

## LOST IN SOUNDS

### *A pilgrimage of sounds in Southeast Asia - Japan*

#### *I. Reflections and Several Thoughts About Sounds*

##### **1. Credo**

Yogyakarta, Thursday Night, 30th May 2019 around 23.00 WIB:

After almost 5 month traveling through South East Asia - Japan, I finally returned to Yogyakarta. A city I called home for the last fifteen years of my life. Tonight, after a seven hour flight and a brief transit in Soekarno Hatta International Airport, I felt lost, with a plate of pecel rice and garlic sambal on my hand that I was enjoying whilst sitting cross-legged on a mat at my favorite street-food vendor near a place I rented in Palagan. Garlic sambal which was always been a favorite delicacy of mine tasted extremely hot. It felt like its been ages since the last time I ate sambal and now my tongue had to adapt to this once familiar taste. Not just my tongue, but my mouth was also burning, so much so that I gulped down my ice tea without pause between each bite. While eating, my mind was wandering everywhere. A tropical and moist Javanese night, a few days away from Ied Fitri .

This morning I was in the metropolis Tokyo city, Japan. Summer had just started there, after a cool spring at the beginning of April when I had just arrived in Japan. The savory taste of ramen broth at the nearby shop from the lodge I stayed in the Ueno district still lingered with the sounds of waiters & waitresses greeting the customers with their long and high pitch voice shouting: "irashaimaseee!". On my way to Haneda Airport, I could still hear the sound of bells from stations with melodies in colorful electronic sounds, which felt very Japanese, vibrated from speakers at various corners. Then, the crowded and busy sounds of people trafficking through Tokyo on weekdays, the sound of footsteps from employees' shoes, and the sound of informational announcements in the commute train which had been a part of my everyday life during my two months stay in Japan. My ears were starting to get use to the sounds around here. Sounds that were once new to me.

Now I'm back to listening to the sounds of crickets on dry nights in Java jumbled with the sounds of the neighbor's rooster (usually crows at dawn), along with the sharp and disturbing sounds of Yamaha RX King motorcycles on the not so wide road (I'm actually very bothered by the sounds of these motorcycles which on the other hand seems to be the pride of the owners whom most of them were men. It might be the model and nature of the sound that seemed to be so masculine that it became a media for actualization), and the sound of conversations in Javanese between customers in the sambal catfish hawker. Sounds, which for the past five

months, I had left now seemed to convince me that I was really back in Yogyakarta with all of its' atmosphere. The next day, when I was cycling through a rice field in Sleman, I once again heard the loud sound of maghrib adzan, coming from every direction through the TOA speakers (which usually were positioned in the masjid towers facing all points of the compass so the sound really travels to all of the area). Sounds that I heard every day here, but not in Japan. If I recalled correctly, the last time I heard this was in March where I stayed in Malaysia for two weeks.

For the past five months (started on the 5th January and ended on 30th May 2019) I had done a soundscape study in four South East Asian Countries, they were Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan. I felt very fortunate to receive a fellowship opportunity from The Japan Foundation Asia Center 2019 to do this research. A research that had brought me, an awkward and stay at home introvert transformed into a self-taught explorer, visiting many places in those countries and found so many sounds each and every day. From the sounds on the streets, to the sounds of markets, children, machines, restaurants, pachinko, stations, stadiums, rivers, oceans, frogs, birds, and many more. From the silence of nights in villages in South East Asia and Japan to the hustle and bustle of metropolis cities on Saturday nights. I recorded, took notes, and studied these sounds. A truly priceless journey and had taught me so many things.

The idea of this research first came to me in March 2018 when I visited Thailand for the first time. On an 18 March afternoon, I took a public bus from Salaya to Bangkok. After about one and a half hour trip, when most of the time I was fast asleep, I had arrived at Victory Monument, one of the busiest bus stop central in Bangkok. After I got off the bus, I didn't immediately continue my trip and I chose to sit back and relax while observing my surroundings.

These sounds were so intriguing to me. The vocals, intonations and dialect of the bus conductors in Thailand were so unique, it reminded me, and made me compare them to, the way bus conductors in Java call out passengers. There were similarities between the two like the volume of the shouts which tend to be loud and powerful because they had to do it on really busy streets. There were also some striking differences, like the intonation and curve of the voice as I had previously mentioned. Admittedly the Javanese and Thailand language, like music, are basically very different if we listen to their sounds. Even though I couldn't explained it in detail with words.

After coming home to Indonesia, I listened again to the recorded sounds archive while I was in Thailand. Not just the ones at Victory Monument, but also during the next few days, which were the recordings of the excitement of a Muay Thai spectators, children playing at

Prantip Park Pratunam, Buddhist worshippers praying at Wat Pho, bells clattering at Wat Arun, and so on. I then came to the realization that through sounds we could 'see' a portrait of varying cultures, because there were sounds that you wouldn't be able to find in Java and vice versa. As someone who was born and raised in Java, I started to do a comparative study of these sounds.

Long before I started this research, six years ago to be exact, in 2013 I decided to continue my study in culture anthropology at the Universitas Gadjah Mada (Gadjah Mada University) Yogyakarta. Back then, anthropology was a completely new subject for me. It was the world of music composition that had previously been close to my everyday life ever since I started studying western music composition at the Music Major in Institut Seni Indonesia (Art Institute of Indonesia) Yogyakarta. Then why did I want to learn anthropology? The answer was simple: not to become an anthropologist, but I just wanted to have a different take on music, which was as part of the human culture.

I wanted to move myself away for a while from the science of harmony, rhythm, instruments, and everything that was related to the history of music and western music composition technique that I had learned during my time as a bachelor student in Music. Coincidentally it was also at the time of my confusion as someone who had just received their bachelor's degree in (western) music composition. I started to question the role of cultural backgrounds in the world of composing. Because I was fully aware, even though during my time as a student I familiarized myself to listen to the work of the likes of Bach, Beethoven, Satie, Ravel, Debussy, Mozart, and other notable names in the western contemporary composition, the reality of my life was so far away from what I had learned. In Yogyakarta one of those realities was when you eat 'nasi kucing' (a small portion rice covered in banana leaf) at an 'angkringan' (a small stall on the side of the street) in Jogja and the radio is playing a wayang show or 'dangdut' music. Then, behind the stall were people talking, spending their night with some tea and fried snacks and often times accompanied by the usual gossiping about politics and politician, football, hobbies, the Sultan, to the impingement about other people. Furthermore I had never been to Europe, which composing knowledge I learned during my time in college. There were distance and paradox about the issue of background and I had to admit that my mastery of western music composition is far from sufficient. Everything was barely comprehensive and confusing. Even though I am fully aware that in the world of creation you are free to take any path in creating something. In addition, as it had often happened in the environment of music creators, the issue around the dichotomy of east and west was often felt irrelevant to be discussed or argued anymore. The world had become a

global village that was cosmopolite and debating over this again and again seemed to be a waste of thoughts and time.

It was also at that time that I was starting to get curious about, why a certain music tradition with all of richness in instruments and its' unique music idioms could be born from a certain group of people? Coincidentally at that moment, because of the opportunity to join Yogyakarta Tembi Music Forum, I was hanging out with friends who were active in the world of traditional music from many regions in Indonesia

Then, discussions during anthropology class drew my interest even further to the subject of culture. Starting from discussions about graveyards, using dipper or shower, language, the way we sit cross-legged, eating with chopsticks, shamans and magic, indigenous ghost, the flow of believe and religions, internet culture, jeans, billboard, symbols, customs, art, photography and documentary films, and many more. What a vast ocean this phenomenon we call as culture is. One of our professors said, Prof. PM Laksono, learning anthropology was like being 'a-know-it-all' about culture. The term 'a-know-it-all' meant that there were efforts or process to approach, guess, and interpret meanings. Trying to know deeper about culture which had intertwined meanings was very complex in the context of society - that was how I would summarize it. This experience of studying anthropology really gave me a new perspective and awareness.

When I went on my research travel to four South East Asian countries and Japan, I was convinced even more that everyday sounds around us, which Canadian composer Murray Schafer called as soundscape, was also an inseparable part of our culture. Sounds at the marketplace, streets, children playing, technologies and machines, conversations, street musicians, sounds in villages or towns, at stations, bus terminals, harbors, religious ceremonies, and sounds at a place of worship, sounds of metropolis cities, and so much more. These sounds are connected with the world of visuals, smells, temperature and weather, and taste which we experience everyday.

Through this research, I would like to propose 'a different point of view' and offer a conversation about today's South East Asia and Japan with all its diversity of people and cultures through sounds. South East Asia and Japan, a region that was built by number of events in a long span of history and influence crisscrossed by culture interactions from many directions. Through ethnography in the form of recorded sounds and texts this research hoped that we could meet each other and talk about the self and others through time and space.

*Credo*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dalam bahasa latin, Credo berarti pengakuan iman atau pengakuan percaya.

## 2. Veritas & Medium

When I was in Japan, I was met by accident with a big shot photographer name, Daido Moriyama. This meeting began in Sapporo, the capital of Hokkaido prefecture, North Japan in mid-April. After a full day of recording sounds in the city of Sapporo which was still very cold for spring time, I was relaxing while looking through the lodge's book collections. That was when I stumbled to a photography book by Daido Moriyama. His work in photography quickly caught my attention. Through Moriyama san's eyes and camera, I saw another side of Japan that wasn't like any other that I had felt before. Black and white portraits of Japan in a rough texture and often blurry with a sharp contrast, grainy, and sometimes not focused. Not the Japan that was shown as clean, beautiful, and perfect. Moriyama san took a lot of photos of modern Japan's social phenomenon post world war two, including the dark sides of modernity in Japan society which was so subtle, explosions of urban lives and populated corners of a city which on one side was advancing further to the future.

It felt like there was a connection between Moriyama san's work with what I was prompting in this journey. Seeing his work which was full of social awareness and esthetics taught me so many things. Photography as a medium could become this powerful in portraying reality and became a narration that could be interpreted by people who saw it. Of course the action of taking photos couldn't be separated from the subjectivity of Moriyama san himself, but reality could always be seen in it. Cameras became the tool or *apparatus* to capture it. I then thought the medium of recorded sounds could also act as representations of social reality and could open rooms for interpretation and further discussions for listeners.

Pondering on this, I was reminded of Jack Body, a composer from New Zealand who during his life often visited Indonesia, particularly Yogyakarta. During my time in college, I attended several of Pak Jack's general classes and workshops at the postgraduate campus of ISI (Indonesia Institute for Arts) Yogyakarta. Pak Jack, that was how me and my associates liked to call him. His acquaintance with Indonesia started in 1974 when Pak Jack did a tour around Java and Bali for four months after he finished study in Europe. After that in 1976, Akademi Musik Indonesia Yogyakarta (Music Academy of Indonesia, Yogyakarta, which was the embryo of Indonesia Institute of Art) asked him to teach as a guest lecturer. This was the opportunity which had brought Pak Jack back and to live in Yogyakarta from 1976-1977.

During his time in Yogyakarta, other than teaching and composing music, Pak Jack recorded a lot of the surrounding sounds - field recording. This hobby of his was captured in an album, at least one of them, "Sounds; Environmental Music from Java". As a composer, Pak Jack also liked to work on his recordings on the field as noise materials in his fantastic electroacoustic composition work

Back to “Sounds”, this album was filled with sounds like *gejog lesung*, crickets, *adzan*, children, and many more. Listening to the recordings of these sounds, as someone who was born in the 90s, long after Pak Jack first came to Indonesia, it felt as if I was brought back to the Java of old. Now, I rarely hear the sound of women’s *gejog lesung* pounding rice grain after harvest. I could only find the sound of *gejog lesung* a couple of times in art festivals as an audience, in other words in an enclosed stage. The sound wasn’t in their natural time and place anymore. Whereas, the sound of diesel powered machines was much more familiar to my ears and had become the reality of Java’s farming life in general today. I remember when my grandparents told the tale of *lesung* sound with all the stories of warmth after harvest time in the tropical villages of Java. A memory of sound from my grandparents that I could only imagine. My grandparents’ memory of the sound of *lesung*, could it ever be the same as I imagine it? I doubt it. It feels now as though, Pak Jack’s recording of the sound of *lesung* has become more precious as ever. This recording had become an authentic document about the reality of sounds and culture of past-time Java, although it was unfortunate that I hadn’t found any information of where exactly this sound was recorded. In this regard, Pak Jack’s recording had become a cultural artefact - even though I didn’t like to put it in the context of a museum like a collection of museum artefacts - antiques, but more of a ‘text’ that would always be read and discussed so that this recording could be so dynamic in its position of cultural study. A piece of sound recording that tells a lot of stories.

When I was writing this part, I then reopen my recording archive during the research in north Vietnam. When I walked through the mountains in north Vietnam which was adjacent to China, I passed by a herd of buffalos and cows. There were more than twenty buffalos and cows. Four late adolescent was herding the tens of cows and buffaloes through the pavement road. The same pavement road being used for vehicles to go through. It was almost evening and the air was getting colder. These shepherds were herding their livestocks to go home after grazing on these mountains, which all the grass and vegetation have grown so lush. Along with the not so fast steps of cows and buffaloes, the sound of the bells hanging on their neck was ringing loudly. In Java, these bells are called *klontong sapi*.

Because of their large numbers, these herds sometimes occupied the whole road, until a couple of trucks and cars that wanted to go through had to sound their horns to get the herd out of the middle of the road, or atleast reminded the shepherds to control the heard. Another reality that was intriguing from South East Asian regions. When I was little, in past-time Sragen, the sound of *klontong* from a herd of cows or even cows that were pulling *bajingan* (a cow pulled cart that is usually painted with many colours) is still the reality today. Even though it didn’t pass our village very often, but the presence of buffaloes and cows on the street were

still often spotted at the time. Now, the cows are caged. The sound of klontong no longer enliven the roads of our village which is now filled with motor vehicles noises. Reality also consists of the element of actuality. It's very intriguing to observe the soundscape reality in today's South East Asia and Japan.

Later on, these recordings will be listened again as noise facts. If we only read texts about soundscape in certain places or see photos while imagining the sounds, there's a big chance of distortion in imagining the soundscape. For example when I wrote my experience of listening to the cows' and buffaloes' klontong in Vietnam in above paragraph. If there are no sound records that accompanies it, there's a high possibility that other people will have their own perception of the sound of the bells, how crowded the sounds of tens of buffaloes and cows passing through the road, how was the sound of the surrounding, and so on. With sound recordings, this reality is moved from its' original place and time to a listening instrument, like a headphone or speaker, like the chemical process of printing a photo using an analog camera.

Next about the medium of sound recording, this research is a decision I make as a music composer to realize my believe of those sounds. Different from visual culture which I myself is not very familiar with, which on one side is more often talked about in discourses about culture and its' presence is dominant around our everyday life (for example in the world of documentary photography, culture magazines, even in the present period and currently celebrated as the child of our era, that is visual informations presented in many social media), I feel much closer with sounds.

Of course in the process of recording and listening to it there will be distortions because the recording tools and sound speakers each has its' own technical characteristics and limitations. For example, like the type of microphone being used and the quality of the amplifier from available recording tools. Not to mention the position and angle of recording just like the angle in the world of photography. In other words it would not exactly be 100% similar to what happened in the field if you're senses were to feel the sensations directly. But at least the portrayal of the noise fact is present and can be listened to.

Next, about the selection of sounds I wanted to record and where I record it, that was part of the subjectivity that I was fully aware of. Interest, considerations, and decisions while on the field are personal. Just like a photographer who has interest in certain objects or phenomenons using specific tools and methods, like Daido Moriyama-san. Later on, explanation about the experience, my method of recording along with the instruments used, will be discussed in the sub-chapter titled 'Apparatus & Methodus'.

### 3. **Experientia**

John Cage, a vanguard composer from America wrote one of title-discussion in his book "A Year from Monday": "Happy New Ear!", it's a word play on the common greeting, Happy New Year!. It's a really fun and witty phrase. But what does it mean? Of course Cage's words are not to be interpreted literally that we are given or have new sense of hearing/ear. Is that even possible?

When I was doing this research in Japan, Shikoku island was one of my destination. This island is famous for its Buddhism pilgrimage route pioneered by monk Kukai Kobo Daishi. Shikoku Junrei, is what the pilgrimage route called, consists of exploring the 88 temples on the island. In Shikoku, I stayed for two days in a small quiet town called Marugame. The host of the lodge I stayed in, Naomi-san and Yoshimitsu san was so kind in welcoming me. Their lodge was only 30 steps away from the back door of the Marugame station, separated by a road that wasn't so big and crowded. A small town corner, quite and far away from the hustle and bustle of big cities.

Naomi san and Yoshimitsu-san had never been to Indonesia and only often hear stories of the island of Bali. Naomi san was so fluent speaking in English, while not so much for Yoshimitsu san. We talked a lot about food, language, culture, to discussions about my research. I told them as it was that my arrival and journey this time was to search and record surrounding sounds. Maybe this was what you would call sound pilgrimage.

When hearing stories about this research, Naomi san who knew Marugame very well and had many recommendations of interesting places and delicious restaurants (Marugame was known for their cheap and delicious udon) suddenly looked confused. Her answer caught my attention. Naomi san said that the sounds there had become a part of her everyday life. She was so used to it that she was confused and had no recommendations what sort of sounds that are interesting enough for me to record. Naomi san even said that maybe it would be better for me to feel the interesting sounds here, because I was from Indonesia. "I don't know. I don't have any idea because all of everyday sounds here is really common for my ear. I don't know which one is special. Maybe you can find some sound in the station or streets. I think, maybe you can feel it more", Naomi san said.

