

みんなくりポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

Myanmar's Nation-Building Cultural Policy : Traditional Music and Political Legitimacy

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Douglas, Gavin メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00001520

Myanmar's Nation-Building Cultural Policy: Traditional Music and Political Legitimacy

Gavin Douglas

University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Prelude — The Asian Fantasy Orchestra in Rangoon

As part of the ASEAN-Japan friendship year, the Asian Fantasy Orchestra (AFO) presented a concert, “Song for Peace, Song for Tomorrow” on June 20 and 21, 2003 in Rangoon (Yangon), providing a rare opportunity to observe a musical collaboration between foreign and Burmese musicians. The Japan based AFO is an ensemble that incorporates multiple Asian and global musical styles and a wide array of contemporary and traditional instruments (keyboards, violins, saxophone, bass, cello, *shakuhachi*, *fue*, *erhu*, *guzheng*, *bansuri*, *tabla*, etc.). Throughout the ASEAN Asian Fantasy Tour of 2003 the musicians met with local artists at each stop and arranged a number of collaborative pieces for performance on the night of the concert. The nature of the Rangoon collaboration revealed much about how both contemporary and foreign musics are situated in Myanmar's (Burma's) present musical landscape.

The first half of the concert began with the AFO presenting their diverse, well-rehearsed global fusion of contemporary and traditional sounds. An hour into the performance a traditional Burmese *saing waing* orchestra rose from the orchestra pit of Rangoon's modern new concert hall (a gift of the Chinese government) to play a few songs. Most of the AFO musicians left the stage except for four musicians (drums, keyboards, guitar and saxophone) who joined the Burmese *saing waing* for two pieces. The traditional orchestra and guests proceeded into *Myaman Giri*, a favourite nineteenth century classical song written by the most revered of Burmese courtly classical composers (Myawadi U Sa) and a second piece *Nagani* (Red Dragon) a 1930s well-known anti-colonial song composed by Shwe Dain Nyunt. The audience of 1,200 people immediately recognized each piece while the four AFO musicians played along with the melody that had earlier been transcribed into cipher notation. AFO musicians were not invited to manipulate the melody or improvise over the *saing waing*. Upon completion the *saing waing* orchestra descended back down into the orchestra pit and Tin Za Maw, a popular Burmese pop singer, joined the AFO for two Western cover songs by Cher and Laura Branigan. The Asian Fantasy Orchestra then returned to their previously planned program and finished the concert without further Burmese collaboration.

The Burmese contribution to this event, which sought exchange, collaborative creation and modern interpretations, was markedly antithetical; very well played

performances of pieces from the center of the classical canon and cover versions of non-Burmese popular songs, but nothing very new, innovative, contemporary or collaborative.

State Support of the Arts under the SLORC-SPDC Government

This type of performance, when available, is somewhat typical of state sponsored events in Myanmar. Court songs and anti-colonial nationalist anthems performed in a traditional style or cover versions of international pop hits being quite common, while contemporary composition and musical innovation being quite difficult to find. One could possibly infer from this event that artistic endeavors are not highly encouraged in the country although, in actual fact, state funding of the arts has increased enormously over recent years. Multiple state projects have provided more job opportunities for musicians in the last fifteen years than ever before (See Douglas 2001). Many of Myanmar's traditional arts (music, theatre, sculpture, dance and puppetry) have also, since 1993, enjoyed a rise in profile and increased access to government funding. Such support and patronage, however, is directed primarily toward the reconstruction and preservation of a pre-colonial heritage (pre-1885). Innovation, fusion and creation of original works of art are marginal if existent at all.

Since the 1988 pro-democracy uprising the SLORC-SPDC government (State Law and Order Restoration Council 1988-1997; State Peace and Development Council 1997-present) has abandoned the isolationist policies of Ne Win's BSPP government (Burma Socialist Program Party 1962-88) and greatly increased foreign trade, opening doors to both tourists and businessmen and releasing the country from its previous self-sufficiency agenda. Increased relations with the global community have been paralleled by a strong emphasis on redeveloping and protecting certain ideas of Myanmar culture. Many new state projects, point to a cultural defense that resists foreign cultural influences accompanying investment, trade, and tourism. Blue jeans and rock music are readily available now in the urban centers, and necessarily challenge the local traditions.

