

## Practice and Documentation of Collaborative Composition in Southeast Asia: A Response to the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Disaster

Makoto Nomura

### Introduction

Dear friends, welcome to the world of collaboration. I am a composer who has explored the various approaches to collaborative composition for more than 20 years. Ever since the nuclear explosion at Fukushima's power plants in 2011, Japanese people have been suffering from nuclear radiation. We have been discussing how we should avoid the possibility of an even worse situation. Most of those discussions are based on scientific evidence such as radiation measurements. Although I agree that scientific knowledge and its rational approach are undoubtedly necessary, I can't help but feel that something essential is still missing when we look at a problem only in this way. In such discussions there is little room for artistic intuition. My role in this situation should be to show an alternative solution to nuclear issues through music. As I was afraid that Japan would export nuclear power plants to Southeast Asia in the near future, I decided to involve Indonesian and Thai composers in my project. The methodology of this research was very simple.

- 1) interviews with collaborative composers
- 2) discussions about nuclear power plants
- 3) collaborative compositions in response to the interviews and discussions

In total I interviewed 7 composers<sup>i</sup>, created 16 collaborative compositions,<sup>ii</sup> and held 6 concerts<sup>iii</sup> and 22 workshops<sup>iv</sup> during my 3-month API research project. I created a website to archive and share these recorded interviews and collaborative compositions. Please listen to our compositions on the website<sup>v</sup>. Music must become more eloquent to be meaningful than this article. In this paper I am writing about our thought processes as we created our collaborative compositions. This article can work as a kind of bypass that crosses over the music intersection.

### 1 Our music

“How do you describe your composition style?” When I interviewed Thai composer/ethnomusicologist, Anant Narkkong (born in 1965)<sup>vi</sup>, I expected he would start his answer by saying: “My composition style is....” But in fact, he started his statement by saying: “Our composition style is....”. He interpreted the word ‘your’ as plural. Throughout my interview his reply was full of phrases like: “we create”; “our music”; and “our composition”. He didn't say: “my music” nor “my composition”! I suddenly realized that Narkkong didn't think of his music as his own possession but as shared property with his friends. In the Western music context, it would be very unusual for a composer to describe a piece of music as “Our composition”, because normally a composition is supposed to be created, notated and owned entirely by a composer. But for Narkkong it is more natural than to say “my composition”.



Figure 1: Anant Narkkong

Actually my original research plan for Thailand was to do a one-on-one collaboration with Narkkong because my stay in Thailand would only be for one month. I didn't think I would have enough time to include other collaborators. I thought that an intense collaboration with him had to be absolutely fruitful. That was why I told him: "I would love to experiment with you to create a collaborative composition because I am interested in your unique approach."

Although I intended to use the word "you" as a singular form, it was inevitable that he would interpret it in the plural form. Composition for him is something to be shared with his friends! It was very natural for him to arrange diverse opportunities<sup>vii</sup> to collaborate with many different kinds of people: school children; university students; dancers; improvisers; visual artists; and musicians from both Thai traditional and Western contemporary backgrounds. I did more than fifteen different collaborations in one month to experience what Narkkong described as "our music". This reminded me of how Peter Wiegold<sup>viii</sup>, an English composer, described his introduction to this collaborative approach in Indonesia:

"The formative thing for me was when I was in Java in 1981 and I studied the Gamelan for a month in Solo. At the end I was asked to write them a piece, which I did in their notation, a list of numbers, and two things happened that were incredible: first they scanned the numbers and they learnt them, you know, read a page: clocked it, this amazing determination not to have to use the page, ....but the second thing was as soon as we began working they said 'well let's have this at the beginning' or 'I'd love to do this here' and it was immediately our piece and not my piece. It was just natural co-operating working (Nankivell, 1999, p54)."

Narkkong also prefers involving his friends in the process of composition rather than composing in isolation, on his own, which is the Western way. That is why he always used the expression "our music", which is synonymous with what I call "collaborative composition".

## 2 Independence of music

I expected that at least one of the collaborations would be a song about nuclear power plants, but no collaborators suggested that we should make a song like this together. It was probably because they didn't want to use music as an activist tool to convey a specific message.

Let's take a look at my collaboration with Indonesian composer Wukir Suryadi (born in 1977)<sup>ix</sup>. Suryadi and I discussed nuclear issues, environmental problems, sustainable agriculture, education and so on, but he didn't directly apply our discussions to the music we composed together. He just took his self-made bamboo instrument and absorbed me in music.

At first I felt confused, but I followed him and devoted myself to communicating through abstract sounds without thinking of nuclear energy. Through this music conversation I was able to express my unconscious emotions. I didn't find any relation between our composition and nuclear issues because Suryadi just separated music from our discussions. He never tried to deliberately connect the music with what we discussed.



Figure 2: Wukir Suryadi (left) and the author (right)

When we composed a beautiful duet<sup>x</sup> on Javanese flute and melodica, Suryadi suddenly said: “This composition is beautiful. It sounds like an organic world in the future without nuclear energy. We should make another composition<sup>xi</sup> that should feel like the rapid development of modern technology.” That was the first moment when he connected our music with our discussions. He waited until our music spontaneously connected with social issues. He didn’t force it.

In order to apply such ideas to the music we tried another improvised musical dialogue, which became full of distorted noise and atonal harmony. Of course when we played, we just concentrated on sounds without too much thinking. Again, unconscious emotions turned up in the music, which was beyond language.