Her answer was so interesting. Why did my experience and Naomi san's experience in hearing the same sounds in Marugame could be so different? It made me thought about when Pak Jack Body who was from New Zealand found and recorded various sounds in Java, or when Prof. Shin Nakagawa told his experience of the first time he woke up to the sound of people ronda (night watch) in Java as written in his book "Music and Cosmos: An Introduction to

Ethnomusicology” (Prof Nakagawa had done soundscape research in several cities like Yogyakarta, Berlin and in Japan):

*When I came to Indonesia, about 10 years ago, I stayed in a friend’s house, his name was Edi. On the first night I was sleepy and went straight to sleep, but suddenly I was woken up by a loud noise like beatings of a drum. Dogs were barking loudly till I felt very afraid and I didn’t know what was going on outside the house. Was it a nightmare? No, because I could hear those sounds in conscious state. I could only curled up in my blanket and wait until the sounds disappeared, the noises was still there but gradually fade away. In the morning I asked Edi what was that scary sound: “What was that noises I heard last night?” Edi answered while laughing.*

*After Edi explained it to me, then I knew and understood I don’t have to be afraid. Those sounds were the sounds of bamboo kentongan being hit by people who was on ronda (night watch). The kentongan was hit by three or four people so it became very loud, like a drum. Why did they make that loud of a noise? Edi said, if Shinsan (Mas Shin) stayed up through the night and participate in the ronda, Shin-san could understand why. After hearing Edi’s suggestion I wanted to participate in that activity.*

Reading Professor Shin Nakagawa experience, I felt like I got a new perspective on the sound of kentongan ronda in Java. For me who was born and raised in Java, the sound of kentongan wasn’t a scary and strange sound. It was loud, especially at night, but those sounds had become something normal. In our village there was a poskamling (the night watch’s base), and in one of the corner was a kentongan hanging from the pillar, it was made of a bamboo’s hump which was pierced to make a hole. In the afternoon, me and my friends would sometimes play by hitting the kentongan. Now the poskamling isn’t there anymore, it was demolished in order to widen the village road, other than because less people use it anymore. Last time I saw it, the poskamling was used as a place for teenagers to hang out and get drunk while singing loudly. Honestly I preferred hearing the sounds of kentongan to hearing the sounds of drunk teenagers singing loudly, because they sang terribly. Now these sounds are no more. The ronda is still in effect but is no longer accompanied by the sounds of the kentongan.

Listening is an experience. Just like seeing, tasting, smelling, feeling. On one side, everyday sounds are objective physical phenomenons, and as physical phenomenons, it could be learned through the science of acoustic. On the other side the experience of hearing is a personal experience which the meaning could be so variative and rich. One same sound could be a totally different hearing experience. A very interesting discussion.

To end this discussion, I would like to quote one of John Cage’s writing in his subchapter “Happy New Ear” in his book “A Year from Monday”.

*One of the things we know nowadays is that something that happens (anything) can be experienced by means of technique (electronic) as some other (any other) thing (happening). For instance, people getting in and out of elevators, moving from one floor to another: this “information” can activate circuits that bring to our ears a concatenation of sounds (music). Perhaps you wouldn’t agree that what you heard was music. But in that case another*

*transformation had intervened: what you heard had set your mind to repeating the definitions of art and music that are found in out-of-date dictionaries. (Even if you didn't think it was music, you'd admit that you took it in through your ears, not through your eyes, nor did you feel it with your hands or walk around inside it. Perhaps you did walk around inside it: the architecturally of music is now a technical possibility and a poetic fact.)*

Cage wrote further:

*If this elevator-originated music had been heard, what modern Japanese music would it have been? Who among the following would have made this possibility an actuality (a music which we will soon hear whether we happen to be in Tokyo, New York, Berlin, or Bombay)? Yori-aki Matsudaira? Yuji Takahashi? Joji Yuasa? Tohru Takemitsu? Takehisa Kosugi? Toshi Ichijanagi?*

In his writing John Cage discussed his assumption about the effect of modern everyday sounds, specifically electronic sounds like the sound of an elevator for example in the creative process and work of composers. In this case Cage discussed the relation of those sounds with the imagination of the work of contemporary Japan composers of which he had close relation with.

Cage was imagining about the process of hearing as an experience. So far as to personalized it by naming one by one the names of his Japanese composer associates that he knew, besides collective experiences of technological sounds in this modern era where he used the word our in the sentence For instance, people getting in and out of elevators moving from one floor to another: this "information" can activate circuits that bring to our ears a concatenation of sounds (music). Cage explained as well as proposed questions. Cage asked us to reflect back that hearing is an experience: experientia.

One afternoon when I was tussling with the research data, my friends which I hadn't seen for a long time came by to my place. They knew I had returned from my research. These friends of mine were not musicians (various backgrounds, one was an anthropology lecturer, one was a building contractor, one worked at an architectural studio, and one was an entrepreneur in brick factory). Because we hadn't met in a long time, whilst reliving the old days, they were also curious to know about my research. Without a second thought, because my laptop and speaker was still on, I played several of my soundscape recordings that I got.

Beyond my expectations, my friends were enthusiastic listening to it, because there were sounds that were strange to their ears, some were very familiar, some triggered a memory or certain associations. Further, their response were different from one another. For example, when I played a recording of a mass in St. Joseph Cathedral Hanoi. My friends said they felt chills from the power of the sounds they were hearing and then tried to imagine the

atmosphere of the mass that I participated in. We were used to Catholic mass because we were all from Kolese De Britto high school, one of the Catholic high schools in Yogyakarta.

While listening, one by one my friends started giving spontaneous responds, “wooh, aku dadi kelingan misa neng kene iki. Tapi rosone bedo, sing podo ming orgen ro melodine, hahahah” (“woow, I’m reminded of the mass atmosphere here. But it feels somehow different, the only thing similar is the sound of the organ and melody, hahaha”), “wah, romone apik yoo bahasane. Iki bahasa Vietnam Gih?” (“woow, the father’s language is nice. Is this in Vietnamese language, Gih?”), “waah umate apik tenan suarane. Iki regu kor opo kabeh umat cen suarane koyo ngene?. indah tenan e, bedo karo neng kene, hahaha” (“woow they sound really nice. Is it a choir group or all the congregation sounds like this? so beautiful, it’s different from what we hear here, hahah”), and so on.

So that was how the experience of listening to the recording went. On one side, we shared our memories of the atmosphere of the mass in Yogyakarta, but on the other side, each of us also had associations and specific as well as contradicting imaginations when listening to the recording of the sounds of mass in St. Joseph Cathedral Hanoi. The experience of listening could become a collective experience and could also become a personal experience where each person could have their own memory or association of the same recorded noise fact. No problem. These responds and discussion actually make things exciting.

#### 4. **Locus**

In a city, there are spots that are so crowded and noisy, and there are spots that are very quiet. On an intersection in Bukit Bintang Kuala Lumpur on a saturday night, sounds of vehicles and people walking back and forth mixed with the sound of monorail trains going in and around the city. On one of the corners of the intersection, a group of musicians and singers were singing dangdut songs from Indonesia. From her accent, the female vocalist seemed to be a worker from Indonesia, while the male vocalist used a fairly fluent Malaysian accent, he was probably Malaysian. Among all the people watching, a group of moms wearing hijab and their children who knew the lyric to the songs sang and dance along with them, as if to let go all the feelings pent up within them. The songs were “kopi dangdut”, “sambalado”, “kereta malam”, and many more. The sounds of instruments like guitars, bass, and tambour from the electric drums delivered so well through a portable speaker which was actually quite big, like the size of an airport cabin luggage. These group of musicians and singers were busking while entertaining a lot of people here. Meanwhile, not far from there just a few hundred meters, it had gotten a little bit different in the small alleys. The sound of footsteps became clearer to the ear, the sound of one or two rats chirping and running around easily caught the attention

of the hearing senses, along with the low frequency rumbling from air house and AC machines installed on the back of houses in the hot capital city of Malaysia. One turn before that, in an Indian restaurant which opened 24 hours, I could still find noises of people along with televisions sounds set to high volumes broadcasting sports, particularly football. Within a radius of only a few hundred meters, the state of sounds had become so different and diverse.

At the end of May before I return to Indonesia, I took sometime to attend to an exhibition in The Museum of Contemporary Art (MoTart) Tokyo which was in the midst of organizing a special exhibition retrospectively the works of famous Japanese artists in the last century. The exhibition was titled "Weavers of Worlds - A Century of Flux in Japanese Modern / Contemporary Art". The reason I knew and was able to attend the exhibition was because of my meeting with Akio Suzuki san, the pioneer and maestro of Japanese sound art. At the end of April, my friend Kumiko Yabu san invited me to visit Akio Suzuki san who lived in Kyotango, a quiet and peaceful rural area, about 3 to 4 hours drive by car to the north of central Kyoto. Kumiko san told me beforehand that she really wanted me to meet with Akio san because he was very perceptive to sounds. She told me that this meeting will definitely give valuable inspiration to my research. Long story short, we all met in Akio san and Hiromi san's house, we talked a lot on that cold afternoon in Kyotango village. After I was satisfied playing with Akio san's cat, one of the topics we talked about that afternoon was Akio san's work which was named otodate, a work that had been his characteristics in the last decade.

What is otodate? In Japanese oto means sound and date means place, and otodate literally can be translated to hearing spots. Akio san was inspired by the outdoor traditional tea drinking ceremony called nodate. By using symbols in the form resembling an ear as well as human footprints, Akio san marked clear hearing spots from certain places which he called echo point. To give a clearer image of what otodate is, I have quote a paragraph from a Michael Bullock article:

*As with no-date, an oto-date takes place outdoors. Through the improvised act of walking and listening, Suzuki finds spots where he stands still, hands behind his back or cupped behind his ears, and listens. He then marks the spot with a pair of footprints that resemble ears- or perhaps a pair of ears that resemble footprints - surrounded by a circle. The toes of the feet(ears) correspond to the direction he faced while listening. If a particular spot is on concrete or blacktop, he makes his icon with a spraypaint stencil; grassy spots are marked by specially made tiles, stamped with the distinctive listening feet<sup>2</sup>*

Akio san had travelled to various countries to install his work which invites people to stop for a while in a certain spot and listen to the beauty of the sounds around them with full consciousness.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/35980247/Akio\\_Suzuki](https://www.academia.edu/35980247/Akio_Suzuki)

In the beginning, I had no idea how the system in this work was going to work. Until I finally visited the Motart at the end of May and had a chance to meet with otodate. Akio san was the one who gave me the invitation to the exhibition during my visit to his home. In this exhibition Akio san had placed otodate on 12 locations inside and outside of the museum. Full of curiosity, I finally tried the first spot in the museum. When I took my position to stand on an otodate block, I was really surprised. For the first time in my life (really, I'm not exaggerating), I felt consciousness hearing the sounds around this level, it felt like an escalation of senses. It felt like our hearings became so clear capturing sounds while standing on top of the otodate. You have to try it to know the sensation. On that spot, the sounds became so pure with echo points clearly felt. I felt the chills experiencing it. Akio san had succeeded in inviting me to listen solemnly and enjoying the surrounding sounds on the right spot. Amazing!

How amazing Akio san's ears are. His perception is on another level. Like Mushashi who pursue the way of the sword, his ears were those of someone who is truly trained. It never occurred to me that the perception of our hearings could be invited to participate in a level of this detail when listening to the beauty of the surrounding sounds. It felt like opening new dimensions of consciousness from what I had learned up to that point. When at the Motart I tried to move just one step from the otodate. The sound phenomenon I listened to was not the same, it wasn't as beautiful and pure as when I was on the otodate. It felt like magic, even though the same sounds can still be heard. Only our hearing spot and consciousness became different, like a switch being flipped. Akio san had dedicated decades of his life to the study of hearing. For example in 1988 he built a hearing site in Kyotango which he called Hinatabokko no kukan or Space in the Sun. I would like to quote a paragraph from Akio-san's website<sup>3</sup>:

*During the sixties, Suzuki's sense of playfulness led him to undertake a series of Self-Study Events, where he explored the processes of "throwing" and "following", taking the natural world as his collaborator. The experiences he gained in these events led him in the seventies to invent an echo instrument he named Analapos. The instrument's structure resembles that of two mirrors facing each other, reflecting into infinity. As an extension of the principles underlying Analapos, Suzuki constructed the Hinatabokko no kukan (Space in the Sun) in 1988. This space consists of two huge parallel walls, in between which the artist can sit all day and purify his hearing by listening to the reflected sounds of nature. This space leads the artist to discover a new method of listening. "Sound, which had been conceptually imprisoned in various spaces, is freed to circle the world."*

According to Akio san, the site was inspired by the work of composer Claude Debussy, La Mer<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, quoting Akio san's interview with the British magazine The Wire: "I thought Debussy was sitting in front of the sea for a day," he explains, "but I had never done

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.akiosuzuki.com/web/profile01-en.html>

<sup>4</sup> La Mer adalah karya komposisi yang ditulis Claude Debussy untuk orkestra pada tahun 1905. Sesuai judulnya dalam bahasa Perancis, karya ini terinspirasi dari laut.

such things before. I never used time like that before.” Further Akio san said, acquired through this bodily experience, the skill to become one with nature, like the trees that surrounded me.”<sup>5</sup>

Reflecting on the philosophy of otodate by Akio san, while listening back to the many sound recordings and notes during my trip, I wanted to connect it with the context of this research especially the awareness on locations. Akio-san’s approach as a soundartist was very specific that is finding ideal places to hear, which he called as echo point and invited us to feel the beauty of the sounds in that location. The estuary is more to the experience of hearing and appreciation of the art of sound itself. While the purpose of this research is the study of the variety of soundscape in the region South East Asia and Japan as part of the human culture.

Probably, the term I would favour and closest to this research is the concept of ‘sound map’. The vast planet we live in has become a cosmos to sounds that are born in every spots. Those sounds spread through the air and occupy spaces. Sounds in a corner of Akihabara Tokyo district will be different from the sounds in a funeral complex in Yanaka of the same city, another different situation would be the sounds of a shopping mall in Bangkok, will also be different from the sounds around the river of Chao Praya near Wat Arun of the same city.

The aspect of location really cannot be separated from this research, it’s also one of the main reasons why I visited many places in the five countries of my research locations that I could reach for these past five months. Back to the concept of sound map, map in this context doesn’t only cover the geographical aspect like the border between provinces or countries, mountains, rivers, or oceans, and so on. I want to extend the soundscape study further in the discourse of geocultural map from a large region of SouthEast Asia, in this case Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan which is located on the East Asia region. Through this research I wanted to study how far does the culture diversity of communities in SouthEast Asia and Japan can be reflected through sounds.

In addition, so there will be no misconceptions in interpreting locations, I will not try to generalize the soundscape character of a city, village, province, or even countries as the largest unit in this research. Because after doing my research, I further realized that any effort to generalize something is susceptible to mistakes. For example if we said that Tokyo is loud, then it has to be investigated, where exactly? Because in a large funeral complex in Yanaka, even during the afternoon, it is very quiet. Silence that suppresses feelings, at least that’s what I felt when I went there alone. Even though it is only a few kilometres away from Ueno. To be even more specific, if we take a few hundred steps outside of the funeral complex, we can already

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thewire.co.uk/news/49047/akio-suzuki-s-space-in-the-sun-has-been-demolished>

find hustle in the old and legendary Yanaka complex. The atmosphere is totally different! Not to mention if we compare it with the Shibuya junction which is crowded and famous, where everyday a huge number of people walk by. This phenomenon is similar to the illustration of my journey around Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia which I have told in the beginning of the subchapter. If we are to say that Tokyo tends to be noisy, then I can agree. Because there is propensity in that statement and not an effort at generalization. Propensity can still be understood and accepted. Later on in giving descriptions of fragments of the sound recordings in this research, I will also try to give specific explanations and illustrations of locations other than the ethnographic text I composed as narrations.

## 5. **Momentum**

An intersection in Saigon in the afternoon would sound very noisy. A lot of motorcycles, cars, buses, trucks go and about, sounding their horns, a unique habit in Vietnam which until I left this country and moved onto the next designated country for my research, I still couldn't find the reason why those horns are so often used by the people here (If you ever visit big cities in Vietnam, you would know what I mean, or just hear my recordings).

At dawn at the same place on a different day, the intensity of the vehicles are much more quiet. The sky still dark and the heat of the sun that usually envelops the capital in this scorching south Vietnam still lurking, even though the moisture air of a tropical country can still be felt on the skin. Only few motorcycle pass by in several minutes and because of it there aren't many honking sounds to be heard. Banhmy (Vietnamese traditional bread) sellers calling out through their little speakers starting their day chasing breakfast time, can be heard from afar. Meanwhile, on the trees on the side of the road, a few little sparrows and nightingale have just started chirping. A spot on an intersection in Saigon has become so different during the afternoon and dawn.

In George Town the capital city of Penang island, the sound of adzan can be heard five times a day through the Kapitan Keling Mosque's speaker. In the religious practice of muslims, the sound of adzan also act as a sign of the five time sholat obligation, starting from subuh, dzuhur, ashar, maghrib, and isya. The sound of adzan is present at subuh when the street of Georgetown is still quiet from passing vehicles. The sound of adzan is again present at noon when the hot street of Georgetown starts to get crowded with motorcycles and cars passing by as well as the sound of tourists from various countries admiring the beauty of this small island in the Malayan peninsula. The sound of adzan could be a repetitive routine. But the sound of adzan mixed with the sound of the hustle in the afternoon is so much different than the soundscape of the sound of adzan at dawn.

Other than location spots, time becomes an important factor in this soundscape study. In one place, there are sounds that only come out at certain times, for example at subuh, in the morning, afternoon, evening or at night, there are times when the intensity could rise or goes down, there are times when it could become louder or weaker. There are sounds that become a sign of routine, there are also sounds that are continuous whether it's because of technology intervention or natural causes. Like the sound of huge river streams that will only stop if the river is dried up or frozen. There are sounds that are born (like the birth of the sound of ringtones in handphones it started fairly simple, much different from the ringtone of today), there are also sounds that disappear with time and human history. Other than sounds that are born and lost, there are also a lot of sounds that are inherited from generations to generations and have become a tradition in these regions, for example the sound of adzan in Malaysia and Indonesia (as a case example even though it's not one of the designated locations in this research). Of course there was a time when this sound was not existent, before Islam entered the Malayan countries and Hinduism - Buddhism, as well as various animism had previously been a close part of society - indicated by the various monuments left behind. If we look further, then the discussion of this soundscape becomes even more interesting. Because as of now the sound of adzan at most mosques are conveyed to all corners of the area through TOA, a sound amplifier technology. Since when did this device been used? What was the sound of adzan like before the technology of sound amplifier invented? All discussion and questions regarding this still holds one important aspect: time.