Increased funding of traditional culture also serves to manipulate and enforce particular definitions of "Myanmarness" and the state sanctioned meanings of nation and nationhood. Traditional culture patronage serves to create one official and uncontested national history and national culture, at the expense of many other local histories, and aims to establish a courtly authority to a government whose legitimacy has been suspect. Traditional culture of the nineteenth century Burmese court has become a primary political symbol for the current regime, replacing other long standing and perhaps more democratically useful symbols.

An increase in culture-maintenance projects establishes the regime as protectors of national identity warding off the immoral intrusions of foreign culture. Additionally, as the outwardly “new” regime (many of the present military council members were aides and subordinates of Ne Win) is ideologically rudderless new foundations of authority and legitimacy must be claimed. The SLORC-SPDC junta, out of necessity, ignores the country’s own most recent political history. Aung San’s independence struggle (1932-1947) and Ne Win’s “Burmese Way to Socialism” (1962-1988) both appear to have been replaced by symbols of the royal court found today in religion and the arts.

This appeal to national culture found in a surge of recent state projects is presented in quite a multitude of forms, including excessive religious patronage (Schober 1997), construction of new religious buildings and shrines, restoration and renovation of historic and religious monuments (see Covington 2002, Sheridan 2004), state sponsored academic conferences rife with papers on the importance of traditional culture (see Office of Strategic Studies 1997, 1998), revived equestrian festivals and regattas originally held to honour the king (Khin Maung Nyunt 1996), archeological excavations proving the early roots of humanity within Myanmar (Houtman 1999b), cultural performances, new museums in each of the states and divisions, and a wealth of other encouragements to all varieties of art (sculpture, painting, film, literature, etc.) and other codifiable abstractions of “traditional culture” (see also Houtman 1999a: 96, Nyunt Han 1997).

Within the music community three significant projects have begun in the last decade. The creation of the University of Culture, publications of standardized notations of the orally transmitted classical canon, and the advent of an annual performing arts competition are all projects that began in 1993 to regenerate or re-culturize the music of the country.

The University of Culture

The new Myanmar University of Culture (yin kye hmu tekatho) was created in 1993 and offers degrees in several of the Burmese traditional arts. In the decade following 1988 many of the country’s educational institutions were shut down due to fears of student motivated political activity. The closures of the schools left many students waiting to start or return to school and created an enormous backlog of university students. In the midst of these closures the University of Culture was created with a campus in the suburbs of Rangoon completed in 1996 and a second campus outside of Mandalay opened in 2001. Students who have passed the secondary school matriculation exam may enroll at this university for study in one of four subjects: music, dramatic arts (including dancing, acting, and singing), painting, or sculpture. Bachelor of Arts degrees are offered in all four disciplines and the

university has a consistently full enrollment of over 600 students. Nationalist rhetoric dominates the official discourse surrounding the university while little mention is made of the contributions the university makes to the understanding and/or creation of art. Teachers are instead admonished to “train their pupils to possess patriotism, Union Spirit, and conviction to preserve and promote national culture” (from a speech given by Senior General Than Shwe, quoted in Houtman 1999a: 102).

Entrance to the university is contingent upon passing the tenth standard matriculation exam. The university has an age restriction of twenty years as the oldest age that a student can enter. Such age restrictions allow for a window of only a few years after secondary school for students to enroll and also prevent older or returning students, those whose education has been interrupted by recent political events, from entering the University. Students are not expected to have had any training on a musical instrument prior to enrolling. Beginning group lessons are held for first year students on *saung* (harp), *pattala* (xylophone), violin and piano. Class requirements include courses on International (Western) music notation and history courses focusing on both the Western art music tradition and the Burmese court music tradition.



Photo 1 Students in a *pattala* class at the University of Culture (1999, photo by Gavin Douglas)

Additionally, the University of Culture operates on a dual-education system. Mandatory academic subjects (Burmese and English language, history, integrated science, geography and mathematics) supplement the cultural subjects (music, art, theatre, etc.). This dual-education system assures that the student achieves a base level of proficiency in the, arguably, more marketable language/science/mathematics skills by the time of graduation.

