*, as well as the *serunai* (a double reed instrument) and *seruling* (flute), are the traditional instruments usually found in palace performance.²⁷ Since the *Kesultanan Melayu* era, traditional Malay music has been used to narrate tales, recollect life-cycle events, and mark significant celebrations such as harvest. It is associated with aristocrats and the monarchy system and denotes dignity, prestige, nobility, and racial identities. Festivals, celebrations, and key communal events benefit significantly from the presence of music. *Dikir Barat* in Kelantan, for example, performed by singers and musicians are a sight to behold in which it portrays a unique cultural element to be felt by the audience. On the other hand, *Ghazal* in Johor portrays exemplary stories, while *Joget Serampang Laut* and *Dondang Sayang* in Malacca are testing the ability of each singer to deliver *pantun* (Malay poem).

²⁴ Leman, M. Music, gesture, and the formation of embodied meaning. In *Musical Gestures* (pp. 138-165). Routledge, 2010.

²⁵ Dudrah, R. K. Drum'n'dhol 1: British bhangra music and diasporic South Asian identity formation. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2002, 5(3), 363-383.

²⁶ Chan, C. S. C. Standardizing and Exoticizing the "Main Jo'oh": The Tourist Gaze and Identity Politics in the Music and Dance of the Indigenous Mah Meri of Malaysia. *Asian Music*, 2015, 89-126.

²⁷ Rahimidin, Z., & Sutung, U. *Makyung, the Mystical Heritage of Malaysia*. ITBM, 2011.

States in southern peninsular Malaysia such as Johor and Melaka are popular with *Zapin*. Nor (2001) stated *Zapin* is either a dance or music genre that is a combination of many structures and styles.²⁸ The unique sound of the *Zapin* music is it sounds an expression of Malay cultures, aesthetics, and Islamic moods. This is somehow related to the religious performance of noble Islam (*mujarad*) with the integration of tawhid.²⁹ In *Zapin* songs, the Malay literary form of pantun or quatrains is employed to construct a conjunct arabesque of abstract themes. It is composed of unique rhyming phrases, in which the two first lines have no relation to the meanings of the two second lines. All the stanzas in *Zapin* are classic, metaphorical, and implying meaningful words through the eight to 12-syllable lines of the *pantun* verse. To put it in another way, each pantun line is a separate component of a song in the *Zapin* style that employs an interlaced ABAB rhyme pattern as its basis for composition. When musicians (such as oud, harmonium, and violinists) or a vocalist (*grenek*), who does vocal ornamentation a type of vocal ornamentation via melisma-based free-improvisation, play *zapin* music, the 'mujaradness' of the music comes through in the embellishments in the music played by them.³⁰ Because the soundscapes of Malay-Islamic music are akin to those of *Zapin*'s dancescape productions, *Zapin* music performs the same function as the latter. This results in *zapin* dancing and music having no distinct beginning or end, but instead being abstract (*mujarad*) and highly stylized. Dancing, as well as organized sound (music), are both based on repetitive and symmetrical modular arrangements of conjoint modules that are repeated and symmetrical. There are self-contained components in each module that are not linked to one another in any manner. Individual or group improvisations function as ornaments, emphasizing the abstract character of disjunct units and conjunct modules while minimizing their resemblance to one another. *Zapin* music and dance include elements and styles from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Incorporating a variety of dance steps and music styles into the unique portrayal of the arabesque in Islamic cultures has enriched the identification and creation of the *Zapin* as well as giving a realistic manner of integrating it into the Islamic *ummah* (community).

The *Temiar*, *Temuan*, *Semangs*, *Senois*, *Mah Meri*, *Kayan*, and *Kenyan* are among the Malaysian indigenous tribes who use a variety of musical instruments, including the *Pensol*, *Engkeromong*, *Ginggong*, *Kereb*, *Rebak*,

²⁸ Nor, M. A. M. Blurring images, glowing likenesses: Old and new styles in traditional dances of Malaysia. *Yearbook for traditional music*, 2001, 33, 65-72.

