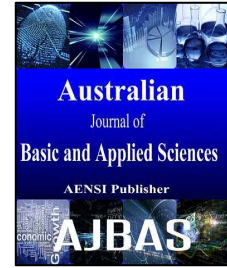




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Surviving Dusun Tindal Musical Philosophy in Kampung Tinuhan, Tenghilan

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ABSTRACT

Background: This paper examines the Dusun Tindal music philosophy that is retained within the modern society in Kampung Tinuhan. Kampung Tinuhan is situated in Tenghilan at the northern west of Sabah. Dusun Tindal belongs to the largest ethnic group, Kadazandusun, in Sabah. Since 1990s, Dusun Tindal in Tenghilan have begun to lose most of their traditional musical culture. However, the people still keep hold of some of their old traditions, and accept some new musical developments in aims to safeguard their children within the right and beneficial ways of life. The elders, realizing the integral role the music plays in their life and society, have also strived to preserve their musical essence no matter how their musical culture has undergone changes. Today, the profound musical philosophy of Dusun Tindal can still be seen dimly emanated from their surviving musical performances.

INTRODUCTION

The Dusun Tindal communities disperse widely on the west coast of Sabah around places such as Penampang, Papar, Tuaran, Kiulu, Tamparuli, Tenghilan, Kota Belud and near the hills in Ranau, Tambunan and Keningau (Pugh 2004).

Kampung Tinuhan is one of the villages in Tenghilan that marks the highest population of Dusun Tindal ethnicity. Kampung Tinuhan is a rather small village, undergoing muscular movements of modernization as the villagers gradually abandon their traditional way of life. This research aims to discover and document the surviving Dusun Tindal musical philosophy in Kampung Tinuhan before it dies out.

Music has been created and practiced by Dusun Tindal people in their daily life since the ancient time and it is a functional tool that serves the ethnic communities towards well development and prosperity of their people. Throughout the history, the people have tried to retain the natural beauty and profoundness of their music all along to reflect their ways and philosophies of life.

Music and life are intimately connected in Dusun Tindal culture. Music is considered something natural, at the same time sacred pertaining to the spiritual understanding of the universe. As could be found, the musical instruments are constructed entirely from the resources of nature and designed in a way that produces beautiful and moving indigenous sounds manifested from the natural surrounded living environment in coalition with profound realizations and understandings of spirituality of life.

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Locality:

Kampung Tinuhan is a village with the distance approximately 10 minutes' drive away from the town of Tenghilan. Kampung Tinuhan is about 25 square kilometers in size with an estimated population of 350. Tenghilan is a small town (around 400 hectares) located on the west coast of Sabah, Malaysia, within the district of Tuaran. It is situated between the capital city of Kota Kinabalu and city of Kota Belud. The distance from Tenghilan to Kota Kinabalu is approximately 38 kilometers (about 45 minutes' drive).



Fig. 1: Map of Tenghilan Town.

Kampung Tinuhan was built by the Sabahan indigenous people from the northern side of Sabah such as Bundu Tuhan, Ranau and Pinasang, Kota Belud. Today, approximately 94% of the villagers are descendants of Dusun Tindal, an ethnic group categorized within Kadazandusun (the biggest ethnic group comprising one-third of the population in Sabah) due to the sharing of closely related traditions and dialects. The remaining 6% of the population consists of Iban, Bidayuh, Bajau, Sino-Dusun and Malay (who migrated to the village through marriages) (Lombuti S. 2015).

The name of "Kampung Tinuhan" was originated from a legend in the ancient time before the existence of the village. It is believed that a man from the hills behind Kampung Tinuhan had travelled to the low-lands. During that time, Kampung Tinuhan was merely a flat, dry and stretched out land with no inhabitants. Due to the extremely dry condition of the land, the man collapsed out of exhaustion. During the old days, the villagers around Tenghilan were not very friendly to each other. The villagers did not help but let the man died on the land where Kampung Tinuhan was built later. To remember this story, the villagers named the village as "Kampung Tinuhan", which means "thirsty" village (Pantai 2010).