Myanmar's struggling economy has few resources to incorporate music and art programs into the primary and secondary schools and the few performance opportunities available to musicians are unlikely prospects after a mere four years of training. Despite this, the dean of the music school proudly claimed, "all students that graduate from this University are assured jobs" (personal communication, University of Culture, June 1999). Though some of the approximately 150 graduates a year apply for jobs as performers or educators at the state music school (Pantera Kyaung) and at the state controlled radio and television stations, most find work in government offices. In fact, all students of the University of Culture are guaranteed work in government ministries. Training in the basic academic (math and science) courses has provided the students with a sufficient basic education to work as civil servants in government ministries not necessarily related to the culture industry. Moreover, while most universities throughout the country were intermittently closed throughout the 1990s and sporadically in 2001-2, there is a need for a workforce with a basic post-secondary education here provided by a specialty university.

The university provides a curious contribution to Myanmar's music culture, as there are no opportunities for careers as teachers in the schools and no serious performance prospects (after only a mere three or four years as training). Given the confusing status the university has as a conduit for the music tradition, it has caused a significant, though quietly expressed, controversy within the professional music community. Interviews with senior musicians reveal strong reactions to the university. One senior musician that I interviewed regularly lectured at the university for little pay but substantial prestige. Despite this he claimed that:

...those students have no future as musicians at all!!! They are attending the cultural university not to be musicians. Their hobby is music so that they go to the University to pursue that. They actually have no future and the government has no plan for it... When someone gets a degree, a bachelor of music from the University of Culture... where will he go? He knows nothing about music.

Government emphasis on the symbolism of traditional culture, here institutionalized in an educational facility, with secondary regard for the transmission, evaluation and creation of art, has perhaps further marginalized Burmese music from its intended audience—the people of Myanmar.

Standardizing and Notating the Tradition

A second project started in the early 1990s is an ambitious endeavor to standardize and notate the entire repertoire of classical and modern classical songs. In Myanmar today we find an oral tradition still to be the primary mode of musical transmission. The texts of court-related classical songs have been catalogued multiple times in

versions collectively known as the *Maha Gita* (literally “Great Songs”). Scholars still meet regularly to edit and revise different versions of these texts that were first compiled during the last dynasty. The accompanying highly improvised music, unlike the prose, is passed down orally from teacher to student and, thus, multiple versions and interpretations of these pieces circulate. Today, committees formed through the Ministry of Information have been charged with standardizing and notating definitive versions of the Maha Gita songs as well as of the colonial period Khit Haung (Old Style) repertoire (approx. 1910-1950s).

By 1999 the first volume of Khit Haung transcriptions was completed. The majority of the book includes short one-page biographies of approximately seventy famous composers, followed by lyrics of well-known songs. Sixteen transcriptions of khit haung songs round out the book. Each transcription is reduced to a single melody with no harmonic support notated; both the chordal harmonization (common in colonial period songs) and the traditional Burmese style accompaniment are absent. The characteristic flexibility of Burmese rhythm is likewise rigidified into the confines of the Western notation system. These two most distinctive qualities of Burmese music—the two-part style and the loose floating rhythmic organization—are lost in the reduction of traditional and modern traditional songs into Western-style notation. That which is the most stylistically Burmese, and that which distinguishes Burmese music from its Thai, Chinese and Indian neighbours, has been lost in the translation. The irony of notating this oral tradition into Western musical notation—referred to as International notation—is further compounded by the fact that very few professional musicians know how to read it. Of those that do, none use it in their day to day performance and practice.

This new project, as described to me by members of the standardization committee, appears to be motivated by two goals, “to preserve the tradition,” and “to show foreigners how to play our music.” These two agenda (preservation and education) reveal potentially divergent goals behind the project, one codifying the essential elements of the piece and the style for archiving purposes and the other concerned with transmission to foreigners unfamiliar with the style. Clashing with these goals are the realizations that few musicians in the country have a working knowledge of Western (International) staff notation, and few foreigners are able to access any of the published volumes, written in Burmese, or any of the original 78rpm recordings. Nonetheless, as the military council has increasingly emphasized tradition, and their symbolic relation to it, they desire visual and tangible manifestations of their tradition embodied in these notations of “national” songs.