²⁹ Hamid, M. F. A., Nor, A. R. M., Meerangani, K. A., Ariffin, M. F. M., & Sharipp, M. T. M. Penilaian kaifiat zikir tarekat al-sh? zuliyah al-darq? wiyah pimpinan haji mohd nasir othman menurut al-quran dan al-sunah. *Jurnal'Ulwan*, 2021, 6(3), 80-98.

³⁰ Nor, M. A. M. Blurring images, glowing likenesses: Old and new styles in traditional dances of Malaysia. *Yearbook for traditional music*, 2001, 33, 65-72.

Centong, and *Tambur*. Music is performed in some important events such as rituals, marriage ceremonies, and festivals. Among the songs of Malaysian indigenous music are songs about harvest, battle, shamanism, rituals and accompanying dance.³¹ Music and rhythm cover a broad range of genres and highlight the vocal range of the performer. Known as the *orang asli* (“original people”) in Peninsular Malaysia, they are a minority indigenous group that resided in the area before the establishment of the Malay kingdoms. The healing ritual songs (*sewang*) of the *orang asli* are occasionally accompanied by the *buluh limbong*, which is a kind of drum made of two bamboo instruments that are hammered together on a wide piece of wood. The ‘Orang Ulu’ tribe is a generic word that refers to a variety of ethnic sub-groups found in Sarawak’s northern region.³² Some of these peoples, such as the Lun Bawan, the *Berawan*, and the *Penan*, who dwell in the deep forest, are among the most notable. The dancers and musicians of Orang Ulu are among the best in the world. They execute their particular tune on a Sape, a boat-shaped lute made of wood with two to four strings. Even though Malaysian indigenous people have maintained their musical traditions, they are unable to resist the impacts of the Western music system brought in by colonialism and economic operations.

As for Indian music, both the South Indian and the North Indian style are well-known in Malaysia. They portray the uniqueness of Carnatic and Hindustani music styles.³³ Carnatic music can be heard in Hindu temples, weddings, and religious festivals. Bharatanatyam performances are accompanied by a variety of Raga and Tala. Also popular in Malaysia is Punjabi Bhangra, especially during the holiday and wedding seasons.

Chinese groups in Malaysia are adopting music style in China as a tradition and culture. Over time, the Chinese have had various characteristics to these tunes. Older Chinese immigrants had a longing for their country, but the current generation sees them as a reminder of a bygone period, while the younger ones saw them as an opportunity to celebrate a new nation. Even when a community rejects a piece of music, it nevertheless becomes a part of the collective memory of that community. This collective musical memory serves as another distinguishing characteristic of a group. The music of the Chinese diaspora is becoming increasingly recognizable in the Asian region. Lee and Wong (2017) explained that Chinese popular music in

³¹ Matusky, P., & Tan, S. B. *The music of Malaysia: The classical, folk and syncretic traditions*. Routledge, 2017.

³² Lumenta, D. A. V. E. Towards transnational Dayak identities? Changing interconnectedness, identities and nation states—a case study on Iban-Kenyah relations in Sarawak, East Malaysia. *Economic Prospects, Cultural Encounters and Political Decisions: Scenes in a Moving Asia (East and Southeast)*, 1-18, 2003.

³³ Pillai, S. Syncretic cultural multivocality and the Malaysian popular musical imagination. *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, 31(1), 2013.

Malaysia serves as a communal experience that brings listeners into emotional alliances with the performers.³⁴ It is fascinating to note that many Chinese identities like Chinese popular music just as much as the rest of the population. Chinese popular music listening is therefore a cultural activity shared by all Chinese people. Attendance in Chinese symphonic concerts are a sign that Chinese popular music has been accepted by the Malaysian community. Besides concerts, Malaysian Chinese music is also evident in an orchestra.