Time, in this case, could also be interpreted in a more broad context, other than in the framework of everyday time like morning, afternoon, evening, night. It could also mean in the context of era or ages. Imagine if you're suddenly being pulled into a time machine and thrown to the exact same place you were in but 200 years ago. How does it look like? How do you think the sounds around you feels like? What kind of noise would you hear? Do you hear sounds that now might not exist and vice versa?

Let's wonder to the world of film for a while. I am reminded of the scenes in "Midnight in Paris" a film by director Woody Allen. In the film it was told, the protagonist was young writer who was obsessed in the world of fictional literature and was struggling to write his first novel when suddenly he heard the sound of bells in Paris at 12 midnight. At the time, Gil the protagonist was drunk. Moments later an old car came by which took the writer through a time machine to the past, he then landed in 1920's Paris. The time when Paris became a melting pot for litterateurs and famous artists like Scott and Ella Fitzgerald, Jean Cocteau, Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Picasso, and many more. In this movie, it was illustrated beautifully how Paris looked like at the time. Of course the setting was built by the the imagination of the

director and the whole film's artistic crew. But the interesting part is, they didn't just built the visual phenomenon, they also made sounds that "presumably" was Paris in the 1920s. The sounds of bells, ancient cars, quiet streets not as crowded as today, the crowd of people in cafes and many more.

Still in Europe, this time we go further back to Italia in 1913. Luigi Russolo, a composer and futuristic artist from the nation of pizza wrote a manifesto titled "The Art of Noises". The Manifesto was written by Russolo at the time for his friend Balilla Pratella as a reflection of the new period in human civilization: the new era of sound because of the invention and development of machines. Try to imagine a period in human history before the industrial revolution happened. Going further back, our world had not yet known James Watt's steam engine, before Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot invented cars (which was already in the scene of 'Midnight in Paris' that took Gil through the tunnel of time), before the Wright brothers pioneered airplanes. Through his manifesto Russolo then reflected back on the surrounding sounds in the past which was filled with sounds of nature, animals, and human sounds, not the roar of machines. Russolo said that all exposure to the hustle of technological and mechanical sounds were orchestrated by this era. In his manifesto he wrote :

*Let us cross a great modern capital with our ears more alert than our eyes, and we will get enjoyment from distinguishing the eddying of water, air and gas in metal pipes, the grumbling of noises that breathe and pulse with indisputable animality, the palpitation of valves, the coming and going of pistons, the howl of mechanical saws, the jolting of a tram on its rails, the cracking of whips, the flapping of curtains and flags. We enjoy creating mental orchestrations of the crashing down of metal shop blinds, slamming doors, the hubbub and shuffling of crowds, the variety of din, from stations, railways, iron foundries, spinning wheels, printing works, electric power stations and underground railways.*

*We Futurists have deeply loved and enjoyed the harmonies of the great masters. For many years Beethoven and Wagner shook our nerves and hearts. Now we are satiated and we find far more enjoyment in the combination of the noises of trams, backfiring motors, carriages and bawling crowds than in*

Reading Russolo's writing we could imagine at the time of the birth of mechanical sounds like cars and trams, it was new sound phenomenon for them while for most of today's society it's no longer considered as something out of the ordinary. Russolo's writing was in the transition era, meanwhile we are already used to the sounds of machines and technologies in our everyday life.

Back to SouthEast Asia and Japan. I then imagine, what was the soundscape like in SouthEast Asia and Japan a few centuries ago? Of course we can say for certain that it would be different. If we look at sketches drawn by past explorers, who at the time was using sailboats as a mode of transportations and not jet planes, we could only imagine the

atmosphere of the SouthEast Asian Countries and Japan was still quiet compare to today. Of course we wouldn't be able to identify it because recording tools weren't invented yet. There were no documents of sound recording that could show us the soundscape reality of SouthEast Asia and Japan at that time. On one hand, we could observe that at a certain place there were sounds that came from the past and was passed down to today as a tradition which in the end became a specific characteristic or identity of that place or community, which then we classify as part of the culture. For example the sound of adzan in mosques, sound of buddhist temple bells, the sound of announcement in stations, the sound of bus conductors, and so on.

Thinking about the aspect of time in this broader context, I am fully aware that this research is the study of soundscape in SouthEast Asia and Japan in a very specific time, which is 2019. To be more specific from the beginning of January to the end of May 2019. For sure the soundscape in SouthEast Asia and Japan will keep on changing in the future. What will the soundscape be like in Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Ha Giang, Malacca, Kyoto, Nagasaki, Chiang Mai, Ayuthaya, Singapore, Osaka Penang, Da Nang, Fukuoka 30 years from now? The answer is still a mystery but one thing we know for sure is that the soundscape will change just like our memories of the sounds in the same place in a different past. There will be new buildings, new technology inventions, cultural interactions in the future and so on. We couldn't imagine or even predict how the soundscape of this place will sound like in the future. It is exactly these changes that are interesting to observe because at this period we could cement soundscape study as part of the narration of history. Not in the museum collection framework of sentimental and nostalgic antiques but as a discourse of cultural dynamic which will always continue moving.



*When I was in Singapore, I took the time to observe and record the soundscape around the Singapore River, at Boat Quay to be exact. When I was there, I found an atmosphere of a calm river, not too busy with activities. From the river we could hear the sound of soft tourists boat engines moving gently through the river and it didn't happen frequently. The atmosphere was calm. Once in a while you could hear laughter from tourists enjoying the beauty and cleanliness of the modern Singapore city while perpetuating the moment by taking pictures. Behind me was the pedestrian area, with the sound of people walking by. This photo was taken on 30th March 2019. Several ancient architectures on the side of the river was still maintained between tall buildings towering above in metropolis Singapore.*



*The Singapore port in 1930, the same location where I record it in March 2019. Look closely, the Singapore river was filled with traditional merchant boats from all corners. The atmosphere was so congested. At the time it was a central trading spot in Singapore before 1977 when the Prime Minister of Singapore launched a policy to organize and clean the area and relocate the merchants to several centralized area, like hawkers center. Imagine the loud noises in the past when merchants came bringing goods and unloading it from ships, it must have been interesting. Or we go back further in the past when Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles from British Colonial Government started to change the island into a new trading port in SouthEast Asia since 1819. What was the sound like back then?*

I want to position this soundscape study in the reflection of the current situation in SouthEast Asia and Japan, a time when information and communication technology have become so advanced, with internet connection that could break through geographical barriers and a time when advances in transportation technologies propels the movement of society even further. When all SouthEast Asian countries, except for Thailand, several decades ago had freed themselves from long period of colonialism and now hope to keep looking to the future with all of its discourse of development and cooperations between countries that keep on rolling. Referring back to aspect of reality and actuality, this study is further research effort

about SouthEast Asia (represented by Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaysia in this study) and Japan of today with all its' cultural richness and diverse community in every corner of its area through sound. All this richness and diversity of course didn't start from a vacuum space rather it was formed through long and connected history and cultural interactions as been previously discussed. So let's smooth up our ears and listen to these sounds.

## **6. Apparatus & Methodus**

When I was still studying in Indonesia Institute of Arts Yogyakarta I saw a digital portable recording tool for the first time. It was in the second year of my study, in 2008. On an occasion, my senior was being lend a zoom h2 handy recorder from a friend of his and that was how I got a chance to try it. Bare in mind that at the time tools like this were still a rarity in our community of music study in Yogyakarta. The first factor was of course the high price, specially for college students whose needs are still around everyday meals. Furthermore, the distribution of this tool was still rare in this city. My senior said that the owner of the tool bought it in Singapore.

When the first time I tried the equipment using a headphone to listen to the recordings, it was for the first time I felt the sound of clock ticking and geckos in the house became so interesting, also the sound of room ambience that felt clearer captured by the microphone condenser that were quiet sensitive. There was a different experience when listening to the sounds captured by the recorder.

Of course the invention of portable recording technology was not something new. If we read the history of audio, portable recording tool for the need of field recording have evolved from time to time, along with the development of technology. From the first wax cylinder technology which recordings was still very simple and rough, then to cassette tape, minidisc, to now digital data recording we know today. But back in 2008 was the first time I laid my hands on it and I felt amazed by its' flexibility and ability. I felt like a little kid who just got a new fun toy. Different from studio recording format using computer, soundcard, microphone, with specific room settings, portable recording tool allows us to do field recording, record everywhere, including surrounding sounds - soundscape.

After graduating from my music composition major and able to save some money, finally I could buy a zoom h4n portable recording tool, the newest model at the time. I bought it in a music store in Yogyakarta. Different from a few years ago, these tools were easier to find in local music store with more choices of brands and models. Believe me, at the time having one of these tools was the only dream I had. Since then, whenever I had a freetime, I record the surrounding sounds, especially at the Lempuyangan station because I really love trains at the

time. I started recording and gathering crowded sounds at stations, chicken rice sellers, the sound of locomotive, bells, and many more.

Slowly I left this hobby of mine and I spent more of my time in front of my computer inside the room of my rent which I turned to a simple studio. I then more often work with music software, making music composition using electronic sounds and virtual instruments. One of the reasons, after graduating from music, the chance to meet an ensemble or orchestra became that much rare, and my old associates whom I went on the process with had all went their own path. The portable recording tool was finally made to record the sound of keyboard in my room.

Until March 2018 as I have told previously, I went to Thailand for the first time and brought my portable recording tool again. At the time I was actually there to attend a music conference in Mahidol University, because it felt interesting to also record the surround sounds because it was my first visit to the White Elephant Country. To my surprise, this re-connection was what had brought me to further research about soundscape in SouthEast Asia and Japan through The Japan Foundation Asia Center Fellowship in 2019. I had returned to the nostalgic joy with a different conscious and wisdom.

The portable recording tool had become my friend during my journey through SouthEast Asia and Japan. I spent most of my time alone accompanied by my recording tool and sounds. Before departing, I bought several new equipments to support my research they are microphone Audio Technica BP 4025 which was designed for field recording needs and also Tascam series DR 44 WL which sound characteristics were quite natural, then headphone and a tripod to install the microphone. It felt such a waste if had went without proper equipment to be used on the field. I because I was sure to find so many interesting sounds along the way. The sounds must be recorded with a good quality (or at least not in a bad one), even though I have to admit I didn't have a background in the study of recording and the world of audio. I only relied on empirical experiences and really could be categorized as an amateur who grew up with all the equipment I brought with me. It was totally different compare to sound engineers or experts in field recording who really focused in this field. My study was field study on the field with relying on full control of the sense of hearing.

When I was on the field, I had two methods of recording. The first was setting in one stale spot. Usually when I find myself in an interesting and possible location, I will install my tripod for the audio technica microphone and record for a long period of time. It could take hours long. Second, there were locations where I couldn't possibly install equipments like these and sit around for a long time observing and recording sounds. For example inside a moving train coach, in Pachinko, places of worships and rituals, crowded public places like the shopping mall.

In places difficult or even impossible for me to record with a complete setting. It felt like it will only disturb and cause discomfort to the people around. I then usually hold by portable recording tools, Tascam and I will stand or walk to record the surrounding sounds. Much more flexible and more importantly non-disruptive to the public comfort because of my stand out activity. People would still be immersed in their activities while I record them.

Based on my observation when I listened back to the recording data, the two methods had their own characters as well as strength and weaknesses. The first method allowed me to gain an ideal corner and spot to record and stay there for a long period of time. One of the weaknesses, I needed time to set up the equipments so I couldn't immediately capture the moment of sound, like a street photographer. Most of these recordings are panoramic with clear quality. While the second method allowed me to record wherever and whenever. Because all I had to do was press the on button and record and control control the sound through a headphone. I could capture the moment of sound much faster. Furthermore this method is very flexible because I could record sounds while walking through alleys, roads, markets, city corners, and so on. I feel like this soundwalk method brings an entirely different record and hearing experience than the method of recording in one place. When I'm walking, there are sounds that pass by, come and go, rise and sink, come from various directions and produce alluring sound compositions. The weakness, more often than not the angle of the recording is not ideal and is different when setting up for a stale position. The next weakness is the reach of the handy recorder microphone is kind of limited compare to the setting of a complete microphone The detail and clarity of the sounds recorded is much different. Despite all that there were many surprises while I was recording using this method and I enjoyed it very much.

## **7. Focus**

I still remember it very well the feeling I had when I started this research in Thailand. A euphoria, full of enthusiasm. For the next five months I was going to find and research many sounds exploring various places. There were no other obligations than to focus on this research. How fun! Even before departing I really can't wait for this research to start. My mind was full of thoughts of the exciting activities on the field. I prepared myself very well, I read a lot of books about the SouthEast Asian region and Japan, trying out my recording tools, cycling almost everyday to keep my body fit and healthy, and took care of all the fellowship documents.

My first week in Thailand, I started to explore Samut Prakan and various corners of Bangkok City. Everyday I went around on the field, spending hours to record various sounds

from the sounds on the streets, sounds in cabs, sounds of birds, sounds of people in museums, shopping mall, sounds of street performers, sounds of creaking docks, sounds of markets, even the sounds in my apartment like the sound of the door, faucet, ac. All kinds of sounds I encountered I recorded it as a consequence of my fiery excitement at the time. I tried to use my ears to its full extent in every place my feet took me. All the sound phenomenon that could be observed around me I swallowed it whole as data.

Slowly, I was struck by a strange feeling. Like I was floating in a vast ocean, it felt infinite. This was the ocean of sounds. I had lost my way and footing in this research. Finally, I still remember it clearly on the third week in Chiangmai, I spent some time alone on a bridge above Ping river approaching midnight. There I looked at flashes of lights from small town Chiangmai with my mind full of thoughts. I was so happy on one hand, but I also felt very tired on the other.

If you read research on social sciences, the state of being afloat on a sea of data is nothing new. The problem was, I had realized that the scope of soundscape was so vast, it even could be said as infinite if you continue to pursue it. Just imagine, every sound around us is a soundscape. Every sound you hear at the place where you are now is soundscape. If I had not been able to determine an orientation and mapping, I would have gone crazy. For the first time I felt like I was drown by my own research topic which was mightily vast. The field was like a jungle. It could be so much fun but it could also get us lost and confused. Even though I had prepared myself before departing, by reading many literatures about soundscape to help me think.

The issue of how vast the world of soundscape research is should be solved immediately. I had to start determining the position and direction this research will take. The overburdened and fatigued mind must be untangled to be able to observe the soundscape phenomenon clearly. Anyway my ability to cover the time and space was finite to handle the vast world of soundscape. Furthermore, as crazy as I would like to explore, SouthEast Asia and Japan is very large space! Imagining all of this reality made me even more intoxicated.

I then reflected. When I wrote this proposal in the middle of last year, I had actually formulate the framework of this research, which was positioning the soundscape study in the field of culture. In other words, I already know what my interest was. Here are some excerpt from my research proposal:

*The project is titled: "Southeast Asia - Japan Soundscape Project". It is a research aiming at recording, documenting the soundscapes of many areas throughout Southeast Asia and Japan, as well as analyzing these sound recordings by treating them as cultural narratives. I propound this research as an alternative way of 'seeing' (listening to) Southeast Asia and Japan nowadays.*

*As a composer who is accustomed to organizing sounds and was once a cultural anthropology student, I strongly feel that soundscape is a reflection of our reality, our life, and our culture nowadays.*

How silly of me to rewrite an excerpt from my proposal and found myself to actually had the framework so clearly from the beginning. So where did I go wrong? After I ponder for a while I realized that didn't honed my senses enough to be able to feel which sounds were interesting and powerful and which weren't. Like a person in an all-you-can-eat restaurant, I had eaten too much without being able to sort it out, and even tend to eat everything on the menu. I had gone far without keeping track of my footsteps. This is silly and dangerous at the same time.

After going through the research for almost one month in Thailand, I decided to loosen the rhythm for a while when I arrived in Hanoi, Vietnam. Coincidentally, when I arrived, the people of Vietnam was getting ready to celebrate Chinese New Year which they called tet. At this time of year people have the tradition of going back home to meet their families and relatives. The people let go of their daily business and have a vacation. The first week I was there, shops, restaurants and offices were starting to close. The streets were empty. The laidback rhythm of the surroundings had made me decide to loosen up my field work rhythm as well.

As it turned out loosening up my work rhythm and taking some rest was essential. I had forced myself to work very hard, but without realizing it I had become insensitive toward my own orientation. From that moment on my research in Vietnam felt more controlled. I started to learn to feel and classify which sound I should observe and record and which I shouldn't. At this period the anthropology science I had studied really comes in handy. I also started to learn to feel sounds that had context and are interesting to be discussed as cultural narration. For example in Bangkok I had spent a lot of time recording street sounds in various spots at the intersection without knowing clearly what was interesting about that street. Recording the sound of tuk-tuk and songthaew during my trip should had been enough to convey one side of the reality on the streets there and from there build many associations about the culture of transportation mode of the Thailand people, that could lead me further to the next steps that are far more clearer in my study of surrounding sounds. But this scheme never happened and I didn't do it! There were some regrets because I could have used my time with more accuracy and precision. But no matter, If it had not been for this hurdle I wouldn't have woken up and tried to be more perceptive. The evaluation of my trip in Thailand was a crucial turning point.

In the soundscape research domain, the focus of this study can be very diverse and can be linked to cross-disciplinary activities. There are some who focus more on ecological issues, like

Bernie Krause, a field recording specialist and naturalist from America who recorded sounds from the forest that are slowly fading away from time to time (he did a comparison of recorded sounds in a forest on each time period and analyze lost bio living sounds). Or the ornithologists who focus their study on the sounds of various types of birds, including doing discussions on the meaning of certain bird songs, for example to attract the opposite gender or to protect their territory from competitor or enemy threat. There are those who focus on the issue of noise environment and their effect on society, like the Pijanowski study about the the effect of soundscape in a hospital toward mental and psychological health of patients, or in engineering that measures the level of noise vehicles produce. There are some who focus their attention to the field of acoustics, for example the acoustic design of an airport, urban planning studies and many more.

