

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: Lingnan University

**Unit of Assessment (UoA): 35 - Area Studies (e.g. Japanese studies, European studies, etc.),
Cultural Studies and other Arts/Humanities**

**Title of case study: Impact of India-China Musical Collaboration on Artists, Curators, and
the Public**

(1) Summary of the impact

The research on the social history of Indian music, conducted between 2012-2017, inspired a performance-based project of India-China musical collaboration and comparative historical analysis. The PI, cultural studies and music research expert Tejaswini Niranjana, addresses the gaps in current scholarship as well as in musicians, curators, and audiences' reception of Indian and Chinese music. While the two cultures' musical crossing dates back to the 6th century, colonialism and the formation of modern nations have impeded further hybridization, producing misleading knowledge about Indian and Chinese musical cultures as isolated from each other. With new insights into the intimacy of the China-India musical connection, performers have discovered new and different ways of multicultural musical collaboration. It also influenced curators to welcome non-West/non-Euro-American collaborative performances to their spaces, thus bringing diversity to programming in the arts in India, Hong Kong, and China. Finally, the music-loving public in these locations, which was mostly unaware of the possibilities of Chinese-Indian music collaboration, benefitted from several performances in India and greater China, which led to a higher level of appreciation for this kind of intercultural music.

(2) Underpinning research

The research, which started in 2012, explores how urban dwellers in India became passionate about Hindustani classical music in the 20th century. It traces the place of Hindustani classical music in Mumbai as the city transformed itself from a seat of British colonial power into a vibrant postcolonial metropolis. (s3.2) Drawing on historical archives, newspapers, oral histories, and interviews with musicians, critics, students, and instrument makers, as well as her own personal experiences as a student of Hindustani classical music, Niranjana shows how the widespread love of music throughout the city created a culture of collective listening that brought people of diverse social and linguistic backgrounds together. This culture produced modern subjects she calls musicophiliacs, whose subjectivity was grounded in a social rather than an individualistic context. (s3.3) By attending concerts, learning instruments, performing at home and in various urban environments, musicophiliacs embodied forms of modernity that were distinct from those found in the West. By embracing Hindustani classical music, Indians from that era were presenting the past, including heritage music, as part of their modern identity. In laying claim to a seemingly ancient civilisation even as they become modern, they were asserting their difference from the 'West'. Learning the music also allowed them to assert a national identity and culture. (s3.4) Historians, anthropologists and musicologists have written about Hindustani music in India, but Niranjana creates a new interpretive framework with concepts such as 'musicophilia' and 'the social subject' to address the role of music.

A number of academic outputs were produced by this research [s 3.1-3.4], including a documentary film, two articles, and a book monograph. The findings were disseminated at 11 public talks between 2016 and 2018 in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Bangalore, Beijing, and Kochi, including a plenary lecture at the 2018 Association of Cultural Studies bi-annual conference held

at the University of Shanghai, a well-attended lecture at the Kochi-Muziris Art Biennale 2018, and another at the 11th Shanghai Biennale 2016. The research also received the 2017 Humanities and Social Sciences Prestigious Fellowship from the Hong Kong Research Grants Council, worth \$141,000 (one of 5 awards out of 20 applications).

Having identified music's role in creating modern identities in India, Niranjana decided to extend the research in 2016 to a comparison between India and greater China, to explore whether music had played a similar role in the Chinese context. Modern nation states have promoted nationalized and isolated traditions of music. As a result, the vibrant inter-connections evidenced by shared traits in improvisational methods, lyric tonality, and harmonic structures have all but disappeared. The lack of cultural connection is part of a larger disconnect in the world of geopolitics between two parts of Asia with shared histories. Here, the transregional historical connections date back at least to the 6th century. Niranjana approached 3 Indian vocalists, one Cantopop lyricist, a Yangqin player, a pipa player, and a Chinese folk singer, to respond to the questions she presented to them about Indian and Chinese musical forms and their histories. They answered by creating new performative styles that challenged the boundaries of these music traditions.