Influences from China and the Western make up the *Hua Yue Tuan*, sometimes known as the 'Chinese orchestra'. Western polyphony is combined with Chinese melodies in this orchestra. Even though Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China have influenced most of the repertoire in the orchestra, many local Chinese orchestras also play Malay folk melodies regularly, with a variety of local composers attempting to merge parts of Chinese musical cultures with the Malay music elements. They also added *shidai qu* and Cantopop to their repertoire as well as modern Mandarin songs, as *Hua Yue Tuan* grew in popularity. A typical orchestra consists of between 12 and 50 players, mostly funded by Chinese organizations such as schools, associations, and Buddhist societies. There are four types of music instruments family namely as bowed strings, plucked strings, wind, and percussion are typically made up the parts of the Chinese orchestra. Numerous orchestras and opera companies are sponsored by Buddhist and school organizations operating in Kuala Lumpur.³⁵ Lion Dance performances are often accompanied by percussion ensembles with drums, gongs, and cymbals. In Malaysia, Chinese classical music has also been preserved and the number of exceptional performers is increasing. Most Malaysian virtuoso musicians, on the other hand, get their advanced training in either China or Singapore.

Adapting Western Aesthetic Philosophies in Malaysian Traditional Music

As Westerners debated traditional music aesthetics, much previous research focused on what music can offer to the listener.³⁶³⁷ Philosophers such as Mattheson and Hutcheson believed that music influences

³⁴ Lee, K. H., & Wong, D. T. K. (2017). Chinese popular music as a musical heritage and cultural marker of the Malaysian Chinese. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23(10), 989-1001.

³⁵ Loo, F., C. & Loo, F., Y. The contemporary musical theatre in Malaysia. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 2(8), 1339-1358, 2012.

³⁶ Davidson, J. *The music practitioner: Research for the music performer, teacher and listener*. Routledge, 2017.

³⁷ Sparshott, F. Reflections on Affektenlehre and dance theory in the eighteenth century. *The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism*, 56(1), 21-28, 1998.

psychological development and mold emotional expression, primarily the human voice. There are French theorists who were opposed to the idea that music could express emotion because it lacked the necessary tools.³⁸ They debated between expressionist and formalist ideology on the function of emotion in traditional music.

Music art is always temporal. According to Peckel and Begand (2015), when we pay attention to music, our minds are forced to move along. Using our minds is more than just listening to new sounds as they appear. In response to the music's motion, the mind is also influenced by it. For instance, musical motion can be perceived as physical motion in traditional music. Differently, the temporal nature of music affects our minds as well. Because it is a natural response, when we hear something, our minds trail the music patterns of what we hear and further incorporate the patterns into our perception of the music. Musical works are not always available, so the order in which we listen to them is crucial to our understanding. There is a clear musical structure along with interpretation through the mood of a song and the complexity of such content vary widely when it comes to traditional music. It indicates that all art music from the early era is much more creative than the current. It is also evident when we listen to traditional music, it takes time to understand the message due to the highly aesthetic value content that existed in the music. Consequently, it is a good effort to listen to traditional music as it enhances our experience and inculcates awareness of culture and heritage.

Furthermore, the aesthetic that existed in a music could be related to the Immanuel Kant's Critique of Judgment as it has significant contribution in the music aesthetic field.³⁹ It explains that aesthetic views encompass feeling in perceiving a thing of purposefulness, regardless of emotion or preconceived notion of what the thing should look like. In this study context, music is an abstract object which allows imagination and comprehension to interact freely. If it can be sensed, this shows the basis for our pleasure in feeling the beauty of music. It also related to imagination's ability to perceive musical form is comparable to intuition's ability to refer to concepts, which puts it in harmony with understanding.⁴⁰ These concepts can be perceived independently of any notion of an object in music. Music is perceived as having a purpose for reflective judgment so long as this is possible. Therefore, music could be considered as a beautiful art.