So I feel like I have to re-emphasize that the focus of my research study of soundscape in SouthEast Asia and Japan in in the framework of anthropology, that is treating everyday surrounding sounds as part of human culture. In my recordings, as data that I had gathered, lead to this conversation. For example the sound of electronic speaker used by the banh my (Vietnam traditional sandwich) seller while cycling through the streets of Ho Chi Minh City, the sound of footsteps from office employee in Tokyo, the sound of Hmong children in the Vietnam - China border, the sound of adzan in Penang island Malaysia, the sound of Muaythai fans in Thailand, the sound of foreign workers gathering at the front of St. Andrew Church Singapore every week, the sound of ace house machine rumbling in Chinatown Singapore, the sound of boat machines rumbling on the Chao Praya river, the sound of the hustle in the Chiang MAI market, the sound of Hindu rituals in Kuala Lumpur, the sound of cheers and singing from fanatic supporters of the Gamba Osaka football club, the sound of the crowd in Shinjuku and Shibuya, and many more.

This decision, other than from my interest and believe of soundscape as part of culture as I have mentioned previously, also derived from the realization of my limited knowledge about the subject. For example I wasn't able to grasp the vast mystery of natural sounds, which includes insects, birds, and other animals in the focus as a naturalist or ecological study (of course in a deeper study or discussion framework). There were natural sounds that I observed and recorded during the trip. But in hearing and treating it in a study, I'm still on the interest of the anthropological framework, that is by connecting it with the relation of the surrounding community. For example contemplating the close relation between the Japanese people with nature. In this focused framework, I hope that this study could be read by many. Next, this study will be composed and presented in the form of fragments based on each sound recordings that I have gathered during my trip through Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore,

and Japan. These fragments will be grouped based on countries and will not be composed in certain order or based on chronological time. In other words every sound recording will stand on its own with ethnographic text and photos to accompanied it.

During an almost five month long research, I got more than one thousand sound recording data with the following specifics: 286 sound recording in Thailand, 225 sound recording in Vietnam, 119 sound recording in Malaysia, 59 sound recording in Singapore, and 341 sound recording in Japan (consist of 230 sound recording in the month of April and 111 sound recording in the month of May). A number that never comes to my mind, especially during the research because I was busy recording in various locations. If we average it with the number of research days, I recorded around seven to eight sounds a day. Of course there were times when I only got a few recordings, even only one recording in one day or had a break and didn't record at all on the field. On the contrary there were days when I could get tens of recording data on a location that I thought was interesting.

After I returned from my research, I spent some time intensively around two weeks to re-listen to the sound recordings and did a selection process. Regardless of the amount which I personally thought was quite substantial, in the end the interesting and powerful sound recordings in the context of this research as well as in term of good recording quality wasn't even one fifth of the whole data. The next selection process was to take the interesting parts of the recordings which in general had long durations (more than five to ten minutes each recording) was also not an easy task. I have to accept that in the end only a small portion of all my hard work of recording almost everyday for almost five months can be presented. If we compare between the amount and time duration of the data recordings while on the field with the duration of the recording that had been selected, the number would be even smaller (very small even). For example from hours of recording data on the field, in the end I only chose five or ten minutes of the best and interesting part.

After going through a long and grueling process that took a toll on both my mind and hearing, in the end I was able to compose sound fragments that I will present further as this research presentation. Besides the presence of sound recordings as the primary medium, I will also enclose photos as visual representations and of course ethnographic texts filled with my experience on the field, thoughts and personal comments, then I will correlate it with various references that would put the sound recording in a much broader context like the narration of culture and history.

## *II. Sound Ethnography from Southeast Asia & Japan*

### **Thailand**

#### **1. A Boat to Wat Arun**

Rivers and boats are something that are so close with the lives of most communities in Bangkok and Thailand, even until today. The Chao Praya river with all its' history and culture, the legendary river still crowded everyday from early mornings to late nights, filled with local boats cutting through the city. With its' large width, this river is like a highway with boats as its' buses. The difference is if the everyday streets of Bangkok are often jammed, the traffic on the river is still vacant. On the river side, boat stops (stations) give facilities to the people to ride and get off the boats to places they want to go. The passengers are from various backgrounds, from school students, merchants, employees, tourists from various countries (ofcourse) and many more. An integrated mass transportation system, like BTS or Bangkok MRT. A scenery that is 'very Thailand'.

During my stay in Bangkok, I used boats several times as my mode of transportation to visit several research locations, at the same time I recorded sounds of these local boats as a part of my research. There were several kinds of boats, from traditional boats, more modern designed boats like express boats, to luxurious boats for tourist purposes. Among these boats, traditional boats had always been my favorite. I didn't know why, I felt like the shape and pattern of the boats blend well with the ripples and waves of the brownish water of Chao Praya river. These boats were made of wood and painted with bright colorful colors and so ornamental, it reminded me of the art of slebor becak (unconventional rickshaw) in Java which now had dwindle down in numbers, cast aside by a more modern mode of transportation like online ojek (motorcycle taxi). The boats had slim shape and stretches to the front tip with conical shape, while the boats' engine and captain was on the back of the boat. At the tip or nose of these boats there are usually colorful flower ornaments as a symbol of their religious beliefs. Inside the boat, there was a small canopy with an oval shape made to protect the passengers from the hot Bangkok sun.



For me, the one thing that caught my attention while recording the sounds of the boats in Chao Praya was the sound of the engines. The sound of these boat engines always echoed the surrounding environment up to tens and hundreds of meters because of its loud rumbling noise. I then imagined that in the past, a time when these boat engines weren't invented yet and had not yet been a part of the river transportation life here. If we look at the archive of old photos of Chao Praya river, for example through the photos by Robert Lenz a German photographer who captured the life around this river in 1890, you could see that the traditional boats used paddles and long poles as the mechanical power to move the boat.

Without any sound recording data, I could only imagined how quiet the soundscape must have been like around Chao Praya river at that time without the presence of any engines, or maybe there were some other noises that at the past that were there and now had changed. Today, the rumbling of boat engines in different sizes had become part of the sound reality that couldn't be separated from the transportation culture in the Chao Praya river. To my observation, there weren't anymore captains who used paddles or long poles to move their boats. Furthermore, the sounds at the piers or boat stops were so unique, like the sound of port steel creaking up and down because of the waves in the river, the sound of people getting in and off the boat, the sound of the crew calling out the passengers or gave announcements, and also the sound of boat conductors who gave codes using whistles to ease the parking coordinations with the captains at the pier.

I got this sound recording during my boat trip from Saphan Taksin pier to Wat Arun which was very famous as one the tourist destination in Bangkok. If you observe and listen, the

presence of engines has made ship movements much faster and as a consequence the friction and impact with the waves becomes harder. In this recording you can hear the sound of impact between the waves of the Chao Praya river with the wooden body of the boat several times, along with the thumping sound from the boat engines' gas. Besides that you also hear wooden squeaking and crackling from the boat as well as water splashing on the right and left side of the boat, eventhough I put the microphone a little to the left of the boat. Another interesting thing is, the engine's position would follow the direction of the steer so the sound coordinates would move around if you capture it with stereo microphone.

## **2. Wat Arun's Tourist Boat Advertisement**

When I arrived at Wat Arun and spent two hours there, honestly I didn't find myself in a situation I wanted to be in. Instead of imagining myself in the middle of a historic Buddhist temple in Bangkok, I got a lot of tourists noises, especially foreign tourists crowding Wat Arun. I then asked myself, why do I need to record the noise of tourists? My friend from Yogyakarta, Mas Gata (the "mas" is an honorary name like -san in Japanese), who at the time accompanied me in my visit to Bangkok, also asked me do I want to record the sound of tourism in this research. I was in a dilemma, but on the other hand in the end I realized that the sound of tourism was an inseperable reality of cities and places, specially, in SouthEast Asia and our world today. Tourism had become part of culture, especially with the mode of transportations between countries that had advanced and achieveable like planes. Now, if seen through the lense of tourism, Bangkok was one of the primary tourist destination in Thailand, furthermore, Wat Arun was one of the place you have to visit if you go on a tour in Bangkok.

What can you do? other than the sound of tourists noise, in the end I decided to record a tourists boat information advertisement which kept repeatedly sound off through the TOA speaker located in one of the crowded corners at the complex courtyard of Wat Arun. In actuality, if I listen to this sound, at least to me it sounds very annoying. Because not only was it set on high volume (understandable, advertisements need to be heard by as many people as possible on a given range), the sounds were repeated over and over again without any variations. As though it became a patterned line aligned with the sounds of conversations, the cheers of happiness from children traveling along, footsteps, and the sounds of boat engines rumbling from the river (because Wat Arun is located right on the riverbank). Imagine, if playing a song or music over and over again can bore you, then how about an announcement produced by a machine repeatedly played at the same spot. Maybe, I was being oversensitive. Once again, my mind wandered far to the photograph by Robert Lenz who captured Wat Arun

in 1890. Of course at that time there were no boat advertisement through TOA like what I had recorded, because the technology didn't even exist yet (when I think about it this technology was created to broadcast announcements whether it was words or any other sounds). Then the next reflective question would be, should I really compare it? For what purpose do I need to compare it? Am I a nostalgist who wanted to go back to the past? But at least, one definite answer I could give was that my ears were tired listening to the noise of advertisements using TOA repeated over and over again. I don't know if anybody felt the same way or not. But I also had to accept that the condition of soundscape in 'our world' kept on changing.

### **3. Twilight Birds in Wat Mahatat**

Taking some time away from the hustle and bustle of Bangkok city, I bought B class ticket trains at the Hua Lampong station headed north, to Ayutthaya. When I was preparing for this research, the former capital of Ayutthaya kingdom of the same name, was one of the destination list that I really wanted and had to visit. In the history record, the Ayutthaya kingdom was active in 1350-1767 and during its' heyday it was said that there was a very close and friendly trading relationship with merchants from all corners of the world, like China, Vietnam, Portuguese, India, Japan, Korea, Persia, and continued on to Spain, Dutch, British, and France, indicated by the permission for these communities of merchants to build a settlement area outside the walls of the capital. When I was reading several history books about about the Ayyutthaya kingdom I was really curious of what the soundscape would be like in the former capital, which was full of history of the past, today. Of course this was a distant exploration and stretch, because every SouthEast Asian countries present, past, one hundred or one thousand years ago had their own kingdoms and dynasties, like the Borobudur temple in Java for example, or Angkor Watt, Champa, and so on. I really listened and observed the condition of the soundscape in the present Ayutthaya, especially this was my first visit there.

After a less than a one and a half hour trip, finally my train had arrived at the Ayutthaya station which was small but it had a unique and beautiful architecture, complete with wooden chairs that bends and acoustic station bells (not electronic) which was manually operated by the station officer as a sign for the train to come or to go. Next, I looked for motorcycle rental which was not from the station. Around one in the afternoon, I was able to get a matic motorcycle for me to use going around exploring Ayutthaya.



The first impression I got was I felt like I was in a time machine. The pavement road that I walked through brought me to the view of ruins or Buddhist temples which still stands on the right and left side, along with today's resident housing. There were many Buddhist temple in Ayutthaya among them are Wat Mahathat, Wat Phanan Coeng, Wat Chai Watthanaram, Wat Ratchaburana, Wat Phra Ram, Wat Phra Si Sanpet, to the ones that were built before the Ayutthaya period like Wat Thammikarat and Wat Phuttaisawan.

So what sound was I looking for, between these historical temples? Of course everything had changed. I imagined, If in several SouthEast Asian cities the soundscape were getting louder each decade, at least based through text studies from humanist, historians, or even anthropologist, then what happened in Ayutthaya was the exact opposite (I could be wrong, so I really want to discuss this further). I imagined at the time the Ayutthaya kingdom was active, these temples would sure be alive and people praying in it, doing rituals with all its' sounds of the crowd. Now, in several popular temples, again as tourists destinations, there were people visiting them and we could hear some noises there. But at most of the other temples, the situation was quiet. This reminded me of my pilgrimage to several unpopular temples in Yogyakarta.

After spending a few hours visiting several temples while observing the surrounding sounds, I finally stopped at Wat Mahathat and installed my recording equipments there. It was almost dusk, and I was starting to get tired being exposed to the sun on my trip there. Finally I recorded the sound of the chestnut-headed bee-eater there which had beautiful chirping sounds and they were calling out one another. In this recording you could hear, in the distance,

vehicle sounds like motorcycles and cars with their horns could still be heard, but not dominating. Then, because it was getting dark, visitors had started to leave the huge area of the temple. In the middle of recording, there were sounds of planes passing by quite often in the sky above Ayutthaya. Of course once again the location of my recordings was very limited, I focused myself to observe the soundscape in an ancient former capital Ayutthaya, not in stations, markets, housing complex, or even on the side of a highway. So I was not trying to do any kind of generalization of the soundscape condition of Ayutthaya at this very instance, but more on my interest to show one the soundscape portrait of today's Ayutthaya around ancient temples which felt like time machines. In the midst of dusk in Wat Mahathat, when the same sun that had shone the earth with all its' history took a step back, I sat alone accompanied by sounds and asked: what was the soundscape of Ayutthaya capital in its' glory days like?

#### **4. Wat Phra Singh Buddhist Chant**

After staying for more than two weeks in Bangkok, I decided to move on to Chiang Mai which was 700 km north of Bangkok. Chiang Mai in the past was the capital city of the Lanna kingdom which was the neighbor and competitor of the Ayutthaya kingdom. Chiang Mai which air was more cool and fresh compare to Bangkok was a small quiet town. To me the atmosphere here felt so meditative, especially after grueling with all the hustle in Bangkok. While in Chiang Mai, I stayed in the Old City district which was very historic, built by King Mengrai in 1286 as the primary city of the Lanna kingdom.

One of the purpose of my visit to Chiang Mai was to visit Buddhist temples, because this town was one of the central development of buddhism in Thailand since the era of Lanna kingdom. In Old City I could already find famous Buddhist temples, like Wat Phra Sing, Wat Chedi Luang, and Wat Phantao. I wanted to listen to sounds in the temples, particularly the chanting of the monks.

One afternoon on 26th January, I visited Wat Phra Singh. According to the information I gathered, everyday the monks would usually do rituals of chanting buddhist sutras at eight in the morning and five in the evening. I arrived at Wat Phra Singh around four in the afternoon. That afternoon, the temple was full of people coming in and out to pray, or just tourists who wanted to see and take pictures. While waiting, I took pictures of the surroundings and observed the many activities in the temple. Truly, during my stay in Thailand, I was amazed by the openness of the buddhist temples to visitors, not only to buddhist worshippers who came to pray but also to travelers, including myself. Even though I wasn't a buddhist and completely has no idea about the teaching of buddha, there was always a feeling of 'being welcomed' in my heart everytime I visit a buddhist temple in this country. Even though visually I stood out

like a sore thumb, usually with a microphone, tripod and portable recording equipment with a headphone strapped around my ears. During my visits and recordings, never once was I scolded, some of the monks even greeted me warmly. Even though to be honest, there was a feeling of uneasiness that my presence might disturbed them. But on the other hand, I wanted to learn more and record sounds in buddhist temples. My worries was never proven, as long as we keep our manners and respect while we are in the temple.

Approaching five in the evening, some children and teenagers took their seats on a thin pillow pad, which had been prepared beforehand by the temples' clerk, one by one. They were wearing orange cloth which was a specific clothe for buddhist monk along with their clean shaved head. In each pillow was a sutra book as guidance of the chants they will do together. After these young monks candidate had gathered, a head monk who was about sixty years of age positioned himself at the front to lead the chants. In front of him was a microphone and beside him was a small bell. I was actually asking to myself at the time, why were the ones present children and teenagers? I later on learned after reading references about that evening that what I had recorded and witnessed was a buddhist chant lesson for young monk candidates.



These children and teenagers learned the buddhist chants by following the lead of the senior monk. An imitation process through listening. If observed and looked closely, these children and teenagers was still learning to synchronize the notes and melody of the chants. Some of them were even singing in a flat tone or border line reading, mumbling, or singing. Some of them chanted way out of tune. In general, their pronunciation was still wobbly and

unsure, even though I couldn't understand every word that was being chanted. It was very different from the senior monk who was leading them, he was a pro and his chants sounded so beautiful and natural. I have just known from learning that learning buddhist chants is a long and difficult process to go through for a young man who wants to be a monk. They have to learn through a disciplined repetitive process everyday to instill these chants into their memory. In addition they have to learn to chant in Pali which is the language used in the Tipitaka scripture and in almost all Theravada buddhist text. The difficulty doubled.

Mastering the buddhist chant is not an easy path. That evening, I felt very fortunate to be able to observe and record this event. When chanting, there were children who were very serious following the chants, there were also some who were probably bored and found it difficult to follow, so in the end they started joking around with their peers near them, even though it wasn't loud enough to cause a ruckus. Truly interesting and on one hand you couldn't blame them they were kids after all. This evening I had witnessed and learned how chanting rituals and Buddhist teachings passed down from generation to generation, like a calm and unrelenting river flowing from long past.

#### **5. Muang Mai Market Chiang Mai at Night and Bumrungburi Market in The Morning**

One of the things I liked to do during my stay in Chiang Mai was visiting the traditional markets. There were many traditional markets here, starting from the ones that were active in the morning, active in the afternoon, and even at night. In the Old City district, only a few hundred meters from where I was staying, there was the Bumrung Buri market that sold daily needs, such as proteins, vegetables, fruits, meat, bread, snacks, and groceries. Near the historical Ping river stands my favourite market called the Muang Mai market. I liked going there, especially at night when the atmosphere becomes lively with the lights from the stalls. The sound of Muang Mai at night was also very interesting. The sellers offering their goods, the hustle and bustle of transactions throughout the night, some sellers played Thailand songs on their radio, which to me had their own humour, the sound of tuk-tuk, motorcycles, cars, and sometimes even trucks. This market is located along the streets of Wichayanon. Aside from being the means to commute, streets of Thailand is an interesting center of life on its own, from the cheap and delicious street food to the crowded markets. The hustle and bustle of Thailand is a very intriguing.



