



Rachel Lai

Abstract

This presentation builds on and contributes to works on national identity and Malaysian ethnomusicology with a specific focus on Malay gamelan. What happens when one lives in a country with a population that lacks a common religion, ethnicity, culture, or language? How can national identity be defined and experienced? For me, this represents Malaysia, a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic country working to achieve developed nation status by 2020. The racial, religious, cultural, and ideological diversity that had previously been a cause for celebration have turned into major blocks that have tripped Malaysia up on its journey towards achieving "first nation status". While usually percussion-oriented gamelan timbre can differ from region to region with some variations including local flutes, drums, and vocalists-variations of "localisation" of the gamelan take into consideration local cultures, and incorporate these local traditions into their respective gamelan ensembles. The gamelan, the focus of this presentation, and in the present study, is the Malay gamelan. Although studies have been conducted on the possibilities of using Malay gamelan to foster intercultural acceptance and national identity, these studies have mostly focused on teachers and/or teaching styles. There has not been an in-depth study that examines how learning the Malay gamelan contributes towards students' construction of national identity. Cultural identity is seen as a strong contributing factor towards formation of national identity. Nonetheless, while studies have looked at notions of cultural identity, values, and education, few have examined these intertwining concepts through music education, especially within a Malaysian context. As such, this presentation aims to share some insights into cultural identity construction between: (i) individuals in ensembles that hold strongly to the traditional "Malay" gamelan and (ii) individuals in ensembles that are open towards incorporating other cultures in their gamelan music.

Bio

Rachel is currently a first year PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. She completed a Bachelor of Music (Hons) for her undergraduate studies, and hopes to combine her love for music while contributing towards the development of a progressive education in Malaysia. She has a vision of Malaysia's educational potential to develop students as global citizens that are well-equipped to deal with 21st Century challenges.