³⁸Alpers, P. *Musical Aesthetics: A Historical Reader*, 1: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century, ed. EA Lippman (Book Review). *Notes*, 1987.44(2), 269.

³⁹Sweet, K. *Kant on freedom, nature and judgment: The territory of the third critique*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁴⁰Leman, M. Music, gesture, and the formation of embodied meaning. In *Musical Gestures* (pp. 138-165). Routledge, 2010.

Development of music in the 11th century is often connected with traditional music. However, the modern (21st century) music incorporating more complex compositional norms that are gaining attention especially in some Asian countries. Some improvised traditional songs cannot be considered as 'traditional' because they do not fit into an established tradition of composition, even though the many of Asian art music compositions are classified as "traditional." For example, a traditional Malaysian song entitled '*Empat Dara*' was improvised by infusing modern technological instruments and some rap elements which caused the loss of traditional taste of the song. Additionally, traditional music aesthetics have traditionally focused solely on musical elements. There are loads of aesthetic elements of music pieces derived solely from the music, and non-musical elements are not considered. In traditional music research, it is found most music practitioners have different thoughts from examining the aesthetic characteristics of traditional music containing non-musical elements such as poem and dance. The traditional music aesthetics strongly emphasizes pure or "absolute" music while the conjunction with the non-musical elements is possible.

As a result of a shared Malaysian perspective on music arts during colonial times, traditional music has expanded its artistic resources from medieval polyphony to the pre-colonial eras. However, its compositional techniques evolved after colonialism, and traditional music developed uniquely. It maintained a strong connection with techniques of composition including the development of Diatonic scales and triadic functional harmony used in the late works of this period. Only in late pop music that extended chromaticism begin to erase any sense of the tonic that the basic musical materials and relationships change. Composers' innovations fit with the current tonal system, and their evolvment and extension of resources embedded in that system would make a difference in their composition works. Because of this gradual evolvment within the context of a syncretic aesthetic, tonal harmony's inherent potential is gradually developed, allowing the development of expressive music piece that grow in effective and impactful.⁴¹

Malaysians experiencing a variety of music genres since the post-colonial era in due to assimilation of external cultures. It contributes to the diversity of music preference and distinguish between local music and syncretic music. Also, in term of musical ontology, traditional and syncretic music impacted the metaphysical nature of a Malaysian artwork forming harmonious musical symbiosis. Since then, music became abstract object that is authentic and prominent related to the theory of.⁴²

⁴¹ Young, J. O. How classical music is better than popular music. *Philosophy*, 91(4), 523-540, 2016.

⁴² Cantabrana, C. *A realist approach to categorizing musical works* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow), 2022.

Internal and External Factors That Molding Aesthetic Characteristics in Malaysian Music

In the *Kesultanan Melayu* (Malay Sultanate) era, it is found traditional and folk arts dominated Malay popular culture, often with a regional or local flavor and sometimes with more modernized or syncretic viewpoints on classic issues. *Bangsawan* troupes were among those whose performances combined music and theatre. The troupes travelled throughout the nation. *Bangsawan* was developed as a popular urban theatre at the beginning of the 20th century, incorporating elements of Western, Arab, Latin American, Indonesian, Indian, and Chinese cultures. This urban, multiethnic theatre was named *Bangsawan*. *Keroncong* orchestras and albums were popular with Malay and Chinese listeners in coastal areas because of their alluring blend of Portuguese and Indonesian music. *Orkes Melayu* was a popular opening act for *bangsawan* concerts, especially on the West Coast. These ensembles were highly inspired by music from the Middle East and India. In Johor, the *Ghazal*, which combines Indian, Persian, and indigenous components, has become the predominant musical style.