While in Chiang Mai, I recorded the markets using a handy recorder on my right hand, and I would wander slowly along the market. I felt that this method was far more interesting than putting on a microphone on one spot, because I felt that I was able to explore more and able to feel intuitively the dynamic sounds around me.

The following recording is from Bumrungburi market, in the Old City district, in the morning. At night, the area in front of this market will turn into a food bazaar. In the morning however, Bumrungburi market was as active as a normal everyday traditional market. The atmosphere was slightly different in the Muang Mai market at night. While recording, I sat at a stall that was selling coffee and Thai tea. The market was crowded that morning. Other than

the sound of transaction between sellers and buyers, there would be conversations and laughter among the sellers. I could hear the sound of footsteps from buyers that walked about accompanied by the sound of people cooking from the stalls that were selling foods. The sound of whistles could be heard from the parking area, while trucks, cars, and motorcycles could be seen passing by. Sometimes, foreign tourists would enter the market to look around and take pictures.



In the afternoon, the atmosphere in Bumrungruri became more and more empty. The sound of water flowing from the meat stall could be heard clearly. Employees started cleaning the stalls. One or two sellers talked and laughed together. Some stalls were closed and sellers who were tired could be seen asleep on tables. Meanwhile, one of the stalls turned on the TV with a moderate volume. The sound of whistles could also be heard. The intensity of the hustle and bustle settles down at last.

## 6. Muay Thai

Researching and recording soundscape in Siam would not be complete without a valuable piece puzzle, which is the sound of a Muay Thai match. This traditional sport had accompanied the history of Siam from ruler to ruler, kingdom to kingdom, Muay Thai had become one with the soul of Thailand. In an era of war, it was used as a defense mechanism and part of the military. In a peaceful era, Muay Thai was a form of sport that can be spectated by the general public as entertainment and competition. Recorded since the Shukotai period (1238-1408M), young generations had started to learn this form of discipline. Later in the Ayutthaya era,

where a war against Burma and Cambodia erupted, Muay Thai was studied as a martial art, and in that era practice grounds spread across the land. Since then, Muay Thai have accompanied the history of the Siam people.

*During this period, MuayThai was considered a higher art and was part of the royal curriculum. It was intended to develop good and brave warriors with great physical fitness into great and brave rulers. The first King of Sukhothai, Phokhun Sri In Tharatit, believed in the benefits of MuayThai so much that he sent his two sons to train MuayThai at the Samakorn Training Center to prepare them to take the throne. In B.E. 1818-1860 (1275-1317 CE) Phokhun Ram Khamhaeng wrote a war text that included the teachings of MuayThai as well as instruction in other fighting<sup>6</sup>*

When I first visited Thailand in March of 2018, I accidentally stumbled upon a Muay Thai match at the MBK Center, a shopping mall in Bangkok. I intended to stroll around the shopping mall, but a Muay Thai match was more interesting for me. With all the cheers from the people, traditional music, and exchange of punches and kicks in front of me, my adrenaline -though I never experienced first-hand an exchange of punches- rose high taken by the atmosphere. Coincidentally, I brought my portable recorder, so as I was watching; I was also recording the soundscape of the Muay Thai match. It was in the afternoon, and because the arena was outdoors, the spectators were spread out making the sound recording to be scattered. I was standing not far from the musicians that were accompanying the match. The sound of instruments was also emitted from amplifiers. Around me were spectators, mostly middle aged men, cheering. Today, Muay Thai has spread across the globe and has become a sort of martial art trend, aside from Boxing, Judo, Karate, and other martial arts. That afternoon, this international competition had fighters from different countries participating , starting from Thailand, England, France, Portugal, America, Brazil, and many more. Other than being an identity for the people of Thailand, Muay Thai has become a global Tradition.

During the soundscape research period, I wanted to study further regarding the sounds produced in a Muay Thai match. This time, I wanted to watch in an arena that I felt had a stronger atmosphere. I searched on Google regarding the arenas in Bangkok that regularly hold a Muay Thai competition. Among them were, Lumpinee Boxing Stadium, Rajadamnern Thai Boxing Stadium, and Channel 7 Stadium. After researching through photos and other information, my choice fell to Channel 7 Stadium which was owned by one of the television

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<sup>6</sup> Ruerngsa, Yod, Khun Kao Charuad and James Cartmell. *Muay Thai The Art of Fighting*

channels in the country. The reason I chose that particular arena was because I could feel the intense atmosphere –one of the reasons was because the arena was not too big, but was filled by many spectators-. It was a very intuitive choice.

The Muay Thai match at Channel 7 Stadium was usually held on Sunday around 14.30, and it would be broadcasted live on television. I went there by the BTS train. The stadium was not far from Mo Chit station, only a few hundred meters going across the famous Chatuchak Park. Around 2 o'clock I entered the arena through the checkpoint. The match was going to start in half an hour, but the stadium was already filled by spectators. I felt shook by the spectators here. The majority of people who came were locals, but there were also a lot of foreign tourists, and seen from the uniform and attributes, Muay Thai fighters from foreign countries also came to watch. I managed to get a sit right on the corner of the stadium.



While I was waiting, I set up my equipment. However, because the space there was so small and cramped, I had trouble to place my microphone. Just before the match started, I decided to get out of my chair to sit down below it. This was my post. It felt very comfortable. I was able to freely record the sound and take pictures. Even though I was in the corner of the stadium, but with the cramped condition of the stadium this position was the best choice. I also did not want to bother the people around me with all the equipment. At first, a number of people were looking at me who was immersed with my study. They looked at me not with a suspicious look, but with a curious look. They might had thought of me as a weird person who was setting up sound equipment's in a place like this. However, as time passes they started to forget about me. One man might had even understood what I was doing, and gave me a smile.

It was not a problem. I did not care, and was immersed in the world of sound recording. Furthermore, the stadium was owned by a television channel, so there was a feeling of being in the same boat of recording.

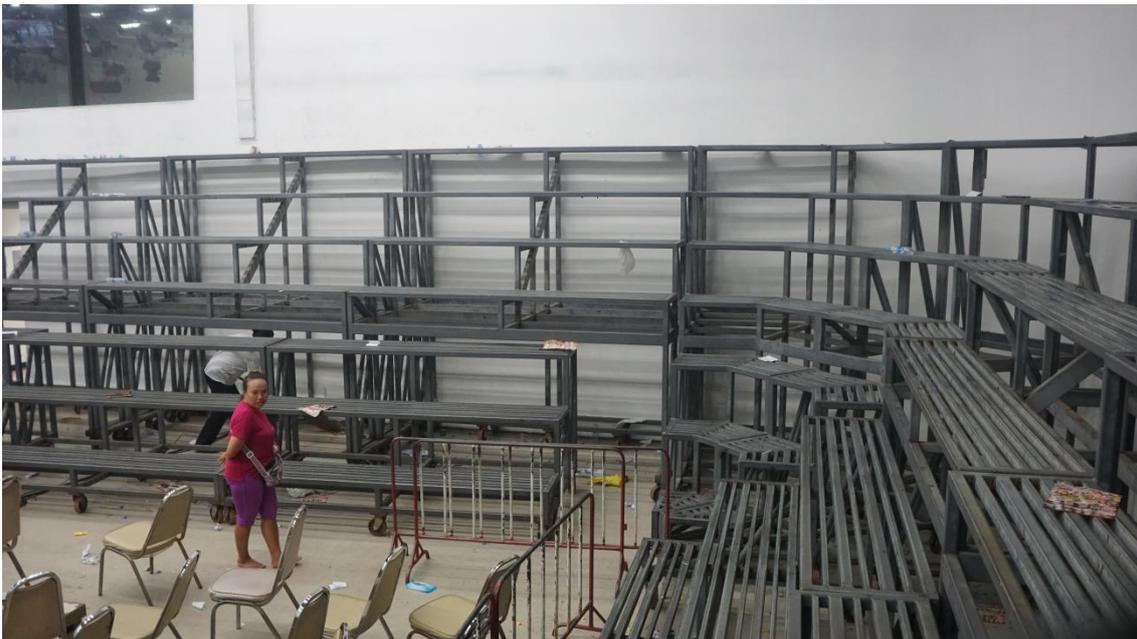
I started to turn on the microphone and other equipments. Five minutes later, the match announcement could be heard. Two fighters entered the arena and warmed up. At the same time, the stadium erupted. At 14.30 sharp, the match started. The accompaniment also started. Adrenalines escalated along with the heightening intensity of the sound in the stadium. The sound of accompaniment that consisted of Pi Chawa, Ching cymbal, and Glawng Khaek all collaborated with the sound of cheers from all directions. The instruments that accompany Muay Thai is naturally loud, but when the spectators started to cheer with every energy they had, the music sometimes got drowned in the commotion. You could imagine how loud and hectic the atmosphere was when the match started. The sound recorder that I initially set for 25% was broken, and I had to lower the level of the recording. The experience of listening to the sound of a Muay Thai match that afternoon was something memorable for me. I was drowned in the fantastic world of sounds in Thailand.



Aside from the cheers, especially when a fighter successfully lands a hit, there were also the sounds of people placing bets among the spectators. In the arena, fighters fought, and outside the arena spectators place bets. Gambling was something that cannot be separated from watching a Muay Thai match. Although I did not understand the language, the sound of them placing bets were very captivating. Visually, it was interesting seeing money going from one hand to another, from spectators to bookies and vice versa and codes communication by

fingers. The sounds were combined into one. The noise would settle for a short moment when the bell rang indicating a round was over, and sometimes accompanied by the sounds of clapping by the spectators showing appreciation towards the fighters. The accompaniment would also rest for the moment. During the rest period, the noise of people betting can be heard clearly. Then, when the bell rang again, indicating the start of the next round, the noise erupted once again.

I watched the match until the end that day, because there were several matches held in a day. The matches vary from the main professional ones to the lower teenage fighters. All the matches finished around 5 o'clock. As the last match ends, spectators exit the stadium in flocks. I was still caught in the moment and was reluctant to leave. I still wanted to observe the stadium. The sound of music and cheers of the spectators turned to the sound of people cleaning the stadium from the waste the spectators left behind. Technicians were putting away their equipment. The atmosphere had settled down, a complete opposite to how it was a few hours ago. I was then surprised to see that without the crowd the stadium was actually smaller than I thought. Amazing how the small space available could fit so many people and be filled with such noise. (You could try comparing the photos)



After I felt satisfied, I packed up my equipment and exited the stadium. I just then realized how empty my stomach felt. Street vendors were ready selling their food by the street just outside Channel 7. It was time for me to fight my hunger.

## **Vietnam**

This land left such a deep impression for me. The people who were true to what they were and talked in a straightforward manner whether in a coffee shop, by the street, in the market, in the train, or anywhere else has made me fall in love and cannot forget the experience while I was there.

In the afternoon on the 2nd of February, I had at last landed in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, after flying for one and a half hour from the Chiangmai international airport. If you draw a line in a map, you can see that both Chiangmai and Hanoi are located on the north plains of south East Asia. This would be my first time visiting Vietnam, and like the many first visit to a foreign country, I was very curious and enthusiastic. The weather was quite cold when I arrived, at least for Southeast Asia standards, it was around 16-17 degrees Celsius. Bagas, a friend of mine from when I attended college in ISI Yogyakarta and played the Oboe in an orchestra in Hanoi, welcomed me at the airport. He then told me that it was winter in Vietnam, Hanoi and other northern parts of Vietnam to be exact. Hearing this, I expressed my curiosity, and we laughed together as we feel that the word "winter" in Southeast Asia is very laughable. However, Bagas, who had lived in Hanoi for three years, told me that this cycle can be felt significantly, different from other parts of Southeast Asia like Bangkok, or even Kuala Lumpur which were closer to the equator. Furthermore, Bagas added that the winter in Hanoi was not that extreme to the point where there was snow, but sometimes it could reach 13-14 degrees Celsius, which for people who lived in tropical areas like us was very cold. Of course, the climate of a region is significantly affected by its geographical location. I was reminded by the experience I had living in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for 10 days. When compared with Bangkok, where it was the rainy season, Chiang Mai was colder. If we take a look at a map, Chiang Mai is located on the north, whereas Bangkok is located in the center near the China Sea.

I would stay in this country for the next month, travelling the North region that connects directly with China, separated by steep mountains, all the way to the South regions, to the hot Saigon or Ho Chi Minh City, and further to the South to see the big Mekong River. Vietnam offers endless surprises as I was staying there for the next month, and as seen in the research data, I was able to find many strong and interesting sounds. The following are the sounds from Vietnam, a sentimental country that left a great impression to me. These were the sounds and stories I collected in Vietnam:

### **1. Hmong Children Playing Cards**

February 15th, 2019, it was a breezy afternoon at the mountainous northern part of Vietnam, the day before I started to ride my rented motorbike for the known 'northern loop'.

This journey started from Ha Giang, a small town located about 300km north from Hanoi. This northern part is a border area between Vietnam and China and now a growing tourist's attraction.

The history between Vietnam and China is a long story. Vietnamese historical record, *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* noted that China and Vietnam had contact since the Chinese Warring States period and the Vietnamese Thục Dynasty of the 3rd century BC.

In this northern loop, I had record several sounds, including the sound of Song Lo river which pass from China to Vietnam, cricket and frog sounds at Yen Minh, one of the small towns in the northern loop (after a quiet mountainous area), the sound of a village closest to China – its just about 600 meters from China separated by mountains, etc. Among these recordings, one of my favourite recordings was the sound of Hmong children playing cards at Dong van Plateau. Hmong people are an ethnic group that live in the most southern part of China, northern part of Laos, and northern part of Vietnam. I could feel that they were mountain people and their traditional clothes seemed to protect them from the cold weather

When I stopped at Dong van Plateau, I met a group of Hmong Children. They were around 4 – 9 years old. As tourism grew in this northern loop, Hmong children also began to have interactions with the tourists, which most of them were foreigner. They started to know how to be photographed and several tourists gave them candies or chocolates. But as children, they were just the same as other children in the world: sincere and very cute. Actually, I feel that they didn't really care about the foreign tourist and just enjoyed playing.



One thing that really caught my attention was that they played cards but with Hmong language – of course. The sounds they made while playing cards were very cute and funny. In this recording, you can hear them mentioning their cards, although I cannot understand their language. I recorded them from a very close distance. These children made a circle while playing cards and I just sat beside them, and put my Tascam handy recorder very close to them. I only use my Tascam handy recorder, and did not organize my complete microphone setting. I do not want to disturb them with my tools, and I just want to record their pure authentic behavior. Also, one of the wonderful moments was when one of the children finally realized the handy recording in my hand and shouted “photoo!, photoo!” enthusiastically. Since they were innocent kids, they thought my handy recorder was a camera. Oh how funny and cute. Their accents and laughter when playing cards were really captivating. In the background, you could hear tourist motorbike passed by and several tourists converse while taking photographs of the beautiful Dong van Plateau.

## **2. Canoe at Ninh Binh**

Vietnam is also famous for canoes. If we ever see Vietnam postcards in souvenir shops at Hanoi for example, one of the most famous images would be women wearing nón lá (Vietnam traditional hat) paddling the canoe along the river, canal, or lake.

After several days in busy and noisy Hanoi, I decided to go to Ninh Binh, a rural area about two and half hour south side, by train from Hanoi. Ninh Binh is also one of the famous tourist destinations in Vietnam. Many tourist agencies in Hanoi had photos of these famous destinations hanging on the wall, such as Ha Long Bay, Sapa, Da Nang, Hue, and Ninh Binh. I made the decision based on my small research on Google and imagining that I could record Vietnam rural sounds in this area, including the sounds of water and canoes being paddled around the canals. One of the most famous areas at Ninh Binh, for its beautiful scenery and canals, is Tam Coc.



At Tam Coc, I set my microphone beside the canals and recorded the surrounding sounds. It was really meditative and wonderful. The canals were surrounded by rock cliffs. It gave the chirping sound of birds around Tam Coc a very nice reverb. The water, paddled canoes, tourists talking, and people on the phone (Vietnamese people usually talk very loud on the phone. It is a part of Vietnamese culture I think) were all captured very cleanly on my recording device. Ninh Binh was very quiet compared to Hanoi. When I was staying at Ninh Binh, I felt as if my ears were able to rest for a while. It was like a sanctuary. And when the night came, we could hear the crickets, frogs, and dogs from far away in a very peaceful night. In Vietnam during the not so cold winter season, Ninh Binh was perfect. I really loved the soundscape of Ninh Binh.

### **3. Music for Hau Dong Ritual at Ninh Binh**

Aside from canoe, cricket, and frog sounds, I also recorded cows, farmers, people catching fish by traditional nets, temple bells, etc. Based on the recording of soundscape we would know exactly the difference of cities and rural areas. Not only the sound of nature, luckily I could see and record Hau Đờng ritual at a temple in Tam Coc. Hau Đờng is a folk trance ritual, when a women become a medium for the demon spirit, and she would dance, trance, and change to several costumes based on the spirit during this 2-5 hours ritual.