According to the villagers' worldview of life, happiness is vital and prioritized to ensure healthy growth and prosperity in the communities. Celebrations, such as *Pesta Keamatan*, wedding ceremonies and birth parties, are held very often in the village as a tradition to enrich their daily life with happiness, entertainment and relaxation through playing music, singing, dancing, and playing simple village games. Today, in Kampung Tinuhan, this tradition is still preserved and annual *Pesta Keamatan* is held in their main cultural hall of the village located in a small hill.

The musical concepts and meanings derived from the deep life experiences and wisdom of the Dusun Tindal ancestors are vital in this study to understand the core of the ethnic music itself.

Surviving Musical Instruments:



Fig. 2: From left: *sompoton*, *tongkungan*, *tongkibong*, *tongkawir*, and *bungkau*. Photo: author.

The traditional musical instruments of Dusun Tindal are mainly made of bamboo wood, bronze or brass, and goat or cow skin. The ones still exist today are *suling*, *sompoton*, *tongkungan*, *tongkawir*, *tongkibong*,

bungkau, *kulintangan*, *gongs* and *gandang*. Under the great influence of modernization, bamboo drum, bamboo guitars, bamboo rak and xylophones are invented as contemporary Dusun Tindal musical instruments imitating the modern western musical instruments. The new innovations aim to attract the younger generations in learning about their music tradition and having further advancement and achievement on their musical performing arts. Giansing B. Lakansa, a Dusun Tindal musical instrument maker from nearby Kampung Kayangat supplies most of the musical instruments for musicians in Kampung Tinuhan and other parts of Sabah.

The traditional instrumental ensembles that still exist in the village are *mengagong* or *mangagong* (which means “beating the gong”), and bamboo orchestra. The *mengagong* gong ensemble uses traditional percussive musical instruments - *gong lapos-lapos*, *gong mongoluton*, *gong songkoluon*, *gong dindihon*, *gong ponohuri*, *kulintangan*, *gandang*. On the other hand, the bamboo orchestra is a semi-modernized musical group that combines traditional bamboo musical instruments - *suling*, *sompoton*, *tongkawir* and *bungkau*, with an adaption of western musical instruments – drum, electric guitars, rak and xylophones that are made from bamboo (Gondoloi 2015).

Bamboo Orchestra is a new form of Dusun Tindal music ensemble which uses a combination of modern and traditional musical instruments. All the musical instruments are made of bamboo. The Bamboo Orchestra is currently very popular among the Dusun Tindal across the whole state of Sabah. The arrangement of the music compositions in Bamboo Orchestra performances is modernized and apt to imitate the simple popular musical styles by adding in the traditional musical melodies and aesthetical flavors. It is an effort to renovate and revive Dusun Tindal traditional bamboo musical instruments and ensembles. It is considered quite successful in attracting and promoting Dusun Tindal musical culture among the young generations, as well as opening up a new door for their music to reach the outside world (ibid.).



Fig. 3: Combination of traditional and modern Dusun Tindal musical instruments in Bamboo Orchestra. Photo: author.

Today, the older musicians are aware of the strong influences of westernization and modernization. Therefore, they educate the young ones with great care and sensitivity so that they acquire the true wisdom to help their people living a righteous life. From here, the young ones are educated to understand and treasure their own musical heritage and identity. Yet, it still remains unknown how far the young ones are able to deeply understand and appreciate the heart of their culture as their music tradition continues to undergo changes and acculturations.

Dusun Tindal Musical Philosophy:

Similar to most of the ethnic people in the world, Dusun Tindal in Kampung Tenghilan consider music as a form of manifestation of their souls. They use music as a means for entertainment, communication with others, expressions of feelings and thoughts, symbols of status and respect, transmission of history and knowledge, seeking of inner spirituality, socialization, and etc. Music indirectly reflects their identity and constantly connects their inner hearts to their ancestors way back hundreds of years ago. However, the music, that is orally transmitted and was not recorded in the past, fails to explain and clarify the beginning of their existence.

Today, only the older villagers in Kampung Tinuhan still uphold and advocate the traditional musical philosophies of their ancestors. Most of the Dusun Tindal villagers, the same as other ethnic groups in Sabah, have acculturated themselves with modern cultures. The lives of their young generations incline to change into new forms and patterns. Their traditional music and musical instruments are gradually overpowered by the modern and popular influences. The young people nowadays know very little about the essential core of their traditional music as they do not have the direct experiences of the old ways of life like their grandparents or great grandparents. However, they are able to grasp some feeble meanings from a distance as they watch the old musicians perform with great profound ambience. With that, they somehow feel connected to their cultural heritage deep inside them.