Asli consists of folk music, pop songs performed in a folk style, instrumental pieces, and dances of several genres, most notably the *joget*. Traditional music in Malaysia has been modernized or commercialized in particular ways. *Asli* is also the name of a lively singing style and a kind of music with distinct rhythmic characteristics. *Bangsawan* was closely related to *Asli* styles that used Western dancing rhythms in their compositions. Even though they were produced from a blend of indigenous and non-indigenous elements, they are all acknowledged as part of the Malay cultural legacy. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Western sociocultural influence began to have a substantial impact on a variety of Malaysian customs. *Keroncong*, *Ghazal*, and *Asli* music are seldom performed or recorded in their traditional forms, however, there are modernized adaptations of these genres. The entrance of Western musical instruments in the Malay area changed the landscape of traditional music and culture, especially in the early 17th century. The popularity of ethno-fusion bands that played Malay music on Western instruments increased.

In addition, Indian cinema musicals and recordings by Chinese musicians from the 1940s, such as Shanghai torch singers Zhou Xuan and Woo Ing Ing, became well-known and well-liked rapidly.⁴³ Both of these factors influenced the evolution of Chinese music in Malaysia. The establishment of a

⁴³ Lockard, C. A. From folk to computer songs: The evolution of Malaysian popular music, 1930-1990. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 30(3), 1, 1996.

distinctive kind of popular culture was significantly influenced by the evolution of marketing strategies and technological capabilities in mass media. The meteoric expansion of the film industry, which included the creation of Malay musicals in the Indian manner, the spread of radio, and the introduction of new musical and dance genres, had a profound impact on Malayan popular culture and Malay popular music. After World War II, Singapore became the hub of the Malay entertainment industry, which flourished for the next decade. Before the 1960s, just a handful of records were produced in Malaya, but India pressed several recordings of Malayan singers and performers for sale in Malaya. After World War II, new amusement parks in Malaysia and Singapore, such as Bukit Bintang in Kuala Lumpur, New World in Penang, and Great World in Singapore, were significant venues for live music.⁴⁴ In the early 1950s, several singer-songwriters came to fame due to the success of their films or records such as P. Ramlee, Saloma, Nona Aisha, R. Azmi, Jasni, and S.M. Salim.⁴⁵

There are songs written during the 1950s addressed the independence of Malaya from colonialism, patriotism, polygamy, and Islam. This was mirrored in several of the songs sung by the singers. Western popular music, Latin American dance music, Hawaiian music, and Indian cinema music were absorbed into Malaysian music in the late of 80s. Strong romantic connotations of Western popular music such as “Your heart, my heart” dominated Malaysian popular music genres. There have been decades of Malaysian songs with the words *sayang* (love), *cinta* (love), and *gadis* (girlfriend) in the title.

There were several advancements in Malay popular music and popular culture during this decade. As a result of Western culture’s increasing influence, the sociocultural life of Malaysia has undergone significant transformations, especially in quickly developing metropolitan centers. More people outside the English-speaking globe were exposed to Western popular music via radio and records, and its influence expanded to urban and rural areas. Western social dances (such as the twist) were gaining popularity among young people. The iconic joget halls were built and disseminate syncretic elements to local people. Due to the increasing popularity of television, many amusement parks such as fun fair progressively disappeared during this time. Nonetheless, a Chinese recording business was founded in the region, and local performers such as Poon Sow Keng were highly famous.

⁴⁴ Zhang, B. (2021). *Chinese Theatre Troupes in Southeast Asia: Touring Diaspora, 1900s–1970s*. Routledge.

⁴⁵ Lockard, C. A. From folk to computer songs: The evolution of Malaysian popular music, 1930-1990. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 30(3), 1, 1996.