This ritual is an old tradition of Vietnamese people. Despite the French colonial government and the early communist leader restriction, this ritual still survived and growing more popularity after the restriction became more lax after 1980s. In this ritual, a small ensemble consisting of three musicians accompanied every stage of the ritual and lead the medium for trance

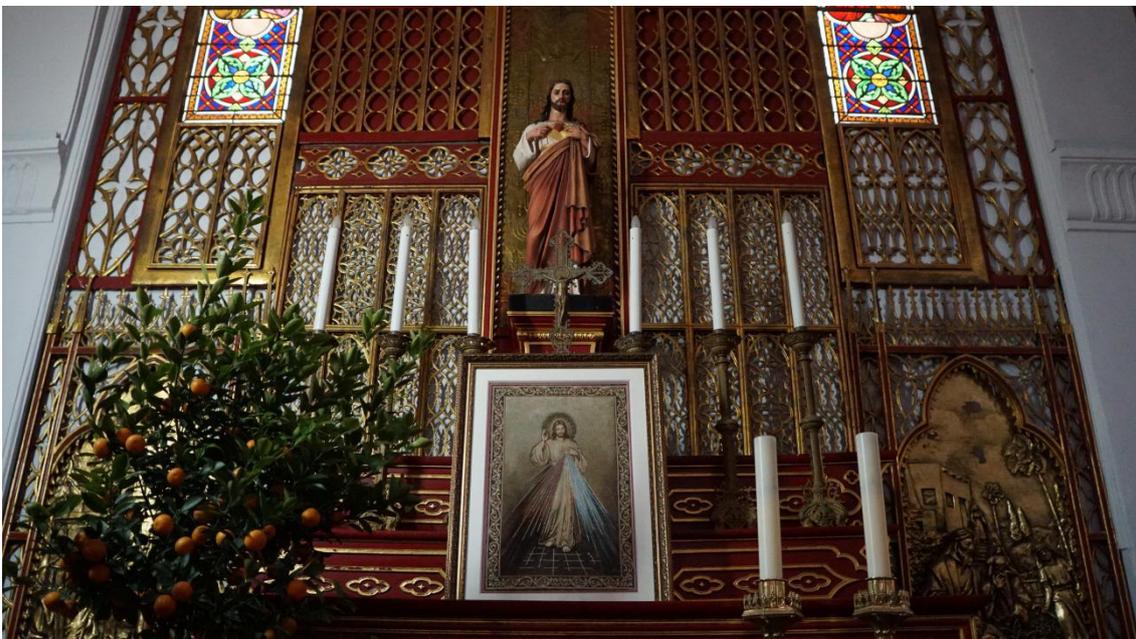
#### **4. Sunday Mass at St. Joseph Cathedral Ha Noi**

In Vietnam, a communist country, the Catholic faith had a long history since 16th century, even before French colonialism. Christianity first came to Vietnam in the 16th and 17th

centuries and was introduced by Dutch and Portuguese traders. When France became the colonial power of Indochina (1859 - 1954), French missionaries arrived to strengthen the Roman Catholic Church which was still prominently represented by large cathedrals in major cities. Protestantism arrived in 1911 with the coming of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and was later strengthened by various Western missionaries. Nowadays, there are more than 8 million Christians in Vietnam (about 8.8 % of Vietnam population).

When I arrived in Hanoi, my friend, Bagas, took me to the famous and historical area: Old Quarter. Then, in this area, just near the Hoan Kiem Lake, I saw the very beautiful St. Joseph Cathedral. This Cathedral was built by the French colonial government and opened for the first time in December 1886.

Then, I decided to record the sound of a Sunday mass here later on the 17th February. When I joined the mass and recorded the sound, I was really amazed. The Catholic liturgical mass in Vietnamese language was really beautiful and made me in awe. The songs sung in Vietnamese was one of the most wonderful mass I had experience in my life. I had recorded the whole mass (about 75 minutes), but this is one of my most favourite moments and songs. I still do not know the meaning of the song, just one word that I heard often during the mass: Chúa, which I found later, meant God. Only that word, and the rest liturgy and song I really didn't know the meaning, but still, through my ears I would say the sound in this church puts me in tears, because of the deep beautiful impression on me.



Later, when I arrived at Ho Chi Minh City, I also recorded the sound during a mass in the really famous Notre Dame Cathedral Saigon. But the sound was different from St. Joseph

Cathedral at Hanoi. There were many big electric fans inside the Notre Dame Cathedral, because Ho Chi Minh City, which was located at the south of Vietnam, was very hot and different from the north Hanoi. So the sound of Notre Dame Cathedral was noisier and less meditative.

## 5. Traffic at Saigon

Now, this is the one famous identity of modern Vietnam: the traffic. I had recorded the traffic sound in many locations in Hanoi and Saigon. In this recording, I recorded the traffic in a busy and hot afternoon near the Saigon River. It was one of the most crowded areas in Ho Chi Minh City or Saigon.

Sounds of surrounding vehicles, like various types of motorcycles, cars, bus, trucks, etc. could be heard. All of these vehicles make a really loud symphony of low frequency sounds, rumbling in a very hot afternoon combined with the loud honks and the sound signals from the buses. Vietnamese people, I felt, really loved to push their horns and we can hear the honking sound for every second in a busy intersection. It was really normal to push horns although sometimes there was no reason to do it (trust me). During my one month journey in Vietnam; my ear still had difficulties accepting this loud honking sound. Sometimes, I just felt that this honking culture also reflected in Vietnamese people loud and high voice while talking to each other. The famous sentence to call each other: “Anh/Chị ơi, cho em hỏi” usually was pronounced with a loud voice. In my first week in Vietnam, I asked my friend regarding this culture. He explained that the loud voice while talking was really normal in Vietnam, so don’t misunderstand it as anger.



In this traffic recording, we can hear how loud it is just to stand beside a busy traffic in Vietnam city. Saigon is a metropolis, and there are many big roads at Saigon. Based on a 2012 government data, there were approximately 340,000 cars and 3.5 million motorcycles in this city, which was almost double compared to Hanoi. Traffic jam is also considered as one of the decade's problem of Ho Chi Minh City. The traffic becomes worst during rush hours. At early morning (4 or 5 am), Saigon's quiet sound was a true privilege. There were only several vehicles, and we could hear clearly the sound of Banh My (Vietnam traditional bread) women vendor riding bicycle around the quiet street, and several beautiful bird sounds at Saigon. Three or four hours later, the same street became a very loud symphony as I had mentioned before.

## **6. Morning Banh Mi at Saigon**

I arrived at Saigon, for the first time, on the 24th February 2019. After three weeks of exploring the northern and central parts of Vietnam, at last I have arrived in the capital city of southern Vietnam. The difference in climate was very significant, due to the fact that Vietnam stretched from China all the way to the equator. It is general knowledge that the northern part of a country is colder than the southern part.

After a long 17 hour train ride from Da-Nang City, I arrived in Saigon at dawn, around three in the morning. I decided to rest in the station before I ordered an online taxi to the place where I will stay at. I then arrived in the hotel around half to five in the morning, and unfortunately it had not opened yet. No one was there. I was very tired, and my eyes were getting heavy. In addition, I had not taken a shower since the day before. Trapped in an unfavourable condition, I decided to look for a 24 hour convenience store where I could buy a drink, some snacks, relax, and perhaps find a better hotel that is more accessible.

I finally found a convenience store on the corner of a crossroad at district 1 Saigon. After buying a drink and some snacks, I sat down on the pavement whilst leaning on the store window. It was in that moment where I was able to listen to the soundscape of this city at dawn. The city that is considered to be the most crowded city in Vietnam. If the hotel was opened, I would undoubtedly be getting ready to sleep, and miss this precious moment (I am not a person who is able to wake up early). The streets were still empty, there were only a few vehicles passing by. A couple of youth can be seen still talking on the side of the road. On the other hand, the birds began to chirp not too loudly. Shortly after, I encounter the sound which I would hear often as I stayed in this city and that was the sound of the Banh Mi vendor making their rounds while riding their bikes. Banh Mi is a type of sandwich unique to Vietnam,

especially to Saigon. There are many Banh Mi vendors in this city. As I was sitting, I see quite a few Banh Mi vendors pass me by.

The history of this particular food is very interesting. It was highly influenced by the French Colonials<sup>7</sup>. After relaxing in front of the convenience store, I decided to search for a new place to stay where it was more crowded but still in the same district, near Đường Trần Hưng Đạo street to be exact. I had walked for one and a half kilometres. Around six in the morning near the hotel, the street was starting to get lively. I could hear the sounds of vehicles, people talking and starting their day. The music from the bar across the street could still be heard, and the sound of a lady Banh Mi vendors can be heard in the corner of the street. I stopped for a moment and recorded the whole experience.

To illustrate the Banh Mi vendors in Saigon, this lady vendor was riding an electric bike, and on the handles hung plastics full of Banh Mi bread. At the rear was a big basket filled with Banh Mi and other ingredients. Banh Mi is usually sold with a variety of fillings, such as vegetables, mainly pork, egg, chicken, fish, and other fillings. The vendors usually wear non la, a Vietnamese hat, to protect them from the sun. Other than that, there was this medium sized speaker hanging above the front wheel of the bicycle, which creates the unique sound of Banh Mi vendors. Technology helped the vendors, because the speakers are able to produce the sound without rest until the battery dies. The unique sound of Banh Mi vendor was a repeated compact sentence. At the moment, I did not understand what the sentence meant. It was only

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<sup>7</sup> The word *bánh mì*, meaning "bread", was attested in Vietnamese as early as the 1830s, in Jean-Louis Taberd's dictionary *Dictionarium Latino-Annamiticum*.<sup>[10]</sup> French colonists introduced Vietnam to the *baguette*, along with other baked goods such as *pâté chaud*, in the 1860s, when Vietnam was part of *French Indochina*.<sup>[11][7]</sup> Northern Vietnamese initially called the baguette *bánh tây*, literally "Western *bánh*", while southern Vietnamese called it *bánh mì*, "wheat *bánh*".<sup>[12][13]</sup> Nguyễn Đình Chiểu mentioned the baguette in his 1861 poem "Văn tế nghĩa sĩ Cần Giuộc". Due to the price of imported wheat at the time, French baguettes and sandwiches were considered luxury items. During *World War I*, an influx of French soldiers and supplies arrived. At the same time, disruptions of wheat imports led bakers to begin mixing in inexpensive *rice flour* (which also made the bread fluffier). As a result, for ordinary Vietnamese to enjoy French staples such as bread became possible.<sup>[14][15][13]</sup> Many shops baked twice a day, because bread tends to go stale more quickly in the Vietnamese climate. Baguettes were mainly eaten for breakfast with some butter and sugar.<sup>[7]</sup>

Until the 1950s, sandwiches hewed closely to French tastes, typically a *jambon-beurre* moistened with a *mayonnaise* or liver *pâté* spread.<sup>[14][15][7][16]</sup> The 1954 *Partition of Vietnam* sent over a million migrants from *North Vietnam* to *South Vietnam*, transforming Saigon's local cuisine.<sup>[12]</sup> Among the migrants were Lê Minh Ngọc and Nguyễn Thị Tịnh, who opened a small bakery named Hòa Mã in *District 3*. In 1958, Hòa Mã became one of the first shops to sell *bánh mì thịt*.<sup>[14][17][18]</sup> Around this time, another migrant from the North began selling *chả* sandwiches from a basket on a *mobylette*.<sup>[19]</sup> and a stand in *Gia Định Province* (present-day *Phú Nhuận District*) began selling *phá lấu* sandwiches.<sup>[20]</sup> Some shops stuffed sandwiches with inexpensive *Cheddar cheese*, which came from French food aid that migrants from the North had rejected.<sup>[7]</sup> *Vietnamese communities in France* also began selling *bánh mì*.<sup>[13]</sup>

After the *Fall of Saigon* in 1975, *bánh mì* sandwiches became a luxury item once again.<sup>[12]</sup> During the so-called "*subsidy period*", state-owned *phở* eateries often served bread or cold rice as a side dish, leading to the present-day practice of dipping *quẩy* in *phở*.<sup>[21]</sup> In the 1980s, *Đổi Mới* market reforms led to a renaissance in *bánh mì*, mostly as *street food*.<sup>[12]</sup>

when I was writing this report when I found out, through references on the internet, what that sentence was. The sentence was:

*Bánh Mì Nóng, Bánh Mì Nóng Giòn Đây, Bánh Mì Nóng....*

Which translates to “breads, hot and crunchy breads”. When I knew what the sentence was, I felt more sentimental with the vendors.



*A Banh Mi lady passing by the road near Ben Thanh Market of Saigon*

## **7. Tug of War, Jump Rope, and Bamboo Jumping Around Hoan Kiem Lake**

When I first arrived in Hanoi, my friend Bagas from Yogyakarta, who had lived in Hanoi for three years, asked me to come with him to explore the city of Hanoi, the Old Square district to be exact.

For the people of Hanoi, Hoan Kiem is a historical and sacred lake. This lake stretches for 12 acres, and the Ngoc Son Temple sits on top of a small island right at the centre of the lake. This temple was built in the 18th century to honour Tran Hung Dao, a Vietnam military officer in the 13th century who led in the battle against the Mongol invaders. The Hoan Kiem Lake and Ngoc Son Temple is one of the important symbols of Hanoi City. Every day, local people and foreign tourists would walk on the streets around the Hoan Kiem Lake.

On weekends, the streets around the Hoan Kiem Lake are usually closed for vehicles and become exclusive for pedestrians. I thought that time of the week was the most interesting time to be around the lake, especially at night time when people come to the lake from every direction. Streets that were usually full of noise from car engines and sirens turned to a street

full of the noise of people doing many different activities. There were children playing soccer, street musicians singing, people exercising, men and women dancing (a community) complete with the costumes and music such as waltz, tango, salsa, or mambo that were played through a speaker. Then there were a group of young people breakdancing to hip hop music that was played from a boom box, there were also Christians conducting prayers in this street, there were children playing jump rope, bamboo jumping, and tug of war.

This last activity really caught my attention, because a group of children, not more than 10 people, didn't just play by themselves, but also taught other people who wanted to play along. A big long rope would entice other people to join in. There were no strict rules. When they felt that each side had the same amount of man power, one of the kids would become the referee and another becomes the initiator. People who passed by will spontaneously become supporters adding to the noise of the people who were playing this competition with no prize. Unfortunately, because I was too captivated by the match, I forgot to take pictures of this moment.

The weekend here in Hoan Kiem felt as though there were no boundaries in the interactions between people. Anyone can join in any activities without needing to introduce themselves, and people cheering without even knowing who they were cheering for. Everyone seemed to be immersed in the excitement and warmth of that cold night in Hanoi. All of a sudden, I did not feel like a stranger there. I felt that this atmosphere was unique to the people of Vietnam even from day one. They were very open and warm. An atmosphere I would come to miss later on.



## 7. Bar and Cafe in Saigon

The recording you are listening now is the recording of the atmosphere near my hotel at night near Đường Trần Hưng Đạo street, Saigon. When I first got here on 24th February the atmosphere near my hotel was not very crowded (like how I explained regarding the Banh Mi vendor). 50 meters from where I was staying, I only saw bars and cafes along the roads that were active in the morning. The scenery of serenity sits on the side of the road, street lights, clean tables, and empty roads that indicate a world that is not yet active.

The night I walked out of the alley in search of food, was greeted with an entirely different atmosphere. Honestly, I was already able to hear the hectic atmosphere from my hotel. Along the road, there were bar stools filled by mostly young adults. These chairs even went as far as to fill the road, and didn't give space for vehicles making it hard for the vehicles to pass by. Motorcycles parked along the side of the road. The tables were full of beers, drinks, and food, and not to mention the music coming from the cafes that are played at the highest volume possible. The cafes and bars did not have closed walls, even though they were all next to each other making the music from different cafes to merge. It felt as if every sound competes and collides with each other in this relatively small area. It astonishes me how people here are able to stay here for hours in this condition, even though you need to use much energy just to talk to each other in this hectic environment. I was even able to feel the vibration of the music. I only lasted for five minutes as I was walking through the boisterous street. It very much drained my energy to be hit by overwhelming sonic waves from every direction. Perhaps, people have different tolerance level towards sound (could that be true?). I did not put the recordings input level above 14% (this is a very low input level), because if I were to use a higher input level then the sound would exceed the limit. Amazing is it not? The intensity of sonic waves in that area.

I came to remember my experience with sekaten at Yogyakarta square, especially the in last decade. Every amusement ride gets highlighted with sound systems. Loud sounds are somehow associated with festivals. For example, when we ride "ombak banyu" or "kora-kora", the excitement gets escalated by the beat of music. I still remember when I was a child, around 20 years ago, Sekaten was not as hectic as it is today, except near the stage and tong stalls. I feel that the sekaten of today is more of a competition of amplifiers, where each amusement ride would play a very loud music so that people will hear them. Due to that, the sound would accumulate into a higher level of noise. Ironically, the beautiful sound of gamelan sekati, which is part of the ritual in Pagongan Lor and Pagongan Kidul, has to compete with the sounds of amusement rides that are more than 100 meters apart from where the ritual takes

place. In the past, this giant gamelan was built so that the sound can be heard from far away as part of the Maulid tradition.

I don't mean to be ignorant, but I feel that we have to re-evaluate how we use the technology around us, in this case speakers. Don't let the advancement of technology makes us aloof to the fact that our body have limitations, especially our ears that cannot be exposed to a constant high sonic waves.



#### **8. The sound of Toad and Insects in Tam Coc Ninh Binh at Night**

Different from the boisterous environment of Đường Trần Hưng Đạo street at night, Tam Coc Ninh Binh in the evening had a very peaceful and calming atmosphere. Based on my experience, similar to the atmosphere in the country side of Vietnam, the soundscape of Tam Coc Ninh Binh at night was mostly dominated by the sound of nature, like frogs, dogs, crickets, and other insects. Humans and machines can also be heard, but they are kept on a moderate level.

#### **9. The Screams of Pig Before being Slaughtered**

As I was exploring the northern mountain region, I stumbled upon the people of Hmong who were preparing a feast on the side of the road. After reading some references, I came to understand that the Hmong people would occasionally hold a feast to commemorate certain events, such as the Hmong New Year called Noj Tsiab where they would hold a three day long feast which consists of pigs, cows, and buffalo meat.

That afternoon, somewhere near the Hmong Royal Palace Xà Phìn, Đồng Văn District, Hà Giang province, dozens of men and women, complete with their traditional costume, gathered to enjoy the feast by the side of the road. There were smoke coming from the cauldron where they would cook the meat, and people skinning and cutting the pig.