While few musicians voiced overt disapproval of the project each musician with whom I spoke admitted that such a document would never be used and that their value was more symbolic than practical. Such assertions echo the critique of Michel-Rolph Trouillot in his analysis of the power and the production of history

that these notations (or histories) may “be less what they assert than the fact of their assertion” (Trouillot 1995: xviii). What these standardization projects appear to have done is to raise the very question of what the Burmese tradition is. This question, denied from public discourse, was previously not asked, indeed, did not need to be asked. By raising the question the government and certain privileged musicians are able to step in and solve the crisis. As Attali writes, “the game of music thus resembles the game of power: monopolize the right to violence; provoke anxiety and then provide a feeling of security; provoke disorder and then propose order; create a problem in order to solve it” (Attali 1985: 28).

The Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition

The third manifestation of this music patronage is an annual performing arts competition. Since 1993 the Sokayeti (singing, dancing, composing and performing) competition has been held every October or November in Rangoon. Over one thousand contestants participating in a multitude of categories based on age, experience, sex, instrument, song genre, dance genre, as well as *yokthe* (puppetry) and Ramayana performances. The annual competition is held in the city’s four largest venues and lasts two and a half weeks (8am to 10pm every day). The event is energetically profiled in the state media and is patronized daily by the top heads of state in the country.

The material for the instrumental competitions is primarily drawn from the classical repertoire of the Burmese court (the Maha Gita) and performed on traditional Burmese instruments as well as a few Burmanized Western instruments such as the piano and violin. There are, additionally, two very large and extremely popular genres of Burmese rural folk music (ethnically Burmese), the *ozi* and *dophat* drum ensembles. Ideally, fifteen Judges are drawn from Rangoon and one from each of the fourteen states and divisions in the country drawing the total number of judges to approximately thirty. In reality this causes problems as the uneven distribution of knowledge in the country allows for certain judges to be thoroughly unqualified in their position. However, the symbolic representation of all corners of the country and the illusion of a democratic judgment overrides the quality control.

By organizing the contestants geographically one contestant from each of the fourteen states and divisions could, in theory, be present in any particular category. Geographical origins appear to be the most important factor organizing the contestants and are always prominently displayed for the media, the audience and the other players through a spoken introduction and from a sign announcing the state or division placed prominently in front of the performer. The ethnic minorities are strongly encouraged to wear their traditional costumes, which announce their

ethnicity in a dramatic and formal manner. The instruments on the other hand are without a doubt, symbols of ethnic Burmeseness with many, like the harp, having strong ties to the court. There is also a disproportionate amount of media attention paid to the ethnic minorities. During the nightly news coverage of the competition many minorities somehow enjoy a much larger percentage of time on TV than they do on stage during the competition.

In spite of the noted presence of ethnic minorities there is no opportunity for indigenous ethnic minority music. Since many of the ethnic minority musics have not been formally institutionalized, or are not perpetuated through a recognized training system, as the above state projects ensure, they are absent from the competition. A strict line is drawn between folk and classical music, between that worthy of national recognition and praise and that that is not. Not surprisingly, this line also falls across the officially constructed boundaries of ethnicity—between the Burmese ethnic majority and the multitude of ethnic minorities. The most popular events in the instrument performance category of the competition, however, are the *ozi* and *dophat* drum ensembles. These, as mentioned, are ethnically Burmese rural folk traditions usually found in festival contexts. Though they have vague ties to the royal court their traditional contexts lie in rural settings and they are not found in any of the institutions that teach music in the country.

Most evenings during the running of the competition the television stations run 5-15 minute articles showing the competition events of the day. By far the largest share of television time is spent on communicating which generals or ministers were present at any given event. In the case of Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, his daily presence at the competition, during my visits, was consistently the most reported event in both television and newspaper coverage. He is considered *the* patron of the competition and in addition to his many political titles is the Chairman of the Leading Committee for Organizing the Competition, and he also, notably, oversees committees at the University of Culture and even among the standardization and notation projects.