Zhang Xiaoying, a Singaporean, became well-known among Malaysians of Chinese descent.⁴⁶

Throughout the decade of the 1970s, many unique musical movements emerged. Lockard (1996) mentioned, that to comply with the more jazz-influenced sounds that were gaining popularity in Western pop and rock music, guitar-based bands instantly included keyboards and even horn sections. Many local vocalists drew influence from disco and “a go-go,” two renowned Western dance styles. Ancient *joget* clubs were replaced by discos, and by the late 1970s, live music bars were becoming increasingly prevalent in urban areas. During the early half of the decade, some English-speaking bands rose to prominence, including The Strollers, The Quests, and The Falcons. Even though their reputation was declining and several of them had dissolved by the late 1970s, foreign singers who specialized in English songs had loyal fans. Another famous trend is ‘*Dangdut*’, a style that is heavily inspired by Indian music. This kind of music has been popular in Indonesia since the 1950s, and performers such as Ellya, who is originally from Indonesia and remains there, have also found success in Malaysia. During the 1940s and 1950s, several Malay vocalists, including Abdul Rahman, Jasni, R. Azmi, and even P. Ramlee used an Indian-influenced arrangement.⁴⁷ The first decade of *Dangdut* was characterized by happy songs that exemplified good behavior and emphasized the significance of moral precepts. However, the originality of *dangdut* has been altered led to the change of *Dangdut*’s aesthetics.⁴⁸

Conclusion

In this study, we explored the evolvement of Malaysian music that were influence by external cultures forming a syncretism element in the Malaysian music. It somehow resonates how an individuum can taste the music based on how the music was composed, played by specific musical instruments. The present study is also consistent with previous work that proved Malaysia is consisted of various races, culture and customs which enrich the taste of its music. This was achieved when there is interconnection of amalgamation between music and culture from the trade and colonization

⁴⁶ Ang, S. C. *The demotic process in Astro star quest contestants from 2006-2016/Ang Shiao Chien* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Malaya), 2018.

⁴⁷ Lockard, C. A. (1991). Reflections of change: Sociopolitical commentary and criticism in Malaysian popular music since 1950. *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 6(1), 1-111.

⁴⁸ Setiawan, S., & Susanti, A. Sexuality In *Dangdut* Lyrics: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 2021, 58(1), 3286-3295.

during the early era. We also discussed the evidence from other countries on how the aesthetics values appeared in music works in both traditional and pop music. The study suggests Malaysia as a multicultural country to preserve the uniqueness of its music aesthetics.

We also realized communities and art forms that are nearly completely pre-modern or modern still exist in the modern world. Despite this, most remote communities are becoming compelled to participate in postmodernity in some way due to the globalization of media, capital, and migratory networks. These combinations could be beneficial, or they can be combustible. Even in the industrialized world, postmodernism is an ideological, aesthetics, and discursive framework that interacts continually with tradition and modernity. In relation to syncretism, we found the syncretism elements most strongly in the colonial and post-colonial history of Malaya. It becomes easier to trace and to feel the aesthetic vibrations which must later be found in the form and content of Malaysian popular music. It is often assumed that Arabic-Islamic Malaysian culture is thoroughly Malaysian rather than being a colonial or post-colonial phenomenon. In modern Malaysian music, aesthetic characteristics that exist in the Malaysian traditional and popular music engender the syncretism symbiosis of Malaysian culture.

In this study, we found a clear existence of aesthetic values in Malaysian popular and traditional music. The art of music works, and the interpretations of music (aesthetic selves) are what we take this to mean. This resonates to both general interest in the arts (such as becoming a musician or a music enthusiast) and specific artistic elements. A change in music genre, whether the music is pop or traditional could potentially change the aesthetic characteristics or the taste of music. It is related to the theory of the Aesthetic Self Effect which recommends the ability to transform ourselves through our involvement and preferences in the arts.⁴⁹ A particularly interesting area of aesthetics values in this regard is music arts, which combines the music work and expression of songs in a unique way. We believe that artistic elements, custom, and cultural elements could also play a role in mediating the relationship between music and aesthetics values. In the future, researchers should investigate these and other potential avenues.

Acknowledgment

This study was supported by Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. No conflict of interest because of this study.