Therefore, the older generations in the village are putting in great efforts to retain their old wisdom among the young generations. Their ancestral music is altruistic and sacred, on the other hand, the younger and modernized Dusun Tindal prefer equitable or lavish returns from their music. Taking the famous and rich artists and musicians as models, the latter learn to compose and perform music aiming more toward fame, money and status as they can see they will only be confined in a rural poor village if they follow the traditional ways and philosophies of their people. These people often defend themselves by explaining that one needs to earn a better living and achieve a better life to become successful. Individual gain is interpreted as a success in life. Therefore, today the musicians in the village have divided themselves mainly into two streams of thoughts. One is to follow mainly the old musical tradition but somehow adapt to a certain amount of modern musical elements and continue to benefit their children and societies whole-heartedly; the other is to adopt the modern and western musical trends, and challenge for a new change of music in their history (Ibid.).

According to the traditional musical philosophies of Dusun Tindal, it is the nature of Dusun Tindal and a need for them to express their inner emotions, feelings and thoughts towards life, world and nature via music. To them, it is necessary to seek inner spirituality in life. In its spiritual ontogenesis journey, it is common for them to express and venture into the spiritual side of their souls and the reality of life through playing music. Since ancient time, Dusun Tindal have also realized that beautiful and soothing musical sound is a good musical therapy to help achieving mental relaxation, calmness and happiness (Lombuti S. 2015).

In the ancient wisdom, Dusun Tindal people perceive that humans acquire the ability to interpret meanings of the sounds without words and we are capable of communicating and understanding each other through mere sounds. Hence, in their culture, they develop their inner abilities and use their music to send messages of one's thoughts and feelings to others such as through music of *suling*, *sompoton* and drum. This is a method for them to foster intimacy and understandings among villagers, and consequently bring about harmony and peace in the communities (Pantai 2010).

Dusun Tindal also believe in human's inner abilities and qualities derived from the cultivation of patience, humbleness, sharpness, sensitivity, awareness, and etc. The elders educate and train the children in developing better inner qualities via various forms of musical training. In the ancestral wisdom of Dusun Tindal, those inner good qualities equip their children with inner strength and wisdom to overcome obstacles and hardships in life, as well as for them to better serve the societies. Thus their music is designed as a tool to cultivate one's mental and physical efficiency, positive values, disciplines and intelligence. In Dusun Tindal musical practice, the people are capable to develop higher skills, abilities and wisdom through the profound musical beauty and arts such as multi-layered musical textures, inter-dependent improvisations, complex interlocking rhythms, virtuoso performing skills, and etc. (Lombuti S. 2015).

In the interviews, Dusun Tindal musicians stress on the importance of music serving to contribute for their people and communities, not for personal benefits. Their musical performances are seldom set on stages and they care less of their appearances while performing. Their ancestors taught them the philosophical importance of selflessness and humbleness, thus traditionally they are not taught to long for own fame or popularity in their musical performances. The Dusun Tindal ancestors foresee that holistic direction of their musical practices may reach the aim of fostering more love, care and altruism among their communities. They believe the positive mentality in good values of humbleness, contentment and altruism are very important to ensure healthy growth and long-lasting prosperity of their people (Tongkul, 2002).

In a deeper sense, the Dusun Tindal embrace the understanding of the power of music to shape the positive atmosphere in their living environment and the music is known capable of influencing the emotions and feelings of people through the musical aura and atmosphere (Malas 2010). Therefore, in their tradition, they practice to cultivate musical sounds that can provide good, peaceful and harmonious atmosphere in their village. This musical concept was also promoted by Confucius in China around 400 A.D. (Confucius c1963). This philosophy is also found embedded in Japanese traditional music, Korean traditional music and Javanese gamelan music.