The immense amount of time Khin Nyunt spends attending shows, visiting with contestants (usually children), and moving between the venues is remarkable for a head-of-state who, one would think, would have other priorities. His visibility as the patron of Myanmar tradition and culture at large appears to intentionally connect a pre-colonial past to the present with himself in the role of King. The movement of Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt to the position of prime minister in September of 2003 has confused many Myanmar watchers. Knowing that the power holders in the country are those that are connected to the military Khin Nyunt's new position may be reduced to a ceremonial position if he is forced to give up his position as head of military intelligence.

Cultural Policy and Political Legitimacy

New institutions such as the University of Culture, tangible codifications of traditions such as song transcriptions and national events like the Sokayeti performing arts competition all contribute to establishing a central point of musical and cultural authority. As the dynasty fell over 100 years ago to the incoming British, court musicians were scattered throughout the country and the official institutions of patronage and musical authority were distributed amongst private clubs, radio stations, traveling drama troupes, foreign record companies and moderately funded government conservatories. Today's projects aim to reverse this fragmentation and to re-localize and re-consolidate a single voice of musical authority. The conception of large-scale music patronage at a historical moment in which government legitimacy is highly contested is additionally significant. In multiple public addresses, Khin Nyunt and other council members clearly state the nationalist and moral agenda of these culture projects and use the vantage point of tradition, and traditional music heritage in this instance, to attack political opponents like Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy whose actions are considered treasonous by virtue of their commitment (or portrayed lack) to traditional Burmese values.

...(I)t must be underscored that national unity has to be built firmer and more steadfast to be able to crush the external (and internal) subversives and destructionists (who are) driving a wedge to split Union spirit in order to dishonour national dignity. (Their) persuasive acts (designed) to tarnish the culture and traditions and weaken patriotism must constantly be offset by endeavours to preserve and promote culture and traditions. That is why the State Peace and Development Council has been undertaking tasks for (the) uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character, and today's Myanma Traditional Performing Arts Competitions play one of the most crucial roles in these tasks. (The New Light of Myanmar, October 2, 1998)

The SPDC's use of traditional culture is central to their goal of proving and establishing their legitimacy. Daily cartoons, such as the one above, posted in the New Light of Myanmar/Myanma Alin (English and Burmese) remind the public of the commitment held by the military regime to uphold traditional values and cultural ways. Yet, there is never any public venue in this closed society for a discussion regarding what counts for the nation's traditions and values. There is, thus, little or no debate, as to the usefulness of these various state projects in upholding and maintaining these "traditions and values."

In modern Burmese politics, legitimacy is still linked to the national independence struggle. The independence movement, however, has been inseparably associated

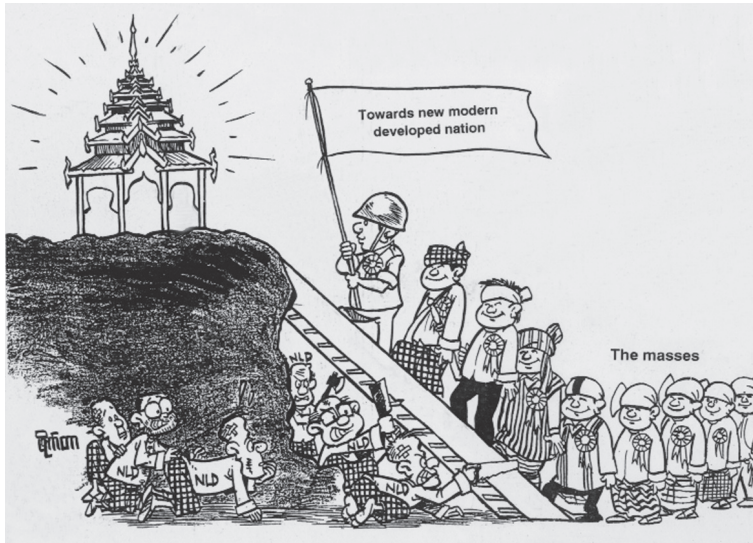


Figure 1 The Tatmadaw (armed forces) lead all citizens (and all ethnic nationalities—Burmese, Shan, Karen, etc.) towards the new modern, developed nation, represented here by a Buddhist pagoda, while the N.L.D. attempts to foil the progress. *New Light of Myanmar*, January 3, 1999.