It is very important for composers to make music independent of logic and language. Composers should be patient and wait for the very essence of music to spontaneously come up from the subconscious. In this process we concentrated on the purity of music by forgetting about meaning. Suryadi subtracted the influence of verbal logic from our non-verbal collaboration. Narkkong also talked about this:

“I think music is very interesting phenomena. We cannot see music, we cannot touch music, but we can feel something. We can share, we can create something new, from early Bach’s time until these days 12-note still running and sometimes in very logical, scientific, sometimes nonsense, but we still call it music. Music will give us so many chances of creating, listening, communicating, and understanding. It is beyond language. I feel more comfortable to talk to Makoto and Kumikoxii through music rather than speaking. I mean sometimes I cannot think of the right English words but when we use instruments to communicate, it is as if we are in the same nation, the same family. (Personal interview with author, July 4, 2013).”

As Narkkong stated, music is beyond language. We shouldn’t consider music to be subordinate to

discussion. Music can play a different and separate role from discussion. If music that was created from a discussion, didn’t express anything else, it would not be more valuable than the discussion itself. Music communicates meaning that is beyond language, and expresses emotions and ideas that words cannot express. In music there is freedom to make illogical leaps in meaning and emotion. According to Narkkong, music is sometimes more eloquent than words. It might be the best way to tell the truth.

“Music is not just entertainment. It is always connected to social issues, religion, and human relations. So sometimes music can speak the truth better than any kind of government information or scientific knowledge. Sometimes people believe in numbers, percentages, but who knows if this helps us to really know if something is real or fake? (Interview with author, July 4, 2013)”

One of my Indonesian collaborators, Memet Chairul Slamet (born in 1958)<sup>xiii</sup> also added this:

“Finding a balance between logical thinking and emotion is important (Interview with author, 30 April 2013).”

In creative collaborations we should not forget to make room for emotional inspirations, illogical leaps in meaning, and madness.



Figure 3: Memet Chairul Slamet (right), Kumiko Yabu (centre), and the author (left)

### 3 Madness and composition

“You are crazy,” Suryadi said to me after a concert<sup>xiv</sup> in Malang. Because I was extremely moved by the intense discussion about nuclear energy with the audience, my performance was extraordinary emotional. It was considerably different from what we had rehearsed before. Of course we could have excluded such ‘madness’ from our composition by insisting on strict notation, but we didn’t want to do that because we preferred to leave space for deviation. When I asked how we should finish the piece, Suryadi said to me, “Continue to perform intensely until you use up your energy. Then stop.” In many kinds of traditional music there is room for madness, for example music that puts people into a trance-like state. Some Javanese compositions also open doors to the spirit world, allowing ghosts and madness to come in. If our compositions are too rational or too controlled, those doors will stay closed. Taking a precise and structured approach to music will keep the madness out of the music. Thai composer Narkkong talked about this when he told me:

“Rules are made to be broken. Music is alive not dead. It is always changeable. It is not an exhibit in a museum. Music is alive in our daily lives. Don’t fix music by making many stupid rules. Music should always be flexible enough to be changeable (Interview with author, July 4, 2013).”

When Memet Chairul Slamet started composing “Mat Sinamatan” in the rehearsal with several composers and me, he gave us oral instruction without any notation. As he often changed the structure, we couldn’t remember it. As soon as we remembered the piece, he changed something. I think he was trying to create tension by confusing us. He asked a performer to tell a story about the tsunami and the nuclear power plant explosion in dalang (the story teller in Javanese traditional shadow puppet) style. Although he brought a very rough notation for the last rehearsal, he didn’t follow the score. The piece certainly included madness, probably because all of us were struggling

to grasp the whole piece. That was just like the situation of panic after the nuclear disaster in Japan. Slamet told me:

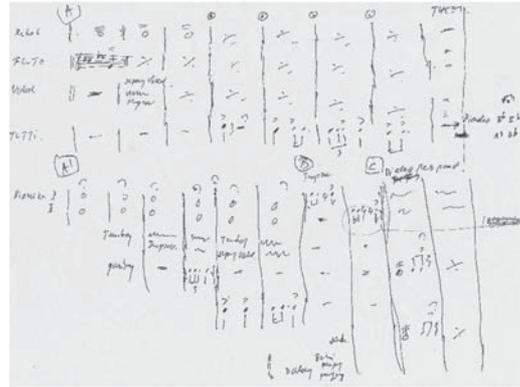


Figure 4: Notation of “Mat Sinamatan” by Memet Chairul Slamet

“The world is changed not by wise men but by crazy men (Interview with author, 10 November 2013).”

There are two different verbs to express playing music in Thai. One is “*len*” and the other is “*karn sadaeng*”. *Len* means to play and to enjoy, while *karn sadaeng* means to perform. Narkkong attached a lot of importance to “*len*” in music.

“*Len*” covers both fun and serious. We use *len* also with gambling, magic, tricks, sports, and even making love. “*Karn sadaeng*” is applied to a formal performance or a showcase. This is used more in modern/urban society when upper class and middle class people attend concerts or other formal artistic performances. It is a very official and academic kind of thinking for this word. (Email to the author, August 10, 2013).”

In order to include madness in compositions we might have to “*len*” with music rather than take the “*karn sadaeng*” approach. The spirit of “*len*” leads us to deviation.



Figure 5: Len music with students at Patravadi High School Hua Hin, Thailand



Figure 6: Recording at Khon Muang Radio Station in Chiang Mai

#### 4 The role of deviation in collaborative composition

Madness is a big deviation from conventions. Therefore confusion and deviation are effective ways to invoke madness in compositions. At a glance such deviation seems just a random happy-go-lucky approach, but it could actually be a firm methodology. Let's take a look at how my collaboration with Narkkong took sophisticated deviations. He and I communicated in English because I didn't speak Thai and he didn't speak Japanese. Of course English was our common spoken language, but we thought we could be more eloquent by using Thai and Japanese intonations.