I recorded the cries of the pigs that were dragged through the road to the chopping block. Along with the cries, the pigs struggled to not get dragged by the people. The cries of the pigs broke my heart. I could feel the fear through their screams. The intensity of the screams spread across the wide mountainous terrain. Perhaps people can say that animals, in this case a pig, cannot think and feel as humans do. However, the anger and fear of the pig can be felt through their screams. It was a different groan than the one made by the pigs that were enjoying their food in the cage. It was the last groans of pain before being slaughtered. In this same recording, we can hear the sound of fire being ignited and people conversing while they skin the pigs they have slaughtered. That afternoon was a very impactful experience for me. In addition, it was the year of the pig.

#### 10. Tet firework at Hoan Kiem Hanoi

It can be said that I arrived in Vietnam at the wrong time, but lately I have been thinking that I am fortunate to have arrived at that “wrong time”. I arrived in Hanoi on the 2nd of February, 3 days before the Chinese New Year; Tet, short for Tết Nguyên Đán (節元旦), which is a Sino-Vietnamese phrase for “Feast of the first morning day”. Yes, I arrived in Vietnam right before Tet, an important time of the year when people would go back to their hometown to

gather with their friends and families. This tradition is very similar to Eid in Indonesia. This atmosphere would go on to continue for about a week, so my friend who was living in Hanoi told me that I will have trouble looking for places to eat and buy daily needs because most of them will be closed. In short, I felt that I arrived at an abnormal time when the world was revolving around its own rituals, and I wasn't part of it.

As I was in this lonely state, I received information that upon new year's, 4 to 5 of February, there will be a firework festival at at Hoan Kiem Lake, Hanoi Old Square, in commemoration of the Chinese New Year. I was ecstatic to hear the news. I would be able to record the sound of fireworks and also the people who gathered around to celebrate the special occasion.

Long story short, on the night of 4th February, I arrived at Hoan Kiem Lake at around 10.30 pm. The roads around the Lake were closed for vehicles and were only opened for pedestrians. When I arrived there, the situation was already hectic. The area was full of people ranging from small children and their parents, teenagers, young adults, and senior citizens. I even had trouble setting my tripod and microphone and had to guard it with my hands in case someone bumps into it. Walking through the crowd was also a problem; I had to look for the slightest gap to be able to step forward. I then decided to not use a tripod and instead hold the microphone and recorder in my hands in order to be more flexible.

As midnight draws closer, the atmosphere became livelier. At last, the moment everyone has been waiting for has arrived. At 12 o'clock sharp, the sound of the first firework was heard, followed by a barrage of other fireworks. The sound of firework filled the air. The sky above the Lake was filled with colours. Everyone was cheering, especially when fireworks made special formations. Firework show, just like a symphony, is designed to have a certain form and rhythm. We could feel the dynamics of the show from start to finish.



The sound of fireworks reminded me of an interesting fact. If we read the history of fireworks that used gunpowder as the explosive, it originated from China, in the era of Sung Dynasty from 960-1279, before spreading through the globe. Later on, gunpowder was used as a means of war around the world. Fascinating how I was immersed that night recording the sounds of firework celebrating Chinese New Year by the edge of the Hoan Kiem Lake, Central Vietnam. Other than the sound of explosions, fireworks produce crackling noise that is unique to fireworks.

## **Soundscape of Malaysia and Singapore**

For centuries, the Malay Peninsula has become an arena of cultural contacts from various directions. Its position between the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean is very strategic for trading map in the past. Culture and beliefs from India, the Arabian, China, Western colonialism and other regions have formed a heterogeneous identity in this region.

During my soundscape research, I found that the diversity of sounds in the Malay Peninsula region was very rich, as a result of cultures contacts that had been formed for centuries. My journey started from the capital city of Malaysia Kuala Lumpur, and then crossed to Penang Island in the north part of Malaysia which was also full of cultural contacts, and headed south to the historic city of Malacca, and ended in the metropolis and modern city of Singapore.

I spent 1 month on this trip: two weeks in Malaysia and two weeks in Singapore. These are some of the soundscape recordings that I chose as ethnographic narratives from this region starting from street musicians in Malacca, bells in the church of St. Paul Malacca, Immigrants workers holiday in Singapore, etc.

### **1. Street Musician in Melacca Singing 'Sukiyaki'**

It was a Saturday night in the historic city of Malacca. Among various cities in Southeast Asia, Malacca is one of the cities that have many stories in the past. Due to its strategic position as a trading port, this area was fought over by various colonial powers. After the Portuguese conquered this city in 1511, Malacca continued to move from one power to another. Namely, the Dutch colonial in 1641-1798, then the British colonial in 1824-1942, Japanese occupation in 1942-1945 before finally becoming part of the Malayan Union in April 1946.

Now, Malacca is no longer contested. There are no more sounds of war and busy merchant ships, as in historical illustrations and artefacts left in the Melaka museum. A

remaining number of European cannons were strewn by the fort of A Portuguese Famosa and around Christchurch. I can only imagine Malacca was once filled with the sounds of war cannons, explosions, pistols, cheers of war besides the noise of the traders and the people around the Bandar.

Now Malacca, which is full of historical buildings, has become one of the favourite tourist destinations in Southeast Asia. In 2008 the Malacca was named as a Unesco World Heritage Site. The tourists from various countries packed Malacca every week. Quoted from the Malaysian government statistics in 2017, tourists in Melaka reached 16.79 million.

When I walked through Malacca on Saturday night March 16, 2019, I found that the soundscape in Malacca was full of the sounds of tourists from various nationalities who were taking pictures in front of various buildings, then the sound of tourist Pedi cabs playing loud music on the loud streets of Melaka, aside from the sound of motorcycles and cars. Malacca was noisy on Saturday nights.



I decided to record and observe the soundscape in the front area of Christchurch Melaka. This church was completed by the Dutch colonial authorities in 1753 and is now no longer used. One of the sound that I recorded was the sound of street musicians that sang and played guitar and harmonica instruments. He sang various popular songs to entertain tourists passing by and his music amplified by a portable sound amplifier and speaker. It was not too loud and not too quiet. One song that was sung was Sukiyaki, a Japanese song popularized by Kyu Sakamoto released in 1961. This song felt really sentimental being among the historical buildings in Malacca. The soundscape also included sounds of water flowing from the Queen

Victoria Fountain which was built in 1901 by the British colonial government. Then the noise of the crowds of tourists who celebrated the night in Malacca

## **2. St. Peter Church Bell**

On Sunday, 17th March, I attended Mass at St Peter Church Malacca. This church was built in 1701 and became the oldest Catholic Church still functioning in Malaysia. In 1511 to 1641 when the Portuguese came to power, Malacca became a Christian city with the existence of a Roman Catholic Church or chapel on the streets of Malacca. In 1618 there were around 7400 Christian followers in Malacca with 14 churches and two chapels.

When Malacca fell into the hands of the Dutch in 1641, the Dutch government which was a follower of Protestant Christianity began to demolish Catholic churches which were established by the Portuguese in Malacca. Catholic priests were forbidden to preach and Catholics are persecuted.

History changed again during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), the Netherlands and the Portuguese sided with the allies (Grand Alliance) to fight French domination. After that, the Dutch colonial government abolished the policy of persecution of Catholics in Malacca and a Dutch Catholic follower named Franz Amboer was granted a plot of land for the location to establish St. Peter Church in 1710. That same year, the St Peter Church's tower bell was completed.

I felt very fortunate to be able to record the sounds of the very old and historic St. Peter Church. I attended the mass at 9 am and when I was reprimanded by the mass officer, who knew that I turned on my portable recorder, I stopped recording the Mass in St Peter Church. After the Mass had finished, I did not go straight home, but sat in front of St Peter Church admiring the architecture of this church under the hot Malacca sun.

Then, approaching 11 o'clock I was surprised. Mass officers rang the bells of St Peter Church, and quickly I got my portable sound recorder from my bag and turn it on. I quickly recorded the sound of this bell before it stops. Finally, I managed to record about 45 seconds of the St. Peter's bell. This was not a perfect recording because it included the sound of wind blowing and the first 15 seconds of the recording sound was at peak, because I did not have time to make any preparations. However, this imperfect recording felt so valuable. At least I could clean it in post-production later on to eliminate the sound of wind blowing and adjust the volume. I was very happy to be able to get the sound of this bell, because this bell was very old and historical. According to historical records, the bells of St Peter Church were made in Goa in 1608, and were saved during the Dutch conquest.



### **3. Adzan Sound from Kapitan Keling Mosque George Town, Penang Island**

One stop point of my soundscape research in Malaysia was Penang Island. This small island, located about 360km north of Kuala Lumpur, is also a place with various cultural interactions for hundreds of years. Starting from Islamic Culture, India, Chinese to the time of British colonial occupation.

The soundscape on Penang Island was very interesting. In contrast to the boisterous and urban soundscape of Kuala Lumpur, Penang Island was relatively quieter and calmer. Especially at night, the streets of Penang Island began to settle down. This is a sound recording of sermons and Adzan from the Kapitan Keling Mosque, which is one of the largest mosques in Georgetown, capital city of Penang. This mosque is located in the corner of Buckingham and Pitt Street or Majid Kapitan Keling Street. The mosque was founded by the Indian Muslim merchant community in 1801. Keling or Kling derived from Sanskrit Kalingga, a word used in parts of Southeast Asia to denote a person of the Indian subcontinent. Kapitan is a term for the community. In short, the Kapitan Keling Mosque means a mosque for the Muslim community from India. This mosque is one of the buildings that marked the early history of the Indian Muslim community in Penang, which started in the early 1800s.



In my second night in Penang, I recorded sermons in Malay and Adzan from this mosque. It was in Malay, but I heard a sermon in Indian on the last night before leaving for Malacca and decided to go back to my hotel to take my portable recording device to record it. I recorded on the Buckingham street corner. On this recording we can hear the sound of motorbikes and cars on the streets of Georgetown which began to settle down at night, during the Isha Prayer in Penang which usually happens after 8.30 PM.

#### **4. Sunday: Immigrant Workers Holiday in Front of St Andrew Church Singapore.**

Singapore, a metropolitan city state in Southeast Asia, is also a working place for many immigrants from other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, etc. Since Sunday was a holiday, the workers gathered on the front yard outside of St. Andrew Church, across from the National Gallery of Singapore. They gathered and mingled, celebrating their holidays with friends. At the same place a few days before, there were no people gathered. It was just like a normal street for pedestrians. On this Sunday however, this place is full of people. I recorded the hustle and bustle of the workers who laughed and chatted in various Southeast Asian languages. They seemed to really enjoy meeting one another. I felt very sentimental, being far away from home myself. In the midst of Singapore's busy modern life, which in my opinion was rather 'cold', ignorant, and tends to be individualistic, the hustle and intimacy of the workers who were so loose and intimate was so interesting. It's like a community. I imagine, tomorrow they all had to return to their

workplaces and be immersed in the domestic areas of their work. Then next Sunday would be a nice time to meet with friends again.



## 5. Soundscape from Singapore River

In 1819 Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles founded Singapore as a trading port for the British East India Company. At that time Raffles thought that Singapore's position was potentially very strategic for a trading port. Since then, Singapore's history as one of the busiest trading ports in Southeast Asia began. Raffles adopted a free trade policy so the traders from various countries were free to trade in Singapore. In the past, the Singapore River became a melting pot for merchant ships. The river became very crowded and a bit chaotic by rapid trade between the people. It was really full of ships!

In 1977, the famous Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew decided to clean up Singapore's rivers, which included the Singapore River and the Kallang River. The clean-up cost the government \$ 300 million and involved a relocation of about 4,000 squatters, along with hawkers and vegetable sellers, whose daily waste flowed into the river. Public housing was found for the squatters, while street hawkers were persuaded to move to hawker center. The government then dredged foul-smelling mud from the banks and the bottom of the river, clearing the debris and other rubbish<sup>8</sup>

Now, the area around the Singapore River is very clean and is only passed by boats for tourists. I spent time recording soundscape around the Singapore River of today. There was not much noise, because the Singapore River stream is very calm, there was only the sound of

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/5-interesting-facts-about-the-singapore-river-clean-up>

tourist boats with its not so noisy engine compared with the boats at Chao Phraya River, and these boats didn't cause a lot of water waves. Then, the sound of birds chirping, constructions near the Asian Civilization Museum, the sounds of travelers enjoying the area around Singapore River, the sound of bicycles, scooters, and road traffic in the distance, and also the sound of clock bell from the historical Victoria Memorial Bell Tower.



We can only imagine, the soundscape on the Singapore River in the past was very different, very crowded with traders, full of boats and people around the river. If we compare photos of the past and present, the differences are very obvious. Those sounds have gone away, and we can only imagine how it was. Now it has become part of the historical journey in modern and fast changing Singapore.

## **6. Dangdut Night at Bukit Bintang**

For me, visiting Malaysia was like visiting a unique relative. There were many similarities, but in the same time very different. That same feeling always accompanied me every time I go there. The history and language is something I will not discuss since it would be too long. I only want to tell my experience while I was living in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. When I first arrived at the capital city of Malaysia, I stayed at a hotel in Lebu Ampang near the Jamek Mosque for two days. Then I moved to Bukit Bintang, the grand entertainment and shopping center of Malaysia. I did not know about this place beforehand, because I only depended on the information from the internet.

Bukit Bintang offered many interesting sounds. Other than the sounds produced by tourists, people that were shopping, and loud noises of people having dinner in Alor Street, this whole area was like a stage for street musicians that intensifies a Saturday night. One musician that surprised me was a man in front of a KFC outlet who was playing dangdut. I suddenly felt as if I had been back in Indonesia. This group consisted of three blind men who played bass, guitar, and an electric drum that could be adjusted to sound like a ketipang, and two people singing the songs. Other than dangdut, a music that was familiar to my ears, they also sang songs from Indonesia, such as Kereta Malam, Bete, and Sambalado. The music they produced was very fun to hear, so much so that people from different backgrounds danced along with the music to celebrate that night.



Right beside the musicians was a generator for source of energy for the instruments, microphone, and speakers that the musicians were using. I recorded for about an hour until the show finished. I chose the song Sambalado for my recording that sounded very fun. The accompanier, although there were only three, sounded very cohesive. The drummer, bassist, and guitarist were very skillful. They were able to adapt various dangdut songs that were usually played in Indonesia. What was interesting was that the singers were still talking in Malay while they were singing. There was this funny moment when one of the singer forgot to sing right after the intro, but the audience were already singing with full excitement. The other singer then teased her by saying “hei, lepas interview jadi lupa diri kamu ya.” It was really a warm experience for me after travelling for two months through Thailand and Vietnam with all the different cultures.

The music merged with the sound of the crowd in that gleaming night at Bukit Bintang. In the far distance was the KL Tower piercing the sky. Another thing that was interesting for me was in the midst of the crowd there was a group of women wearing hijab with their children dancing along to the music. They know almost every song being sung that night. How did they memorize them? It was very adorable, but unfortunately I was not able to ask them if they were from Indonesia. I was only able to speculate. It seems that I would have to come back to enjoy the music and have conversation with people there. The beat of dangdut was the trill of reality. Sambalado is a kind of chilli from the Minang tribe in west Sumatra, who are also the descendent of Malay people. Dadan Indriana, the writer of the song, used it as a metaphor to explain the ups and downs of a love story.

“Sambalado”. Songwriter: Dadan Indriana

*Sambala, sambala, bala sambalado*

*Terasa pedas, terasa panas*

*Sambala, sambala, bala sambalado*

*Mulut bergetar, lidah bergoyang*

*Cintamu seperti sambalado ah ah*

*Rasanya cuma di mulut saja ah ah*

*Janjimu seperti sambalado ah ah*

*Enaknya cuma di lidah saja*

*O-o-o-ho ...*

## **7. Al-Quran Busker at Bukit Bintang**

Still from the same night in the Bukit Bintang area, about a hundred meters from the MRT station, I recorded the voice of an Al-Quran reciters busker sitting on the sidewalk on a thin plastic carpet. He wears a *kopiah*, and in front of him is an Al-Quran holy book. Beside him, there is an open bag as a place for passersby to give money. This scene initially surprised me a bit because I had never encountered the same activity in Indonesia. But during my stay in Malaysia, I encountered these Al-Quran reciters several times in Kuala Lumpur and Melaka and then became somewhat accustomed. They chanted the holy verses of the Koran in the crowd. That night, without using loudspeaker technology, the reciter voice mixed with the hustle and bustle of the streets in Bukit Bintang, the sound of police sirens, the sound of footsteps and people passing by with high intensity and also the sound of music singers from a distance.



## 8. The Sounds of Tires and Asphalt on the Streets of Chinatown, Singapore

I have to say that the quality of asphalt in Singapore was very good. From my observation while I was staying there and when I listened to the recordings, the sound texture of friction made by cars, motorcycles, and other vehicles were very soft. This was not only true for the main road, but also to the smaller roads which were very nice and flat. The roads were not bumpy nor were it full of holes. The sound produced by the road was very different when compared with the sound made in Bangkok, Yogyakarta, and Hanoi. In fact, the government was very detailed when it comes to asphalt quality. You can hear the following recording of the streets around Chinatown where I stayed at. I recorded this at night on a weekday. The intensity of sound was no longer condensed, and we can hear a couple of cars passed by now and then where the sound of the tire rolling against the road sounded very clear and satisfying. A very unique sound you could hear in the streets of Singapore. For additional information, I would like to quote a news from a website called [www. Torque.com.sg](http://www.torque.com.sg)<sup>9</sup>:

*Singapore has over 3400 kilometres of paved roads and they're generally among the world's best in surface quality. Those rough and uneven sections around MRT tunneling works are only temporary – everywhere else, our roads are kept up to scratch by periodic maintenance.*

.....

*Samwoh Corporation, probably Singapore's largest road construction company, produces a wide range of asphalt grades. According to Samwoh's senior technical manager Dr Kelvin Lee, "A variety of asphalt grades are possible with our in-house developed PMB, which stands for Polymer Modified Bitumen. In addition, we are heavy users of recycled aggregate from other sectors of the construction industry, even though we have our own offshore granite quarry."*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.torque.com.sg/features/the-science-of-road-construction-in-singapore/>

The industry refers to the top layer of the road surface as the “Wearing Course”, for obvious reasons. This is the asphalt pre-mix which is in direct contact with vehicle tyres. It would be easy to engineer a resilient pavement using hard-wearing PMB, but that would affect the level of grip and thereby compromise road safety. The available surface friction between tarmac and tires is a critical parameter. It is determined according to the road’s designated speed and expected traffic load, so the asphalt formula used for, say, Kranji Way is very different from that of Kranji Expressway.