with the political importance of General Aung San, the independence hero and father of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Prize winning resistance leader. Political legitimacy in the early 1990s depended on who could claim the heritage of Aung San (see Houtman 1999: 15-36), as it is through Aung San that modern Burmese ideas of nation, nationhood, unity and democracy have been translated. In Aung San's short life (1915-1947) he accomplished numerous feats that secured his importance as the national symbol for the twentieth century. He was an influential student leader in the 1930s when Burma's independence struggle began challenging colonial rule. He was the founder of the modern military Tatmadaw (army) that assisted the British in pushing out the Japanese during World War II. Aung San was the only leader capable of uniting the ethnic minorities in the crucial Panglong agreement that preceded independence. He negotiated independence from Britain after World War II. And, finally, he and many of his cabinet members were assassinated on July 19, 1947 on the eve of national independence (see Silverstein 1993). His martyrdom for the national cause made him a tremendously important political symbol to which all leaders since have had to appeal (or at least confront) for their own legitimacy. Prior to the pro-democracy uprising of 1988 Aung San's portrait was ever-present in government buildings and on the country's currency, and his name was bestowed on stadiums, buildings, playing fields, parks, schools and roads throughout the country. Yet today a campaign of replacing his symbolic power is underway.

The return of Aung San Suu Kyi to Burma in 1988, and her subsequent or “accidental” involvement in the democracy movement, led to a struggle over the rights to Aung San’s name. Who could claim his heritage: the ruling junta, or his daughter? Public opinion swelled in support of Aung San Suu Kyi as placards with her father’s likeness were ever-present during her early campaigns of 1989. “To countless thousands at her rallies she was the reincarnation, the re-embodiment of her father, who had picked up his fallen standard and was destined to complete his work” (Silverstein 1993: vii). In the months before the 1990 election, Aung San Suu Kyi, seen as a threat to the state, was placed under house arrest and the results of the May election were not honored (83% in favour of Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, the National League for Democracy).

In the years following, Aung San, in name and image, has slowly disappeared from the state press, from the political speeches that call for national unity, from the posters in government offices, from the national currency, and even from many school history books (sixth and seventh standard Burmese history texts don’t mention him at all). In the state press his name has even been excised from his daughter as she is referred to by the regime as “Suu Kyi,” “Mrs. Aris,” “The democracy princess,” and other denigrating names, but never as Aung San Suu Kyi.

With Aung San’s name central to the democracy struggle led by his daughter, the regime lost one of their most important political symbols and sources of legitimacy. Aung San’s double role, on the one hand, as representative of the emergent indigenous government (embodied now in his daughter) and, on the other, as representative of the protesting students against illegitimate foreign regimes, caused the SLORC regime inheriting power from Ne Win to rethink the way it positioned itself in relation to this political heritage. This re-evaluation led to a quest for legitimacy from other sources rooted deeper in the country’s past, namely the “traditional culture” of the monarchs prior to the arrival of the British.

With the military moving away from Aung San, effectively re-assassinating him, they have set in motion a process of what Gustaaf Houtman (1999a) has called “Myanmafication.” The regime has substituted Aung San with Myanmar culture. The irony of this Aung San amnesia and substitution with formalized, carefully selected “traditional culture” and symbols of the monarchy is compounded by the fact that Aung San himself strongly argued against reserving a central role for either “culture” or “religion” in the nation’s politics (see Silverstein 1993: 5). Today, Aung San is rarely mentioned in unity speeches given by top Generals Than Shwe and Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt on Union Day or Independence Day; instead the “preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage” is found in his stead.