Then we got the idea to translate language into music. Bee Thamnu Haribhitak from Khon Muang radio station<sup>xv</sup> told a story in Thai and Narkkong translated it into music. Although I didn't understand Thai, I could play the melodic, by following the nuance of his improvisations on the cello. If I had translated that music into Japanese, it could have been a translation from Thai to Japanese via music with wonderful misunderstandings.

After the experiment at the radio station in Chiang Mai, Narkkong and I improvised again using three languages at the same time at a venue called

“Zoo”<sup>xvi</sup> in Bangkok. While Narkkong played Thai instruments and spoke Thai and English, I played the electronic piano and spoke Japanese and English. We sometimes played together without understanding each other. We got inspiration from the intonation of each other. Words have their own melody and rhythm. Synchronicity happened from time to time. When I spoke of water to cool down nuclear power plants, Narkkong mentioned floods in Thailand. Sometimes music developed from meaningful words and sometimes words were derived from abstract sounds.



Figure 7: Improvisation with 3 languages at ZOO by Anant Narkkong (right) and the author (left)

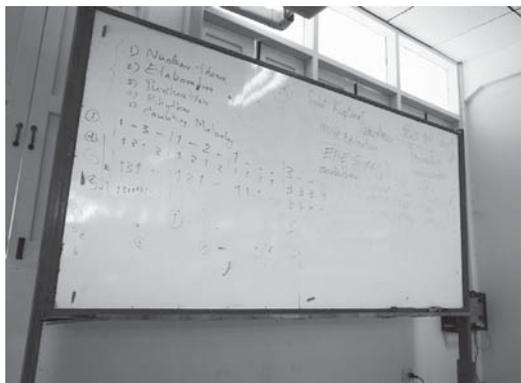


Figure 8: “Nuclear theme” on the whiteboard at Payap University



Figure 9: Discussion with Joe Bringkop and his students at Payap University

When we joined in the seminar by Joe Bringkop<sup>xvii</sup> at Payap University in Chiang Mai, Narkkong and I tried to intentionally misunderstand each other. We found the phrase “Nuclear theme” written on the whiteboard. I suddenly recognized that it indicated basic melody, in other words “*balungan*” of Javanese gamelan. But I deliberately misunderstood it and asked students: “A nuclear theme should be something related to nuclear power plants, shouldn’t it? Could you tell me what it is?” The students seemed to be perplexed but shortly afterwards they got into very intense discussions. Finally a student created a melody for it. We called it “Nuclear Theme” and we developed it further into a semi-improvised composition called “Nuclear Theme”.

Another case of deviation happened in the workshop at Thasala Primary School in Chiang Mai, which Narkkong and I facilitated. At first we exchanged Thai and Japanese songs. As he didn’t understand the Japanese lyrics, I explained the meaning of the first line, “The moon is out”. Then all of a sudden he asked me to tell a Japanese story about the moon. He translated my story into Thai and started an improvisational drama with the children that was based on the story. Then we improvised to compose music for the drama.

Another example of deviation was the collaborative composition “Komposisi Nasi”<sup>xviii</sup> with Memet



Figure 10: Children at Thasala School took part in collaborative composition

Chairul Slamet, Sunyata Pengrawit (born in 1959)<sup>xix</sup>, Welly Hendratmoko (born in 1989)<sup>xx</sup>, Gardika Gigih Pradipta (born in 1990)<sup>xxi</sup> and Kumiko Yabu. When we started the collaborative composition, we discussed how we could escape from nuclear radiation and realized that the spelling of “*radiasi*” (=radiation) was similar to that of “*tradisi*”(=tradition).

*radiasi* + t = *tradiasi*  
*tradiasi* – a = *tradisi*

Then we invented other words that rhymed with *radiasi* or *tradisi*. Then Hendratmoko suggested that each composer should present one word. We chose these six words:

*radiasi* (=radiation)  
*tradisi* (=tradition)  
*komposisi* (=composition)  
*nasi* (=rice)  
*basi* (=stale)  
*asi* (=mother's milk)

Then we created a basic *ostinato* (=repetitive phrase) from these six words. As noted above, we deviated from radiation to mother's milk via tradition, composition and stale rice. In fact the effect of nuclear radiation on mother's milk is a serious problem in Japan. It was surprising that Javanese musicians managed to find such an important example to express the contamination of nuclear radiation. It wasn't created through a rational discussion but instead by game-like phonemic associations. Deviation can be a kind of methodology to discover the truth.



Figure 11: "*Komposisi Nasi*" played by the author with Memet Chairul Slamet, Sunyata Pengrawit, Welly Hendratmoko, Gardika Gigih Pradipta and Kumiko Yabu.

## 5 Coexistence in music

Narkkong often makes use of this kind of deviation in his collaborative compositions. Why is it so important to him? Because it gives him another way to see the world. He also emphasised the importance of having a sense of humour:

"With humor we can look at the world upside down. If you see the letter "M" with a too strict or narrow outlook, you would

only see "M". But if you have a wider and more open outlook, you would see "W", "3" or "β" perhaps. So humor is a way to see the world from a different perspective. If you are too close to the problem, you cannot see the essence of it. OK, step away from it. Then you can see the bigger picture (Interview with author, July 6, 2013)."

To include madness in composition you have to make room for deviation. To deviate you must be able to look at a situation from different viewpoints. To discover different viewpoints you must have a broad outlook. To have a broad outlook you must cover a diverse range of knowledge. Therefore composers who can include madness in their compositions would have access to various fields in music, society, and whatever. For instance, Narkkong sometimes composes music for film, plays various Thai traditional instruments, and also plays both the cello and Western flute. He is not only a composer but also an ethnomusicologist. He is also a commentator on social issues for a radio programme. He described himself like this:

"My profession is actually an ethnomusicologist, a kind of researcher who links the anthropology study and music study. My research subjects are very diverse: from music of gay people, music of ethnic minorities, music of people who are in marginalized borderlines, changing of the traditional music in the modern societies, something like that. My interest expands to composition and I compose a lot of music for theatre work, for documentary movies, experimental films and I am also interested in sound installation. I have recorded many environmental sounds to make my own composition and give exhibition sometime. (personal interview with the author, July 4, 2013)."