⁴⁹ Fingerhut, J., Gomez-Lavin, J., Winklmayr, C., & Prinz, J. J. The aesthetic self. the importance of aesthetic taste in music and art for our perceived identity. *Frontiers in psychology*, 2021, 11, 577703.

REFERENCES

- Alpers, P. Musical Aesthetics: A Historical Reader, 1: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century, ed. EA Lippman (Book Review). *Notes*, 1987.44(2), 269.
- Ang, S.C. *The demotic process in Astro star quest contestants from 2006-2016/Ang Shiao Chien* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Malaya), 2018.
- Basly, S., & Saunier, P.L. Family members' commitment to the firm and family business continuity: investigating the mediating role of family-to-firm identity fit and emotional attachment. *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, 2020. 32(1), 9-32.
- Benjamin, G. Music and the cline of Malayness: Sounds of egalitarianism and ranking. *Hearing Southeast Asia: Sounds of hierarchy and power in context*, 2019. 87-116.
- Brennan, C. Religion, cultural identity, and Kelantan's Dikir Barat. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 12(3), 2001, 302-311.
- Cantabrana, C.A *realist approach to categorizing musical works* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow), 2022.
- Chan, C.S.C. Standardizing and Exoticizing the "Main Jo'oh": The Tourist Gaze and Identity Politics in the Music and Dance of the Indigenous Mah Meri of Malaysia. *Asian Music*, 2015, 89-126.
- Chopyak, J. Globalization, westernization and Islamic influence in music in Malaysia. Paper presented at Conference on Music in the World of Islam. Assilah, Morocco. 2007, 8–13 August. <http://www.mcm.asso.fr/site02/music-w-islam/articles/Chopyak-2007.pdf>
- Collins, S., & Gooley, D. Music and the new cosmopolitanism: Problems and possibilities. *The Musical Quarterly*, 2016, 99(2), 139-165.
- Davidson, J. *The music practitioner: Research for the music performer, teacher and listener*. Routledge, 2017.
- Dudrah, R.K. Drum'n'dhol 1: British bhangra music and diasporic South Asian identity formation. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2002, 5(3), 363-383.
- De Assis, P. *Logic of Experimentation: Reshaping Music Performance in and through Artistic Research* (p. 260). Leuven University Press, 2018.
- Fingerhut, J., Gomez-Lavin, J., Winklmayr, C., & Prinz, J.J. The aesthetic self. the importance of aesthetic taste in music and art for our perceived identity. *Frontiers in psychology*, 2021, 11, 577703.
- Hamid, M.F.A., Nor, A.R.M., Meerangani, K.A., Ariffin, M.F.M., & Sharipp, M.T.M. Penilaian kaifiat zikir tarekat al-sh? zuliyah al-darq? wiyah pimpinan haji mohd nasir othman menurut al-quran dan al-sunah. *Jurnal'Ulwan*, 2021, 6(3), 80-98.
- Hussin, H. *Cosmopolitan Intimacies: Malay Film Music of the Independent Era* by Adil Johan. Singapore: NUS Press, 2018. Pp. xxvii+ 387. ISBN 978-981-4722-63-6. *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 2020, 17(2), 185-187.
- Ingalls, M.M. Style matters: Contemporary worship music and the meaning of popular musical borrowings. *Liturgy*, 2017, 32(1), 7-15.