By the early 1990s pressure from foreign nations increased and the legitimacy of the regime was in question. It was during this watershed year of 1993 that the

symbolic currency of independence here Aung San was lost to the regime and the junta responded with unprecedented development and re-construction of traditional culture. Political speeches that formerly appealed to Aung San's strength and leadership now substitute pre-colonial monarchical symbols. New projects such as historic building renovation, new museums, traditional equestrian and boating festivals, archeological excavations and a continued visibility of monastic support, with the three projects above, all further this end.

Arts Policy, Democracy and the Modern Developed Nation

The state patronage of court music in Myanmar is inseparably linked to the present historical moment and to the current political struggles of the country. The rhetoric of "tradition" used as a tool to discredit the opposition, the cultural marginalization of the ethnic minorities and the portrayal of Myanmar, to the rest of the world as a country with a legitimate (i.e. documented, institutionalized and tangible) body of traditional customs implicates much of this patronage into the SPDC's nation building and self-preservation strategies. It is interesting to note that all three of these new conduits of musical transmission—the University of Culture, the standardized notations, and the Sokayeti competition—are media that were not part of the historical reality of the Burmese court. Universities, texts and competitions are modern institutions that arrange and simplify the tradition in specific ways and can be found in most all late twentieth century nation states. In the Burmese case, however, the degree to which these new modern institutions are used to facilitate hegemonic control is exceptional. State-imposed simplifications, as James Scott asserts, are the basic givens of modern statecrafts (Scott 1998: 3). They make the world not only more legible, but also more controllable.

It is possible, that a future democratic government replacing the present junta would re-assess the value of the patronage projects and many could possibly disappear. All musicians interviewed by this author recognized that these events and institutions were problematically changing the tradition and that many of the projects were providing opportunities for the generals to strategically position themselves as keepers of royal tradition and as protectors of Myanmar heritage and Myanmar identity. Despite this, many agreed that there were more job opportunities for traditional musicians now than ever before. Many of the older performers look at the younger generation of musicians enviously, perceiving that the opportunities available today are far greater than they were forty years ago. However, though jobs have been created for some musicians and the profile of the traditional musician has risen, the wages for work still remain short of a reasonable living standard and most musicians involved in state projects are still forced to work secondary and tertiary jobs for additional income.

While job creation is essential to economic development, it appears, in this case, by focusing on a rather narrow interpretation of the heritage, to contribute to silencing the voices and sounds of other traditions (folk, popular and ethnic minority) and other variations (different interpretations and creative re-workings of the canon) found throughout the country. Standardization and unification of sound and style kills diversity. In practice, each of the three patronage projects discussed above contributes on some level to the standardization of sound and musical behaviour yet, in theory, each of these new institutions has great potential for raising the awareness of diversity—other traditions, interpretations, styles that are outside of the canonical and legitimized traditions sponsored by the present regime.

The University of Culture presently provides little opportunity for embracing, celebrating, or exposing artistic traditions outside of the canon yet the introduction of additional courses on ethnic minority traditions, folk traditions, popular traditions and other world traditions would greatly improve the awareness of how the classical canon is situated. While standardized transcriptions and notations of music are not used by practicing musicians the archiving or publishing of multiple versions of pieces would prove useful for scholars and musicians interested in the diversity across the canon (across genres, pieces and styles), provided they were publicly accessible. Notations of pieces have existed in the private realm for many years and have reflected the cultural and musical diversity of the country. The publication and distribution of the already present diversity and less emphasis on standardization would do far more to preserve the tradition than efforts to create definitive notations. The Sokayeti music competition finally, could offer, if not explicit events for ethnic minorities perhaps non-competitive performances or demonstrations to highlight and encourage the visibility of minority musics. Collaboration with foreign musicians and performances of collaborations during this competition time would also reflect a musical democracy that is presently absent from the country's institutions. Increasing the range of musical expression would undoubtedly contribute to the desire to make cultural traditions relevant to the younger generations whose eyes and ears are increasingly oriented towards the modern world outside of Myanmar.

It remains to be seen how the above projects will affect the culture of Burmese music. The value of this music tradition to its patrons appears to be ideological as opposed to aesthetic and geared to preservation of rule rather than preservation of culture. While many musicians agree that nothing is changing their situation faster than this attempt to preserve it the results and criticism are mixed, as job opportunities are more plentiful and the profile of their art higher than anytime before. But it is my sense that throughout the country many citizens are questioning the authenticity of this patronage.