This multi-faceted and multi-talented Thai composer also commented on the problem of specialization:

“The Industrial Revolution in the West created a division of labor. That was a problem. (Interview with author, July 3, 2013)

The division of labor certainly disrupts the deviation process by creating artificial distinctions that divide one specialized field from another. Perhaps we should change the word “university” to “diversity”. This would be a place where researchers with a wide range of personalities would attach greater importance to interdisciplinary research and promote more omni-directional projects.

Indonesia is a nation of diversity. It has thousands of islands, hundreds of ethnic groups and languages, and diverse music. Haryanto Taliwangsa (born in 1964)<sup>xxii</sup> described Indonesia this way:

“In Indonesia there are many kinds of music because there are so many ethnic groups. Indonesia has hundreds of races. But most foreigners only know about the ones in Bali, Java and Sunda. Who will see the music from other areas like Papua, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Sumatra? (Interview, April 30, 2013)”

Yogyakarta is a melting pot of different races. Naturally composers in Yogyakarta experiment to include a diverse range of ethnic instruments in their compositions. For example, Memet Chairul Slamet told me:

“In my composition I have combined different musical instruments from different cultures. But I didn’t focus on the cultural backgrounds they came from. I just chose those instruments because their sounds were attractive. I believe that difference produces beauty in music. (Interview, April 30, 2013)”

When Slamet composes for his group Gangsadewa, he normally mixes 5-staff Western notation, cipher notation, and oral instruction.

“When I work for Gangsadewa, I use two methods. In Western music only one composer can take the initiative to create a

composition. But normally in Indonesian traditional music many community members can have input in a composition. I use both methods. Although I prepare the structure and theme, we can develop further during the rehearsals. Before the rehearsals I don’t precisely write the score. I notate just a little bit. (Interview, April 30, 2013).”

Another composer, Yohanes Subowo (born in 1960)<sup>xxiii</sup> includes different instruments in his compositions, such as *gender* (Javanese vibraphone), *ranat* (Thai xylophone), *sanshin* (Okinawan banjo), *darbuka* (Arabic drum) and the Western clarinet. The tuning systems<sup>xxiv</sup> are totally different from each other, but Subowo succeeds in creating wonderful sound textures and his music has an intense energy. How does he achieve this?

“Different tuning systems and different scales are not a problem if they have at least one thing in common. To say nothing of the case when there are two things in common (Interview with author, May 6, 2013).”

According to Subowo different musical styles can coexist without any trouble if we have only one element in common. It can be a note, rhythm, tempo or whatever. His music doesn’t have a particular centre. If he sets Javanese music in the centre, Thai instruments would sound off-pitch. Western instruments would appear strange too. He just makes room for every instrument creating compositions without any defined centre. His approach comes from a cultural relativism stand point, rather than an ethnocentric one. This is a very helpful approach to consider, especially in Japan. I have often seen for example, how often people who are against nuclear energy end up divided just because some have slightly different opinions. As a result, the movement against nuclear power plants has become fragmented rather than united, which means it is much less effective. Since these people ultimately have quite similar opinions, why can’t they cooperate with each other? It’s probably because they set their opinions firmly in the centre, and just like

ethnocentric people, their focus on difference makes them blind to their similarities. Cultural relativism takes the opposite approach, by taking differences for granted and focusing instead on common denominators that encourage cooperation.

Looking for the greatest similarity was the starting point when Suryadi and I organised an event<sup>xxv</sup> at Indonesia Contemporary Art Network<sup>xxvi</sup>. We were worried that Indonesian audience might not be able to regard nuclear power plants as their own problem too, because Indonesia has never had a nuclear power plant and it also has enough energy resources. At first, it seemed as if Indonesia and Japan had nothing in common. Then we discovered one similarity. Wok the Rock<sup>xxvii</sup> suggested that the *Lapindo* mud flow<sup>xxviii</sup> in Sidoarjo was very similar to the accident in Fukushima and would



Figure 12: Discussion with audience at Indonesia's Contemporary Art Network

be familiar to any Indonesian. Indonesians could relate to nuclear victims through *Lapindo*, and Japanese people could empathize with Indonesia's *Lapindo* victims by comparing them to radiation victims.

## 6 New traditional music as an intersection

A young Indonesian composer, Gardika Gigih Pradipta, came up with a unique suggestion when he told me: "New traditional music<sup>xxix</sup> could be the solution." That was his response when I asked if he would collaborate with me on a composition

about the nuclear disaster. Rapid economic growth and technological development are happening in Indonesia and unfortunately one consequence of this is that some traditional cultures are on the verge of disappearing. This crisis should be a turning point for Indonesia. As a result of following the path of modernization, Japan experienced the accidents at nuclear power plants. Indonesia mustn't follow Japan. But then which direction should Indonesia go for? Just going back to tradition (neo-classicism) isn't the answer, nor is going further towards increased modernization (futurism). Instead, we should be able to see both the past (=tradition) and the future (=new) to create something new. That is what Pradipta is suggesting can happen if we apply this idea to music to create



Figure 13: Gardika Gigih Pradipta (left) and the author (center) playing a new composition at the 2013 Tembi Music Festival

something called 'new traditional music'. Most of his recent compositions have been based on ideas from Indonesian traditional music.