- Ismail, M.J., Chiat, L.F., & Anuar, A.F. 'Music in Film' for Gifted Students: The Effect of Differentiated Learning on Students' Motivation. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 2021, 29(4), 2709-2728.
- Jiayang, L., & Jia, L. Localization and Westernization of Popular Music in Malaysia in 21st Century. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 2021, 3(8).
- Johan, A. (2021). Reframing the National Culture Narrative of P. Ramlee. In *Discourses, Agency and Identity in Malaysia* (pp. 367-385). Springer, Singapore.
- Johan, A., & Santaella, M.A. (Eds.). *Made in Nusantara: Studies in Popular Music*. Routledge, 2021.
- Johnson, W.A. (2017). Sedap cycle: a multi-movement 'compositional tour' of Malaysian cuisine. *Malaysian Journal of Music*, 6(1), 73-97.
- Kozak, M. *Enacting musical time: The bodily experience of new music*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Lee, K.H., & Wong, D.T.K. (2017). Chinese popular music as a musical heritage and cultural marker of the Malaysian Chinese. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23(10), 989-1001.
- Lehman, R. (2018). Lingerin: Pleasure, desire, and life in Kant's Critique of Judgment. *JSP: Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 32(2), 217-242.
- Leman, M. Music, gesture, and the formation of embodied meaning. In *Musical Gestures* (pp. 138-165). Routledge, 2010.
- Lochhead, J., & Auner, J. *Postmodern music/postmodern thought*. Routledge, 2013.
- Lockard, C.A. From folk to computer songs: The evolution of Malaysian popular music, 1930-1990. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 30(3), 1, 1996.
- Lockard, C.A. (1991). Reflections of change: Sociopolitical commentary and criticism in Malaysian popular music since 1950. *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 6(1), 1-111.
- Loo, F., C. & Loo, F., Y. The contemporary musical theatre in Malaysia. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 2(8), 1339-1358, 2012.
- Lumenta, D.A.V.E. Towards transnational Dayak identities? Changing interconnectedness, identities and nation states—a case study on Iban-Kenyah relations in Sarawak, East Malaysia. *Economic Prospects, Cultural Encounters and Political Decisions: Scenes in a Moving Asia (East and Southeast)*, 1-18, 2003.
- Manuel, P. Music as symbol, music as simulacrum: postmodern, pre-modern, and modern aesthetics in subcultural popular musics. *Popular music*, 1995, 14(2), 227-239.
- Matusky, P., & Tan, S.B. *The music of Malaysia: The classical, folk and syncretic traditions*. Routledge, 2017.
- Nor, M.A.M. Blurring images, glowing likenesses: Old and new styles in traditional dances of Malaysia. *Yearbook for traditional music*, 2001, 33, 65-72.
- Nor, M.A.M. 3 Malay-Islamic Zapin. *irgit A*, 2011, 71.
- Peckel, M., & Bigand, E. How does moving along to music influence its later recognition? In *L'Annee psychologique*, 2015, 115(1), 53-76.

- Pillai, S. Syncretic cultural multivocality and the Malaysian popular musical imagination. *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, 31(1), 2013.
- Rahimidin, Z., & Sutung, U. *Makyung, the Mystical Heritage of Malaysia*. ITBM, 2011.
- Razali, C.S.M.M., & Salleh, M. Composing Music for Puisi Melayu: Exploring the Music Composition of 'Prosa Air Mata'. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 27(S1), 35-44.
- Setiawan, S., & Susanti, A. Sexuality In Dangdut Lyrics: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 2021, 58(1), 3286-3295.
- Sparshott, F. Reflections on Affektenlehre and dance theory in the eighteenth century. *The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism*, 56(1), 21-28, 1998.
- Sweet, K. *Kant on freedom, nature and judgment: The territory of the third critique*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Tajuddin, T.I., Naili, R., & Ismail, M.J. (2021). Tracing Art Music Compositions and Composers in Malaysia. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 15(10), p. 542-560.
- Wanjala, H., & Kebaya, C. Popular music and identity formation among Kenyan youth. *Muziki*, 2016, 13(2), 20-35.
- Young, J.O. How classical music is better than popular music. *Philosophy*, 91(4), 523-540, 2016.
- Zhang, B. (2021). *Chinese Theatre Troupes in Southeast Asia: Touring Diaspora, 1900s–1970s*. Routledge.
- Zittoun, T. (2013). *Religious traditions as means of innovation: The use of symbolic resources in the life course. Religious voices in self-narratives making sense of life in times of transitions*, 129-148. De Gruyter.