Coda

Several days after I witnessed the collaborative concert with the Asian Fantasy Orchestra (June 2003), I met up with several musicians who were variously involved in the above projects (teaching at the University of Culture, judging at the Sokayeti music competition) but still in the early years of their careers. Hoping to passively observe a recording session of Burmese music that they were planning, I was intrigued when these musicians deliberately asked me to teach them a piece of music from a non-Burmese tradition with which I had some familiarity. Before I knew it we were all engaged in learning, recording, reworking and fusing traditional Burmese *saing waing* instruments with a couple of Irish jigs and reels. While the recorded results of our collaboration were curious to say the least, the aggressive interest in collaboration and exchange manifest by musicians in a private context was pronounced. Such intense interest in the sharing of musical traditions and musical vocabulary seems to be quite present in the private (at least in the urban centers of the country) but are quite peripheral to public state sponsored performance.

The marginal collaboration between the Asian Fantasy Orchestra and Burmese musicians, while representative of the government line on innovation and manipulation of tradition belies many of the inclinations of today's musicians who, in this author's opinion, yearn for exchange and collaborations and more artistic freedom within these new state projects.

References

- Attali, Jacques. 1985. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Theory and History of Literature Vol 16. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Becker, Judith. 1969. "The anatomy of a mode." *Ethnomusicology* 13(2): 267-279.
- Brandon, John J. 1998. "The state's role in education in Burma: An overview." In *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg, 233-246. Cambridge, Mass. Washington D.C.: The World Peace Foundation and Harvard Institute for International Development, Brookings Institute Press.
- Covington, R. 2002. "Sacred and profaned: Misguided restorations of the exquisite Buddhist shrines of pagan in Burma may do more harm than good (Photographs by Cameron Davidson)." *Smithsonian* 33(9): 80-90.
- Department of Fine Arts. 1999. *Yangon University of Culture: Curricula and Syllabus*. Yangon: Union of Myanmar, Ministry of Culture, Department of Fine Arts.
- Douglas, Gavin. 2001. "State patronage of Burmese traditional music." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington.
- _____. 2003a. "The Sokayeti Performing Arts Competition of Burma/Myanmar: Performing

- the nation.” *The World of Music*. 45(1): 35-54.
- _____. 2003b. “The Myanmar University of Culture: For patriotism and national unity.” *Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore* (Special issue on Cultural Policy and Traditional Performing Arts in Asia). 141: 261-281.
- Garfias, Robert. 1975. “A musical visit to Burma.” *The World of Music* 17 (1): 3-13.
- Houtman, Gustaaf. 1999a. *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy. ILCAA Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa Monograph Series No. 33*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.
- _____. 1999b. “Remaking Myanmar and human origins: An account of the role of pagoda relics and museum fossils in SLORC-SPDC concepts of nation-building.” *Anthropology Today* 15(4): 13-19.
- Khin Maung Nyunt. 1996. *The Seventh Myanma Traditional Cultural Regatta festival: November 20-23, 1996*. Yangon: Sub-committee for the compilation of a booklet in English on the Seventh Myanma Traditional Cultural Regatta Festival and an account of King Thayawaddy’s naval expedition to Dagon.
- Nyunt Han. 1997. “The role of the cultural sector contributing to national consolidation.” In *Symposium on Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to National Consolidation*, 155-74. Yangon: OSS, Office of Strategic Studies—Ministry of Defense.
- Office of Strategic Studies. 1997. *Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to National Consolidation*. Yangon: Ministry of Defense, Office of Strategic Studies.
- _____. 1998. *Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar*. Yangon: Ministry of Defense, Office of Strategic Studies.
- Schober, Juliane. 1997. “Buddhist just rule and Burmese national culture: State patronage of the Chinese tooth relic in Myanmar.” *History of Religions* 36(3): 218-26.
- Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Sheridan, Michael. 2004. “Burma’s junta ruins heritage to raise cash.” In *Sunday Times* (London), January 4, 2004.
- Silverstein, Josef. ed. 1993. *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, Revised edition. Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press.