"I have tried two approaches. First, I mix traditional instruments with Western instruments. The second approach is to write for Western instruments based on Indonesian idioms, like applying the pentatonic scale to my composition. But the idioms or techniques are not very important to me. The most important thing is the spirit; the Indonesian spirit (Interview, May 9, 2013)."

Since the 2011 theme of “Festival Musik Tembi<sup>xxxv</sup>” was “New traditional music”, he had encouraged composers to create new traditional works from both traditional music and contemporary music, creating a dynamic interaction between the two. Welly Hendratmoko is also a promising young composer with a background in *karawitan*, a traditional form of Javanese music, He said:

“In 10 years the younger generation will play the gamelan not in the style of traditional karawitan music but by inventing something new”. (Interview, May 12, 2013)

How can we make traditional music new? How can we connect new music with tradition? Thai composer Anant Narkkong did it by experimenting with these approaches when he formed the contemporary Thai music ensemble *Korphai*<sup>xxxvi</sup> in the 1980s.

“When I started the group Korphai, I didn’t intend it to be an orchestra or a professional group. It was just a meeting point for friends from different schools and different music backgrounds. We shared something beyond music. Some members came from very strong traditional music families, but others were not from traditional backgrounds. Some came from rock, folk, and pop music backgrounds. A few members did not have any particular musical background, but they were just interested in Thai traditional musical instruments and wanted to make something meaningful. We met in 1983 when Thailand was celebrating the 100th birthday anniversary of Luang Pradith Phairoh (Sorn Silpabanleng), the great master of the Thai xylophone. This fantastic event was to honor the amazing composer and it inspired us very much”. (Interview, July 6, 2013)

As Narkkong mentioned, new traditional music works as an intersection, where many roads from different backgrounds are crossing to go in various directions. At such a meeting point, in order to find the way, different people need to interact with each other. “New traditional music” should be an open space for different people to share.



Figure 14: *Korphai* ensemble on stage at the Thailand Cultural Centre

Collaborative composition is one of the most effective ways to create more of these interactions.

## 7 New rule for discussion

Narkkong and I were stuck in a terrible traffic jam for almost two hours on our way to meet Chatchol Thaikheaw<sup>xxxvii</sup>, who is a *guqin* (ancient Chinese 7-string zither) player. Narkkong and Thaikheaw had organised a lecture on *guqin* for ethnomusicology students for that morning. In the afternoon they invited students to join an improvisational session. But Thaikheaw didn’t play the *guqin* in the session probably because the volume of *guqin* was too quiet. I suggested that everybody else should play his/her own instrument quieter than *guqin* because with this rule everybody could listen to each other. Then a student asked a question what scale he should play on. Narkkong answered that any scale could be fine if they played quieter than *guqin*. We tried playing with that simple rule. The result was really beautiful (we could hear all the sounds!). This was not only a successful example of collaborative composition but also a good suggestion for discussion. On the analogy of this composition we can discuss as below.

Rule: You can say any opinion unless you speak more loudly than the person who has the quietest voice.

Discussion with this rule may take us to another direction for nuclear disaster.



Figure 15: Chatchol Thaikbeaw played the guqin



Figure 16: "Field of Music" is 40m×8m land art by the author. Photo by YAMAMOTO Tadasu, courtesy of Aomori Contemporary Art Centre

## 8 New traditional life

Music is inseparable from daily life. It is an integral part of everyday life, such as weddings, playing games, cooking, walking rhythm, various environmental sounds etc. If music is related to life, "new traditional music" should be based on "new traditional life". What is "new traditional life"? Of course I am not approving traditional cultures 100%. For instance predominance of men over women is taken for granted in many of the traditional cultures, but of course I think we should change this tradition into equality between men and women. We should see both traditional life and new life.

I have been looking for more sustainable lifestyle especially after I experienced the nuclear accidents. For example I switched from electronic cookware to traditional iron kettle and earthen pot. I also started growing organic vegetables. Eating organic vegetables cooked using traditional cookware had influence on my sensitivity and physical sense. As a result it changed my music. My sense of music was absolutely affected by what I ate. This made me understand the meaning behind the Japanese traditional custom of fasting. According to Pradipta the main purpose is to strengthen the sensitivity by reducing the effect by eating.

"I carried out fasting for one week before the concert of my orchestra piece. I ate only before sunrise and after sunset. During the daytime I never ate. Why did I do it? The

reason was not for health nor for religion but to improve my sensitivity. It helped me to concentrate and focus. In the end I could conduct the orchestra with big concentration. (Interview, May 1, 2013)"

The purpose of fasting for him was to concentrate on music entirely. If that was the case, what could be new traditional fasting? How can we adapt this traditional custom for our contemporary life? For example many Japanese people are getting much information about nuclear radiation by internet because the information from mass media isn't sufficient. However dependence on the internet too much makes our sensitivity too paralyzed to do fair judgement. How about applying the concept of fasting to time spent of the internet? After shutting out the information from internet for 1 week, we will improve our sensitivity to find our own opinion. It will make us respond to the essential information more effectively.

I was an artist-in-residence in the summer of 2012 at the Aomori Contemporary Art Centre<sup>xxxiii</sup>. It is in a forest in the countryside, so I decided to cultivate a piece of land (8m x 40m) to make a vegetable farm as my new creation: a field of music. I made a huge musical notation, or 5 rows of 40m in which I grew various vegetables as musical notes. I think this idea can be applied to disasters, which can give us opportunities to think more deeply about our lifestyles. After the earthquake in Central Java in 2006, Indonesian

composer Suryadi was inspired to build a traditional Javanese house by himself. Why? Because he noticed that most traditional Javanese houses were not affected by the earthquake, only the many modern houses were damaged.