Outputs: The video installation 'Riyaaaz' (created by PI Tejaswini Niranjana and film director Surabhi Sharma), exhibited at the 11th Shanghai Biennale (2016), foregrounded issues of listening and pedagogy. 361,554 people visited the Biennale that year, and the video has been acquired for the permanent collection of the Biennale host, Shanghai's Power Station of Art (PSA). Three Indian singers performed in a collateral event inside the Biennale venue in November 2016 and jammed with a Chinese instrumentalist.

The PI's research challenged the musicians to create India-China connections through

- Putting lyrics in Cantonese and Mandarin into Indian melodic forms
- Playing Indian compositions on Chinese instruments
- Rendering Indian melodies in kunqu Chinese operatic style
- Juxtaposing Cantonese opera with Marathi-language musical theatre.

(3) References to the research

3.1) *Returning to the First Beat*, directed by Surabhi Sharma, produced by Surabhi Sharma and Tejaswini Niranjana. 2017.

3.2) Niranjana, Tejaswini. 2018. "Musicophilia and the lingua musica in Mumbai." *Cultural Studies* 32 (2): 261-85.

3.3) Niranjana, Tejaswini. 2018. "DEEWAANA (the mad one): the lover of music." *Cultural Studies*. DOI: [10.1080/09502386.2018.1509222](https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2018.1509222)

3.4) Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Musicophilia in Mumbai: Performing Subjects and the Metropolitan Unconscious*. Durham: Duke University Press; New Delhi: Tulika Books. (Accepted in December 2018; Forthcoming in February 2020)

(4) Details of the impact

Impact of the original research on Mumbai

"Beautifully written, *Musicophilia in Mumbai* will set the standard for new waves of scholarship on Hindustani music and India's other classical traditions", says UCLA Professor Anna Morcom, author of *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance: Cultures of Exclusion*. [s5.1]

Impact on the creative process of Indian and Chinese performers

The project shows how Chinese and Indian musicians changed the way they make music, through collaborative musical compositions, instrumental adaptations, and new lyrical content. 21 artists across different performance genres and geographical locations participated in the collaborative project between 2016 and 2019. Award-winning Hong Kong-based songwriter Chow Yiu-Fai, for example, learned new ways of composing to adapt Cantonese lyrics to Hindustani music, leading him to experiment with different rhymes, word choices, and musical content: *“I learned from the possibilities [that have been] opened up by the Hindustani musical traditions and practices, new paths for me write in Cantonese Chinese”* [s5.2]. In terms of the collaborative composition and instrumental adaptation, Chinese musician Ip Kimho *“explored how to expand the possibilities of playing Indian Raga composition on a Chinese instrument. This includes unconventional tuning and incorporation of improvisational techniques on the Yang Ch’in [a Chinese hammered dulcimer]”* [s5.3]. Ip participated in five concerts and a workshop (attended by approx. 650) in which he demonstrated what he had learned. Nationally acclaimed Hindustani vocal performer Rutuja Lad, commented on her new found understanding of musical collaboration: *“Working with Chow Yiu Fai’s Cantonese poetry and musical exchanges with Ip Kimho have given me a chance to create a different set of melodic expressions than those conventionally available in Indian music”* [s5.4]. As a direct result of this project, Ip and Havaladar are collaborating in 2019 in writing a first-ever guide (50% completed) to performing Indian music on Chinese instruments. The concerts to be heard on <http://saathsaathmusic.com/> are evidence of the impact the musicians have had on each other.