If we compare it with the streets in major cities of South East Asia like Hanoi, Bangkok, and Jakarta, the streets of Singapore tends to be more organized. At least according to my experience when visiting Singapore, I had never experienced a traffic jam to a degree where it causes stress. In addition, there were less car horns compared to other cities like Saigon. The level of sound was still very comfortable to my ears. Although sometimes there were sport bikes or sport cars with roaring engine passed by from time to time, but overall the sounds were very clean. On one side, Singapore, which has a very small space, has created a very great traffic system. The subway can reach any parts of the island. I was very surprised while writing this part as I came across writings from other travelers regarding Singapore’s past. One of the writing was from Robert Foran, a novelist and travelogue writer from England, who was on a trip to write about the countries in South East Asia.<sup>10</sup> The articles written by Foran were very different from the modern Singapore, and I tried to imagine how different Singapore was back then. It is true, that after Raffles made Singapore as an open trading country, Singapore grew

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<sup>10</sup> Tulisan ini dimuat dalam buku kumpulan tulisan berjudul Traveller’s Singapore. An Anthology. Disusun oleh John Bastin dan diterbitkan oleh Oxford University Press pada tahun 1994. Kemudian diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Indonesia dan diterbitkan oleh Komunitas Bambu pada tahun 2011 dengan judul Singapura Tempo Doeloe, 1819-1942.

very dynamically as time goes on. Foran's writing was very interesting and detailed as a personal experience. I also think that Foran had a very sensitive hearing. In his writing, we can see how much he was bothered by the boisterous sounds in the streets of Singapore:

*Travelling in Singapore is always filled with life. The uproar cannot be described. London, New York, Paris, and other big cities are already quite bad, but they all seem like a calming place compared to Singapore. The drivers of public transportation, who are of Malay descent, have a very bad attitude. They cannot seem to resist the temptation to press the honk. Their mischievous fingers just cannot seem to stay away from the horn even for a second. These acts of theirs are identical to children who are given trumpets to entertain themselves, and use it to torment others.*

*These drivers do not seem to understand that car horns are meant to be used to warn other cars when they are getting too close. They think that horns were created solely to be pressed as they please. They are the source of annoyance, because they make create unwanted noise day and night.*

*I often see taxis line up pressing their horns as if they were playing a symphony. Some sit up straight and use all their might to press the horn, and there are also some who lay back, smoking a cigarette while pressing the horn with their feet. The bustling sound of this amateur jazz band is better only imagined and not displayed. This has to be torture for the people who work in the area, or even the ones only passing by. This constant noise created by vehicles is strongly not permitted to be played as music.*

*To be used to the sounds is something that seems to be impossible. The noise will not stop until around two or three in the morning. Two hours later, the church bell will be rung to call upon the people of faith, and the symphony of car horns will start all over again. For the first few days I was in Singapore, I could only sleep three to four hours at night. If this keeps going, visitors might just go crazy.*

Foran's writing was very different from what I had experienced while staying in Singapore. I had travelled all over the island, and I couldn't seem to find the boisterous sounds Foran was describing. In fact, I was always able to have a good sleep at night. Even when I was staying in Chinatown near the main road, I was not having trouble sleeping. This was due to the fact that the intensity of sound drastically lessens at night. I even often overslept. The only torment I felt while in Singapore is the scorching sun, and that is why I mostly start recording in the afternoon and at night. The reason for that was standing in the middle of the sun really drained my energy.

### **Soundscape from Japan**

After three months going through multicultural regions of Southeast Asia, I started my research journey in Japan on April 1, 2019. Starting from a very crowded and metropolitan city - Tokyo, then moving to the north: to Sendai, Yamagata, the cold Hokkaido island, then flying to Osaka, Kyoto and the quiet Kinosaki. These are some of the soundscape that I selected from many soundscape recordings in Japan.

## 1. Akihabara Pachinko

Based on my experience in recording so many soundscapes in Japan, Pachinko is probably one of the noisiest places in Japan. Here, many machines produce very loud sounds that are overlapping with each other. It was a very chaotic place of sound; it was neither fancy nor very well organized.

At Akihabara, one of the most popular electronic and entertainment centers in the 90s Japan, Pachinko was easy to find. I visited Akihabara for the first time on April 2nd. Tokyo is a metropolis city where the pressure of work life and business can be felt in everyday life. Pachinko is one of many places to relieve fatigue. Based on my observations, Pachinko in Tokyo was always crowded especially after the afternoon and usually not so much during the day. In addition, Pachinko in Tokyo was more crowded than other cities that were not so busy and stressful compared to Tokyo, like Sapporo, Kyoto or Hirakata. While I was in Pachinko I observed that the ones who played were mostly workers after work. They were still in formal attires, both men and women. We can find Pachinko parlor machine almost everywhere in Japan, from the north Hokkaido to south. Many Japanese people spend hours in Pachinko to kill some time. Of course not all of Japanese people play Pachinko, but it's a strong part of Japanese life.



I recorded with a handy recorder, of course not in a complete setting. In this recording, very loud engine sounds can be heard from all directions. The sounds of Pachinko balls and the other sound in that area were really loud. I am a little surprised by how many people in Pachinko could tolerate this noise for hours. In less than ten minutes I was in Pachinko, my

ears felt like they were going to fall off. Perhaps it was because I did not join the game. When I was writing this report, I read the history of Pachinko. It was very interesting to find that Pachinko machines were always innovated. So the Pachinko machine that we see today is the modern pachinko machine. It also had a very long history. Until 1980s Pachinko machines were mechanical devices that used bells to indicate different state of machine. I wondered how the Pachinko place sounded in the past. It would be very interesting to compare it with Pachinko machines nowadays which had very loud electronic sound effects and music. There were various sound effects which indicate many things, such as win or lose.

## **2. Water and Birds at Genbudo Cave Toyooka**

On April 26, my friend Kumiko Yabu-san took me to Kinosaki to visit Genbudo Cave in Akaishi, Toyooka. Toyooka is around 3-4 hours north from central Kyoto. This area is near the sea and is very beautiful.

We visited Genbudo Cave in the evening around 6pm before it was dark. A good moment as Kumiko-san said, because during the day this place was usually crowded with tourists and it would be difficult to record beautiful natural sounds.



The sound of gurgling water reflected on the walls of basalt rocks. It felt like enjoying a natural concert with natural reverb. Reflections were very distinctive compared to acoustics on concert halls. In ancient times of the Edo period, many people took stones from the Genbudo cave to build foundations for their houses, walls, and other infrastructure so as to make deep basins and sculptures here.

When I was recording, a bird sang very beautifully and its sound was also formed by a stone wall. It was truly a meditation with natural sounds in Japan. Kumiko Yabu-san also taught me many things about the science of sound recording because he was a musician and composer aside from being a sound engineer. I learned a lot especially about the placement of microphones to get good sound recordings

### **3. Sapporo Clocktower**

This is one of the most popular sound marks in Sapporo: Sapporo Clock tower or Tokeidai. For tourist who visit Sapporo city, it is one of the must visit list. The building was built in 1878 and it was a training ground for Sapporo Agricultural College. In July 1881 a big clock was brought from Boston and was installed in this building. This clock was created by the famous clock tower manufacturer, E Howard & Co from Boston Massachusetts.



When I visited the Clock Tower there was an explanation of how this manual clock mechanism was able to make sound. It was a really complex mechanism. It was amazing. This clock was very well maintained and continued to ring since 1881 till now. It was such a great time machine. How many historical events had occurred along with the clanging sound of this clock?

The sound of the Sapporo Clock tower was very loud. It could be heard from a radius of hundreds of meters in the city of Sapporo. I recorded the sound of this clock at noon at 12 o'clock, so it rang for 12 times. When we listened and compared with the sounds of the visitors and the traffic around, the sound of this clock was very loud.

#### 4. I was a Sumo Wrestler

Okazaki Kyoto Park was crowded with people on the 28th of April, just at the beginning of the golden week. On Sundays, Okazaki Park became market full of people selling food, drinks, and used books, CDs, clothes and many more. Not to forget some musicians who also played music here. But what really caught my attention and many other visitors was a strong man in a sumo costume. His stage name was Chanko Ponchya-san.

Chanko-san introduced himself as a sumo wrestler, but had retired. He demonstrated sumo movements in this crowded park. Of course his presence was very interesting, very entertaining and funny.

One moment after demonstrating various sumo movements, Chanko-san suddenly started to rap and used his sumo costume as percussion. He told his story as a wrestler. Very attractive!



I think I was very lucky to turn on the recording device at that time and managed to record Chanko-san's voice for several minutes. This was an unexpected gift on a Sunday afternoon in Kyoto. Apart from adults, many children also loved Chanko-san. On this recording we can listen a kid who laughed because of Chanko-san.

#### 5. A Quiet Afternoon at Yanaka District

Unlike Shibuya, there were no lights being tossed around or billboards. Everywhere you look, you see spacious land. Silence became my friend as I walked through a graveyard in the Yanaka district of Tokyo. Although it was daytime, a time where other parts of Tokyo are

bustling, the atmosphere here was very different. In the midst of the tombstones was where I spent my afternoon to hear and record the surrounding sounds. The funeral complex here in Yanaka was very vast. According to the data, this funeral complex covers more than 10 acres of ground, and has around 7000 graves.

I honestly went here without a single plan. In the last days of my research, which ends on the 30th May, I felt the fatigue building up in my body. I was mentally drained in particular, having to travel to different countries, provinces, and cities in this five months of research, so I decided to take a pause to ponder about what I have been doing.

However, it seemed that isolating myself in my lodge made me fairly bored. That was why on the 22nd of May, I decided to go out in search of fresh air. I have visited almost every famous spots in Tokyo, such as Shibuya, Harajuku, Kibahara, Kanda, Imperial Palace, Yoyogi, Ueno, and Ikkebukuro to name a few. After searching in the internet, I had a very peculiar destination, the Yanaka Memorial. I was very tired of the crowded cities I had been in, and I was very curious since I had never been there. How was the largest Memorial in Tokyo like?



After riding the train to a station near Nippori, I walked about a hundred meters to the Memorial complex. At the moment I arrived, the afternoon became silent. The sound of trains can still be heard from afar or the sound of airplanes up above. However the rest were dead as night. The sound of sweeping from the Tennoji Temple could be heard. Because it was very quiet, everyone was talking in a low voice. In addition, the chirping of birds up on the trees made the silence even more noticeable. I experienced something powerful, being able to find

a calming place in a boisterous city like Tokyo. The silence was very immersive, especially because I was alone.

## **6. The Cheers of the Gamba Osaka Supporters.**

To be honest, there were certain moments, while recording soundscapes, when I myself didn't know what to record. When I arrived in Osaka, a city of business and trades where the people are stereotypically not as polite as the people in Tokyo, I was perplexed. I stayed near Umeda Station. This city was a large city to be explored soundscape wise. I had already travelled around Dotonburi, Namba, Umeda, and other areas of the city, but it seems that I was not able to focus on my work.

After a few days of slow progress, I decided to visit the Osaka Expo Park, which in 1970 was the venue of the grand World Expo. I had never been there and wanted to witness first-hand the statue created by Taro Okamoto himself, Tower of Sun. Aside from that, I also wanted to visit the museum of Ethnology, in hopes to regain focus or at least refresh my mind. Long story short, I took a bus to go to the Expo. It was Golden Week, which was a 10 day holiday in commemoration of the succession of the Japanese Emperor. I was very fortunate to be in Japan in that exact moment. However, this long holiday made the tourist spots to be crowded beyond imagination. Everyone had to fight for themselves. Even the bus I was on was filled to the brim. Due to that fact, I missed my stop and ended up at the Suita Panasonic Stadium, the headquarters for the Gamba Osaka. It was pure coincidence, because I was not aware that the home of Gamba Osaka was located outside of the Expo City area. My destination was the Expo City, and not the stadium. In the past, some television channels in Indonesia aired the Japanese league, so the name Gamba Osaka was quite familiar to my ears.

This disaster turned to a blessing. That day, May 4th, Gamba Osaka was playing the Tokyo FC. When I stepped out of the bus, my eyes immediately turned to the crowd of supporters heading towards the stadium. It was around two in the afternoon, and the game has not started yet. I then went to the front of the stadium, and I suddenly felt excited to see the fanatic supporters. Almost all of them wore a black and blue shirt, the colour of Gamba Osaka. The supporters consisted of children, teenagers, young adults, and even senior citizens.



Around three o'clock, a fantastic moment occurred. Thousands of fans gathered around the stadium. One supporter, using a megaphone, led them to sing the team chants. Not wanting to miss this moment, I quickly set up my equipment to record the whole thing. Although I was not able to get a perfect spot to record the moment, I still felt very fortunate to be able to record a part of this event. The supporters were all singing with passion. I always thought that a mass coordination was an amazing thing. A bass drum, which had a sound similar to kettledrum, was played to shake the hearts of everyone there, and it was played along with the clap of everyone there. I felt happy to hear the supporters singing with full excitement. The leader of this chant also sang along with all his might. Curiously, I was able to feel the strong fire of Japan through the chants of the supporters. It was very firm and strong.

#### **7. Friday Night: People Back from Work at Kanda**

One of the stereotypes of Tokyo is business. Tokyo is a place where thousands of people live and work. One of the things I enjoyed doing in Tokyo was observing the life of employees in Tokyo. According to one of the articles I had read, Japan is known to have a long work hour. It could reach 60 hours of work each week. While I was in Tokyo, I stayed at Kanda, which was one of the work centers in Tokyo. It might sound strange, but I would listen to the daily life of employees while I was in Tokyo. I listened from the footsteps, the hustling sounds of stations, and the noise from Izakaya or other places people would go to after work. While I was observing, I was able to feel and hear different sounds throughout the week.

Monday morning was a time filled with burden and pressure. At least that is how I felt. First of all, riding the train on a Monday morning was torment. The train would be crowded by people going to work. The sound of Monday mornings felt very cold and serious. At the station, footsteps often sound hurried and there would be no laughter. Everyone looked all focused.

Friday night had a completely different atmosphere. On 5th April, I wanted to look for some ramen near Kanda Station, because I was starving. The transition from winter to spring here in Tokyo was still cold. While I was walking to the station, I passed quite a lot of employees. They were all still wearing their work attire. “White collar” was something we would often call them.



Tonight, the area around Kanda Station was very lively. Everyone was celebrating the weekend like they were letting go of the entire burden they were carrying. They were divided into groups, a very Japanese culture. There were many sounds of laughter, but on the corner of the street there were other workers offering karaoke, restaurants, bar, cafes, and other form of entertainment. It was also very lively in Izakaya. The days full of pressure had passed for now.

## 9. To Yoyogi Train Station with different Jingles

I really enjoyed the sounds we could hear in the stations in Tokyo, especially the jingle right before a train departs. Although simple and short, the melody of the jingles sounds very beautiful. I felt like listening to an instrumental music in the midst of travelling, and I always listened to it with joy. A few melodies even comes to mind just talking about it. One of my

favourite jingles was the one from Tokyo Station that sounded modern and futuristic. I recorded many jingles while I was staying in Japan.



It turns out that the person behind those jingles was a person named Minoru Mukaiya, a composer and keyboard player from the jazz band Casiopea. Minoru-san had created over 110 jingles for the stations in Japan. The jingles he made have this unique melody created from a digital synthesizer. The melody is very unique to Japanese culture that reminded me of pop music, video games, and jazz fusion of Japan from the 70's and 80's. The Japanese people call these jingles "Hassha merodi" that translates to the melody for a train departure. Quoted from ABC News, Minoru-san explained the meaning of these short jingles "People know the doors won't close while the music is playing and it gives comfort to people." Arigatou gozaimasu, thank you Minoru-san for creating such wonderful jingles that brightened the day of many people in the station including myself. If only there were beautiful melodies in every Indonesian station, other than the famous melody: *mi do re sol, sol re mi do, do mi re sol, sol re mi do...*

## 10. Fukuoka Yatai Crowd

After travelling from the center of Japan all the way north, on the second Sunday in May, I decided to travel south. My main destination was Nagasaki. However, before going to Nagasaki, I decided to visit Fukuoka. I did not really have a specific reason going to Fukuoka and just let everything run its course. This was my first time in Fukuoka. I took a Shinkansen and arrived in Fukuoka around two in the afternoon, but the schedule for hotel check-ins in

Japan was around four. This check-in schedule in Japan tormented me, because my work involved going from one place to another. In addition, the checkout schedule in Japan was 10 in the morning. I had to get used to this lifestyle. After having lunch and strolling around the area of Hakata, I finally checked-in right on time. I felt incredibly tired and decided to rest for a while.

I then woke up as the sun was setting. After getting the rest I needed, I grabbed my equipment and headed out to walk around the city of Fukuoka. Without any specific plans, I stumbled upon something surprising, an “Angkringan” just like in Yogyakarta (angkringan is a typical of open foodstall/street vendor in Yogyakarta). I suddenly felt as if I was back in Jogja. Other parts of Japan usually have food sold indoors.

These “Angkringan” was actually what they called Yatai, an open food stall unique to Fukuoka. Without a second thought, I went straight to one of the food stalls selling satay, beverages, noodles, and fish. Out of the blue, “nasi kucing” went through my mind. After ordering a fish dish, I set up my equipment close to where I was sitting. I recorded the conversations that took place in this small Yatai. I sat down between two Yatais, and the sounds from both of the Yatais were captured by my microphone. With a semi-opened tent, I felt very relieved and open. I could feel the happiness in the conversation between the people here, although I was not exactly sure what they were talking about. One of the cook here was especially funny and love to make jokes. The light conversation made me feel like I was back home in Java.