Supa Yaimuang<sup>xxxiv</sup> is the director of the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation in Thailand. She encourages city dwellers to create gardens on their balconies and their verandas. Even plastic bottles can be used as planters. Devising creative ways to grow vegetables is truly a good example of what a “new traditional life” could look like in cities. Inspired by her approach I created a work “*vege-tabla*”, for which I used a broken *tabla* (Indian drum) as a planter to grow vegetables.



Figure 17: “*Vege-tabla*” was shown at Art Space Niji, Kyoto in October 2013.

### Conclusion

Before I started this project, I was wondering how I could connect nuclear issues with music. However, my collaborators showed me that music should be independent of verbal logic. It has its own

distinct language that is beyond the ideas created by logic and words. Music has so much potential to solve our problems, and we should consult it to find alternative solutions. Logical discussion often makes our thoughts reach only one conclusion. It is a linear process. But music creates nonsense and this creative chaos allows our thoughts to explore all directions. That is why music can be considered as a kind of safety device that can protect us when the logical mind takes us in the wrong direction. As Slamet mentioned, achieving a balance between logic and emotion is essential. The balance between notation and improvisation is also important. To attain this balance in their collaborative compositions, Indonesian and Thai composers make room for creative madness in music by devising unique approaches to notate music, which performers can interpret in their own ways. They often attach importance to deviation to guarantee the freedom of expression in the composition process. Deviation can only occur when composers have a broad outlook and include diversity in their music culture. That broad outlook must be able to embrace traditions from the past and modern culture to take us into the future. Since Japanese attached much more importance to economic growth than to its own and other traditional cultures, we have suffered from nuclear accidents. Japanese people should have recognised the importance of respecting traditional wisdom as we rushed into the development of technology. One way to achieve a balanced coexistence between technological growth and traditional culture is to adopt Pradipta’s idea and explore the concept of “New Traditional Music”. This “New Traditional Music” should also be based on a “New Traditional Life”. Then we should explore this “New Traditional Life” in order to make “New Traditional Music”.

Although I am using words in this paper to reach a conclusion, at the same time I wish my words in many directions. If we limit the value of music, we can only go in one direction. However, if we allow music the freedom to embrace and celebrate diversity, it will open doors for us that can take us in all directions. This reminds me of a quote by Harry Partch (1901-1974)<sup>xxxv</sup>, which John Paynter (1931-2010)<sup>xxxvi</sup> told me about when I was researching collaborative composition with children in the UK on a British Council Fellowship:

“When things are hopping: THE BIG WORLD, lots of excitement, few rules, no analysis.

When things are not hopping: the little world, small in excitement, many rules, UTTER ANALYSIS! (Personal conversation, June 1995).”

I should ask myself questions which have infinite answers. What is the meaning of music? What is the meaning of life? Why do we enjoy music? Let’s quote Narkkong when he explained the meaning of his group “*Korpha*”:

“We also followed a great monk, Buddhadasa, who was also an intelligent philosopher. The name Korpha came from him. Phai means bamboo. You won’t find anything inside bamboo. Music brings you to emptiness, to inner peace or ‘nirvana’ (Interview with author, July 6, 2013).”

Through music we can experience infinity and emptiness. Perhaps emptiness is another way of defining infinity. Let’s quote another visual artist, Arahmaiani Feisal (born in 1961), who is also an environmental activist. When I was composing with Suryadi at his house, she came in. We stopped playing and talked with her about nuclear issues and environmental problems for two hours. At some point she finally said to me:

“Being negative does not produce good results and being too theoretical is not effective. Enjoying a positive approach to life is what is most important (Personal conversation, May 7, 2013).”

Yes, we should enjoy our “New Traditional Positive Life”. Then we can enjoy “New Traditional Positive Music”. As Narkkong said:

“When you love each other, there is no war! We have no need to fight. In the same way, through music we share the same heartbeat, the same breath, and not just the same notes. Maybe collaboration for us goes beyond making music. It is about being able to reach an understanding between different people. We discover the present, not the past or the future (Interview with author, July 4, 2013).”

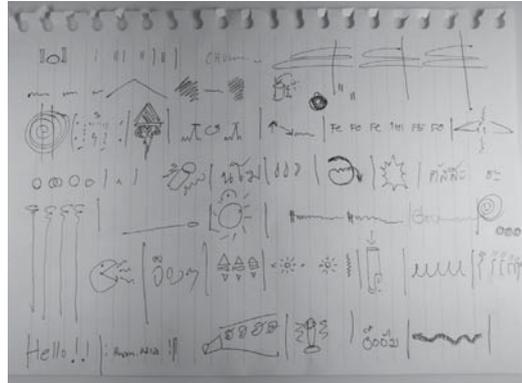


Figure 18: Notation of collaborative composition with students at Silpakorn University

Discover the present. Let’s see what is going on in front of ourselves. And enjoy a “New Traditional Positive Life”. Let’s open doors to the big world, in all directions, including past and future; East and West; reason and madness. And I had better stop my stupid writing. Now is the time for me to open doors to communicate with you. Shall we take a step towards another kind of “new collaboration” as I share this paper with you?

#### NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Gardika Gigih Pradipta, Haryanto Taliwangsa, Memet Chairul Slamet, Yohanes Subowo, Michael Asmara, Welly Hendratmoko, and Anant Narkkong

<sup>ii</sup> “lagu angin”, “dialog antara mesin dan lele”, “Ikanpun mempunyai nuklir” with Wukir Suryadi, “Musik Tradisi baru” with Gardika Gigih Pradipta, “Halo ikan”, “5”, “untitled”, “Komposisi Nasi”, “Mat Sinamatan” with Memet Chairul Slamet, Gardika Gigih Pradipta, Welly Hendratmoko, Sunyata Pengrawit and Kumiko Yabu. “Quiter than guqin” with Anant Narkkong, Chatchol Thaikheaw, “Sand” with students of Songkhla Rajabhat University, “Nuclear theme” with Anant Narkkong, Joe Bringkop and students of Payap University, “with untranslated story” with Anant Narkkong, Kumiko Yabu, “Shogi Composition” with students of Silpakorn Univeristy, “The Sounds of Zoorasia” with Anant Narkkong, Kumiko Yabu, Jean-David Caillouet, Watchara Pluemyart, and an untitled song with Anothai Nitibhon and children at Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music

<sup>iii</sup> At Malang on May 15, at Tembi Rumah Budaya on May 24, at Tembi Rumah Budaya on June 16, at Silpakorn University on June 19, at Chaing Mai University on July 5, and at ZOO on July 6.

<sup>iv</sup> At the faculty of ethnomusicology, ISI Yogyakarta on April 30, at postgraduate seminar, ISI Yogyakarta on May 1, at the faculty of western music, ISI Yogyakarta on May 2, at graduate school ISI Yogyakarta on May 5, at postgraduate seminar, ISI Yogyakarta on May 8, at graduate school ISI Yogyakarta on May 12, at Gelery Malang Bernyani on May 15, at graduate school ISI Yogyakarta on May 26, at Indonesia Contemporary Art Network on June 8, at Buddhadasa Indapanno Archives on June 21, at Thaikheaw's house on June 23, at Patravadi Hish School Hua Hin on June 24, at Songkhla Rajabhat University on June 26, at Silpakorn University on June 29, at Silpakoen University on July 2, at Payap University on July 3, at Art Gallery Minimal on July 3, at Thasala Primary School on July 5, at Chiang Mai University on July 5, Silpakorn University on July 6, and at Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music on July 11

<sup>v</sup> [asiancomposers.jimdo.com/](http://asiancomposers.jimdo.com/)

<sup>vi</sup> Anant Narkkong was born in 1965. After earning his B.F.A. in Thai Music from Chulalongkorn University, Anant went to SOAS, University of London for his M.Phil study in Ethnomusicology. His comprehensively journeys in Southeast Asia countries, both mainland and islands made his acquaintance into Musical Cultures of this area. He founds a fusion music group *Korpbai* (a bunch of Bamboo) which internationally renowned for its excellent rendition of Thai Classical Music as well as Thai Contemporary Music. Other of his interests in music are improvisation performance, soundscape, fieldwork recordings and sound installations. Now he works at the Faculty of Music, Silpakorn University as a lecturer in Ethnomusicology, World Music, and Composition subjects. He hosts a weekly radio program in Thai music at the Thailand National Radio Broadcasting and has published a large number of articles in Musicology — Cultural Anthropology area for newspaper and monthly magazines.

<sup>vii</sup> In fact during only 1 month in Thailand I did 3 concerts, 4 lectures, 9 workshops and a recording session.

June 19: a concert at Silpakorn University

June 21: a meditation workshop at Buddhadasa Indapanno Archives

June 23: an improvising sessions with a guqin player

June 24: a workshop for students at Patravadi Hish School Hua Hin

June 26: a workshop for traditional music students at Songkhla Rajabhat University

June 29: a lecture for composition students at Silpakorn University

July 2: a workshop and a lecture for music students at Silpakoen University

July 3: a workshop for world music class at Payap University

July 3: a lecture at Art Gallery Minimal

July 4: a recording for radio station

July 5: a workshop at Thasala Primary School

July 5: a concert and a lecture at Chiang Mai University

July 6: a workshop at Silpakorn University

July 6: a concert at ZOO

July 11: a workshop for children at Princess Galyani Vadhana Institute of Music

<sup>viii</sup> Peter Wiegold is an English composer. He is a professor at Brunel University in London, UK.

<sup>ix</sup> Suryadi was born in Malang, and both works and lives in Yogyakarta. He is a self-taught composer/musician/instrument-maker who had already started his career as a musician at the age of 12. Bambu Wukir is the product of a unique fusion of an ancient Javanese tradition with an onslaught of contemporary noise. The original instrument is shaped like a bamboo spear and utilizes both percussive strings carved from the bamboo's skin, and melodic steel strings, bringing together elements of traditional Indonesian instruments with garage guitar distortion. Schooled in the theatre, Wukir Suryadi brings theatrical ruckus to the classical stage, plucking, strumming and bowing his way from peaceful meditations to rhythmical frenzies.

<sup>x</sup> This piece was named "*Lagu Angin*", which translates as: song of wind.

<sup>xi</sup> "Dialog antara mesin dan lele" (Dialogue between a machine and a catfish).

<sup>xii</sup> Kumiko Yabu is a percussionist/composer.

<sup>xiii</sup> Memet Chairul Slamet is a composer and a lecturer at the faculty of western music, ISI Yogyakarta.

<sup>xiv</sup> On May 15, 2013 at Gelery Malang Bernyani

<sup>xv</sup> [www.khonmuang.org](http://www.khonmuang.org)

<sup>xvi</sup> "Zoo" was run by composer Jean-David Caillouet. The concert was on July 6, 2013.

<sup>xvii</sup> Composer/ethnomusicologist and lecturer at Payap University.

<sup>xviii</sup> This piece was first performed at the museum of Tembi Rumah Budaya on June 14, 2013. It was one of five new collaborative compositions performed at the concert.

<sup>xix</sup> Sunyata Pengrawit is a lecturer at the Faculty of Traditional Music, ISI Yogyakarta.

<sup>xx</sup> Welly Hendratmoko was born in 1989. He studied at the Faculty of Traditional music, ISI Yogyakarta. He has composed several innovative compositions for the gamelan.