Impact on West/Eurocentric framework of galleries and art spaces

Performances that combine Indian and Chinese elements are unusual in galleries and art spaces in Asia. Only since 2016 have performances of that type have been presented in India, Hong Kong and China. The project brought changes to the existing framework in which curators and performance programmers organize their programmes. More specifically, in relation to 9 galleries and art spaces in Hong Kong, Bangalore, Mumbai, Shanghai, and Beijing, the project challenged the customary presentation of art objects and performances only in comparison to the ‘West’ or Euro-American art practices. By creating new musical performance opportunities between India and China, it has changed the ways that stakeholders in the art scene, such as Asia Art Archive, the Shanghai Biennale, West Heavens, Hanart TZ Gallery, and Genesis Workspace curate programmes without taking recourse to a Eurocentric point of reference. Chen Yun, programmer at the non-profit art organization West Heavens in Shanghai, wrote: *“The participation of Chinese musicians, singers, lyricist, and music lovers in the first three years helped to actively develop the project, pushing it forward to become potentially a new way of creation and invention reflecting and learning on/through the other side”* [s5.5]. West Heavens has a ten-year record in creating conversations between Indian and Chinese artists, musicians, and scholars in different cities in China, and has reached 18,000 people so far. Although they had worked with film and visual arts before, bringing in music helped them reach even wider audiences. Public performance *Staging Gender* in 2018, a musical presentation around cross-dressing in Cantonese Opera and Marathi-language musical theatre (s3.4), also changed the direction of programming for John Tain, curator and Head of Research at the Asia Art Archive. He wrote: *“As a result of this successful event, AAA is keen to host more performance-oriented programmes and activities, including those that bring together Chinese and Indian performance forms”* [s5.6]. AAA is primarily visual-arts oriented, so this is a major shift in their curatorial strategy. Benefits include new dialogues between musicians, visual artists and curators.

Impact on the public’s opinion of intercultural music

The kind of musical collaboration demonstrated by Niranjana’s project has been unknown in the contexts of India and China. Search engines can find no mention of anyone listening to or talking about India-Chinese music before 2016. However, since then, the research and its outputs have

altered the way the musical public in India, Hong Kong and China perceive intercultural music, and increased its appreciation. Between 2016-19, 11 public concerts and 6 stakeholder performance workshops across 11 venues in India and greater China, involving 21 artists, showcased the outcomes of the collaborations to students, music artists and theatre performers. In total, between 2017 and 2019, we estimate that over 1000 people have engaged with the research. One public performance was staged for an audience of over 100, and “performed to thunderous applause” at the Hanart TZ Gallery in 2017, Hong Kong, as *The Hindu BusinessLine* (daily circulation 108,000) recounts [s5.7]. Mahalakshmi P in *The Times of India* (daily circulation 13,047,000) writes that Saath-Saath is a “melodious Indian-Chinese collaboration” which changes the way we think about inter-cultural exchange [s5.8]. Nina C George in the *Deccan Herald* (daily circulation 458,000) says that when Indian and Chinese musicians join hands, “language is no barrier to building musical bridges” [s5.9]. After attending one of the public performances, music-lover and blogger Poorva Rajaram said: “Unlike the usual ‘fusion’ concert, the performers were not simply playing the forms of music most familiar to them, but actually exchanging traditions and techniques to create new music. The experience of sitting through the concert made me realise it was possible to converse across musical traditions, without actually relying on words.” [s5.10]

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1) <https://www.dukeupress.edu/musicophilia-in-mumbai>

5.2) Personal correspondence with the PI from songwriter, Chow Yiu-Fai (dated 08/12/2018)

5.3) Personal correspondence with the PI from Hong Kong-based composer and instrumentalist, Ip Kim-ho (dated 08/12/2018)

5.4) Personal correspondence with the PI from Hindustani vocalist and instrumentalist, Rutuja Lad (dated 08/12/2018)

5.5) Email from Chen Yun, Programmer at the non-profit art organization West Heavens, Shanghai (dated 23/01/2019)

5.6) Email from John Tain, Head of Research at the Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong (dated 31/01/2019)

5.7) Savitha Karthik. “Strains of Harmony,” *The Hindu BusinessLine* (dated 08/06/2018)

5.8) Mahalakshmi P, “Language of Togetherness”, *The Times of India* (dated 29/06/2019)

5.9) Nina C George, “Language is no barrier to building musical bridges,” *Deccan Herald* (dated 26/06/2019)

5.10) Email from music-lover Poorva Rajaram (dated 23/01/2019)