The gong ensemble provides different musical textures that combine the inter-locking rhythms, multi-layered textures, and *kulintangan* free-fold improvisational part that fall within the complex musical frame work of the gongs and *gandang*. None of the player is able to stand on his own without the supports of the other players. The unique musical nature is a result of the practice of unity, working together and mutual respect among the musicians. It is the wisdom of their ancestors to use the music to train their people to work in unity, humbleness and harmony. The ensemble may also provide a great strength that heightens the spirits of the villagers with its deeply resonating and magnificent metallic sounds, as if giving encouragement for the villagers to move on with their life problems and difficulties.

The villagers realize that music is also a reservoir in which musicians may be able to store and preserve their knowledge and wisdom about life and the world. Thus, every of their music pertains to deep meanings and their children are always taught to listen to the music carefully with their hearts and souls so that they are able to capture the true meanings and knowledge within the music. This is a technique as well to bring one to more profound and deeper levels to fully understand the meanings behind a piece of music.

Conclusions:

Dusun Tindal traditional music in Kampung Tinuhan is surviving, but yet it might be facing the fate of being substituted by modern and western popular music in the future. When the traditional musical culture dies, its heart of meanings will be lost as the concepts of new musical forms will take place.

The study has discovered that Dusun Tindal traditional music is a functional tool that serves their people. There are purposes for the music to be performed and practiced among the Dusun Tindal communities. The traditional music of Dusun Tindal also reflects the natures, thoughts, culture and life philosophies of their ethnic group. Moreover, the music stores the knowledge and wisdom of their ancestors about the nature, spirituality, inner qualities that help their people to maintain a harmonious and happy life. Happiness is the main purpose of their musical practices. What the Dusun Tindal people desire the most in their life is happiness, not only for themselves but for all their families and entire communities. They believe that happiness and peace are ultimately more meaningful and beneficial for their future generations.

Therefore, their traditional music has consequently structured in a way to cultivate positive values of harmony, happiness, unity and peace. Within the process of the positive cultivations via music, Dusun Tindal people have come to learn about their deeper inner human natures, wisdom and abilities. In other words, music practices have become a vessel that they use to attain deeper understanding and more meaningful cultivation of their own inner selves.

This is the main reason the older Dusun Tindal in Kampung Tenghilan strive to preserve their culture, musical tradition, language, values, etc. They hope that the invaluable wisdom in their old tradition would not be defunct but continue to serve for the good of their people to attain true long lasting happiness, harmony and peace, at the same time, to equip them with wisdom eyes to recognize the bad influences from the outside world so that it does not destroy their future generations.

Today, only a handful of young children in the village learn their traditional music and some groups of students in Tenghilan National High School are taught the traditional music instruments in the semi-modern ensemble, Bamboo Orchestra. Most of their young generations are likely to abandon their own ethnic music as they step into the modern societies and many of them have the least idea in their ancient philosophies of music and spiritual cultivation even though the old wise ones constantly give in efforts to tip in stories and experiences from the past during music playing and performances to lead them to understand the essential meanings of their traditional music. These older people express that they will not stop to educate the young children. Yet to them, the future is too far to be predicted and the young hearts are not easy to be controlled and shaped as the modern societies change drastically within blinks of eyes, and young children nowadays are very easily carried away by the powerful waves of societies.

Currently, commercialization and modernization is gradually irrupting the ethnic societies. In addition, the direction of the ethnic music in Malaysia is apt on tourist or economic benefits of making money. If this situation continues and not carefully controlled, the ethnic music would turn into money generating machines, and eventually result in empowering of the ideology of materialism and individualism among the ethnic societies. This would consequently jeopardize the well development of the values of humanities in Malaysia, especially in the ethnic communities. In other words, there is a danger there of losing the good values and knowledge within the ethnic music due to the wide penetration of materialism and commercialization. One of the examples can be taken from this study is that many of the Dusun Tindal young children in Kampung Tinuhan have started to look down on their own ethnic people and traditional culture. They have been stimulated in modern life to pursue for materialistic dreams in music, and for luxurious modernized lifestyles.

It has become the responsibility of elder Dusun Tindal to safeguard the soul of their music through the wisdom they acquired in their past experiences of life. To perform music without the true benefits to serve the good of their people will be likened to empty sounds that do not possess any power to win the souls and hearts.

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