<sup>xxi</sup> Gardika Gigih Pradipta was born in 1990. He studied composition at the Faculty of Western Music at ISI, Yogyakarta. Ever since 2011, when he participated in a collaborative composition which was directed by Tomoko Momiyama, he has been active in the field of improvisation and collaborative composition. He currently works as a researcher at *Tembi Rumah Budaya* (Tembi Cultural House) and researches various kinds of traditional music in Indonesia and also applies his research to compositions for orchestras, chamber music, music for theatre, etc.

<sup>xxii</sup> Haryanto Taliwangsa is a composer and ethnomusicologist. He teaches at the Faculty of Ethnomusicology, ISI Yogyakarta.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Yohanes Subowo is a composer. He teaches at the Faculty of Dance, ISI Yogyakarta.

<sup>xxiv</sup> One octave is divided into seven equal intervals in Thai music, five equal intervals in Javanese music and twelve equal intervals in Western music.

<sup>xxv</sup> [canmanage.net/wips-juni-2013-makoto-nomura-wukir-suryadi](http://canmanage.net/wips-juni-2013-makoto-nomura-wukir-suryadi)

<sup>xxvi</sup> [canmanage.net](http://canmanage.net)

<sup>xxvii</sup> Wok the Rock was born in 1975. By crossing over the fields of visual arts and music, the work of Wok the Rock reveals the influence of new media and technology on Indonesian culture. <http://www.koganecho.net/koganecho-bazaar-2013/info/english.html>

<sup>xxviii</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidoarjo\\_mud\\_flow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidoarjo_mud_flow)  
The Sidoarjo mud flow or Lapindo mud (informally abbreviated as Lusi, a contraction of Lumpur Sidoarjo wherein lumpur is the Indonesian word for mud) is the result of an erupting mud volcano in the subdistrict of Porong, Sidoarjo in East Java, Indonesia that has been in eruption since May 2006. It is the biggest mud volcano in the world; responsibility for it was credited to the blowout of a natural gas well drilled by PT Lapindo Brantas, although some scientists and company officials contend it was caused by a distant earthquake. At its peak Lusi spewed up to 180,000 m<sup>3</sup> of mud per day. By mid August 2011, mud was being discharged at a rate of 10,000 m<sup>3</sup> per day, with 15 bubbles around its gushing point. This was a significant decline from the previous year, when mud was being discharged at a rate of 100,000 cubic metres per day

with 320 bubbles around its gushing point. It is expected that the flow will continue for the next 25 to 30 years. Although the Sidoarjo mud flow has been contained by levees since November 2008, resultant floodings regularly disrupt local highways and villages, and further breakouts of mud are still possible.

<sup>xxix</sup> Thitipol Kanteewong mentioned the similar concept “neo-traditional music” in his paper “Changing Identities of Japanese Traditional Music in Twenty First Century” pp.216-225 “The work of the 2009/2010 API Fellow—Understanding Confluence and Concentrations, Continuities and Changes”

<sup>xxx</sup> See the report: [www.tembi.net/id/news/berita-budaya/festival-musik-tembi-2011-pagelaran-musik-tradisi-sihir-penonton-1437.html](http://www.tembi.net/id/news/berita-budaya/festival-musik-tembi-2011-pagelaran-musik-tradisi-sihir-penonton-1437.html)

<sup>xxxi</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korphai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korphai)

*Korphai* Ensemble is an ensemble of traditional Thai percussion music. *Korphai* literally means a ‘bunch of bamboo’. The group plays Thai classical music, or *piphat*, as well as Thai contemporary music. Throughout the past 20 years, *Korphai* has released a number of albums and performed in numerous public concerts in Thailand, including a performance with the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra. The group has also performed abroad, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Paris, Amsterdam and Berlin. The group is also involved in composing music for Thai documentary and experimental films, theatre productions, plays, and international festivals, such as “Thai Percussion Days 2004” (Vienna). Their music is featured in two famous Thai films: *The Legend of Suriyothai* (2001) and *The Overture* (2004). *The Overture* won the Best Music Award at Thailand’s version of the Academy Awards and *Korphai* was a co-recipient of a Star Entertainment Award 2004 and the Bangkok Critics Assembly Awards. In 2005, at the concert dedicated to the 55th anniversary of Thai-Cambodian diplomatic relations at the Chaktomuk Theatre, the performance of the Bangkok Post reported that the *Korphai* ensemble “won accolades from members of Cambodian royal family”, Bangkok Post reported.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Chatchol Thaikheaw studied guqin when he studied Chinese literature in China.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> [www.acac-aomori.jp](http://www.acac-aomori.jp)

<sup>xxxiv</sup> [www.api-fellowships.org/body/profile\\_detail.php?usr\\_id=166](http://www.api-fellowships.org/body/profile_detail.php?usr_id=166)

<sup>xxxv</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry\\_Partch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Partch)

<sup>xxxvi</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Paynter\\_\(composer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Paynter_(composer))

**REFERENCES**

Nankivell, Hugh E. 1999. Group Composition: A Relevant and Practical Model for use in the Primary School Classroom. Huddersfield, UK: unpublished Huddersfield University MPhil Thesis.

Kanteewong, Thitipol. 2010. Changing Identities of Japanese Traditional Music in Twenty First Century. The Work of the 2009/2010 API Fellows –Understanding Confluence and Concentrations, Continuities and Changes: Towards Transforming Society and Empowering People. The Nippon Foundation, pp.216-225.

Nomura, Makoto. 2013. The Practice and Documentation of Collaborative Composition in Southeast Asia Project Website. [asiancomposers.jimdo.com](http://asiancomposers.jimdo.com)