

A Metaphorical Study on Teaching Individual Creativity in Asia: Indian Ālāp and Vietnamese Dạo

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Abstract

Societies and cultures in Asia are everywhere strongly reflected through ways and strategies of transmitting performing arts such as music and dance. In this study, we take the transmission of some essentials in music tradition from two different places in Asia, namely India and Vietnam, as a metaphor to be further applied on cultural and social analysis in order to achieve a better understanding of how creativity is taught and culturally established. Indian music is asserted as a Gurumukhi Vidya (Guru centered science) in musical treatises found in India. In the learning process, both Guru and disciple continue their duties for each other which are very necessary to construct a suitable cognitive environment within both sender and receiver. The process of transmitting knowledge might be successful as far as the teacher gains satisfaction and a real impression on the student and at the same time by the student's behavior and capability of receiving and applying knowledge. Similar yet different processes can be observed with teaching in the Vietnamese music tradition. Ālāp is a very important part in north Indian classical music as well as the Dạo in the Vietnamese music tradition as they dominantly create the mood of a Rāga or a Điệu¹ respectively in an improvisatory manner that demands a high input of individual creativity. Teachers usually initiate teaching after providing a brief introduction of basic elements. It is essential that students should follow first every phrase in a parallel way as the teacher articulates. This process is continued until the students understand the approximate picture of the Rāga or Điệu. Subsequently the teacher allows the student to improvise in his own way by keeping to the rules thus a student develops creativity through developing individuality. The final outcome is then an improvisation. Nevertheless, some contradictions in transmission and perception can be stated such as between the supposedly "free" in an improvisation and the strict way of teaching the "free". So, individuality and creativity develop in a process of tension between rules and breaking rules. Metaphorically, we can see strong parallels to other subjects of transmitting social and cultural patterns of communication that are perceived differently from the perspective of the West and East. In discovering cultural individuality in dealing with creativity, social developments can be seen much clearer and concepts of creative developments could be more effectively reasoned within the societies concerned. Though this study cannot be comprehensive in direct application of musicological findings on social behavior, it may help to open up new interdisciplinary ways in conducting social analysis, mainly to provide a methodological path in recognizing possible stimuli for future creativity in different Asian societies.

Key Words: Indian classical music, Vietnamese music tradition, metaphorical analysis, transmission of creativity, communication patterns

¹Main systemic approaches to traditional music production in these cultures.

1. Introduction

Teaching creativity in any society is everywhere strongly reflected through ways and strategies of transmitting performing arts such as music and dance, so they are in Asia.

In this study, we take the transmission of some essentials in music tradition from two different places in Asia, namely India and Vietnam, as a metaphor to be further applied on cultural and social analysis. In choosing the most demanding part in terms of developing individual creativity, we focus on the mechanism of turning a definite quantity of experience into a new quality of creativity within social communication that is reflected in the transmission process.

Creativity in the context of Asian societies may evolve as a culturally patterned category that calls for specification within different cultural environments (Hemlin et al 2004).

Main qualitative methods applied in this study are grounded theory and metaphorical analysis (Holyoak & Thagard 1995). As long term students and researchers in the cultural practice described, both authors of this study could conduct deep analysis in performance practice. Since the study takes music transmission as metaphor, the percentage of observing and analyzing musical transmission is high compared to its application on the entire society. In order to achieve a strong metaphorical sense (Rigney 2001:4), the focus on musical details may help to identify the concepts that work as respective social communication patterns. Insofar, the drafted social analysis attached profits from musical knowledge. However, it also requires an understanding of musical matters. Finally, concluding simile patterns implies differences as well. These differences must be subject of further researches in both sociological and musicological analyses to which this study is only a first step.

Additionally, the comparative approach of two cases in remarkably different Asian cultures that are still practiced in a rapidly changing social environment might entail the broad view on diversity within Asian cultures that are in popular media often subsumed as existing under joint conditions. Intriguingly, the differences show the parallel of metaphorical effects and the usefulness of stepping into studying performing arts to prove the existence of metaphors expressed in non-verbal communication. The way of teaching and appropriating creative skills in music practice might be an unspoken metaphor on approaching creativity in general within a given society.

In the following, the two cases *Ālāp* for Indian and *Dào* for Vietnamese music traditions are explicitly looked at and in a short discussion contextualized. Both cases are followed by questions raised from them and some first conclusions regarding the application of metaphorical studies deriving from culturally patterned music transmission.

Though this study cannot be comprehensive in direct application of musicological findings on social behaviour, it may help to open up new interdisciplinary ways in conducting social analysis.

2. The North Indian *Ālāp* and Patterns of Transmitting Creativity within Community

Even though the origin of Indian classical music is contextualized to the *SāmaVēda*, it has been evolving and perpetuating through oral transmission which has been legitimized by treatises of various authors emerged in different periods throughout Indian history. In probing to different periods in the history, it can be noticed that these treatises are perceived and followed differently by different music connoisseurs as a result of divergences of cultures and their influences to transmission system of music. At present, diversities of some view points and music pedagogies are dominantly apparent in south and north traditions of classical music in India. North Indian classical music or Hindustani music is known in the west as a kind of music which is to be played in improvised manner while south Indian music is known as fixed though it is not absolutely fixed in some instances. The most common feature of both music systems is that they are strongly committed as *Guru MukhiVidyā* which connotes that science which is orally transmitted to the pupil from the Guru. This passion of transmitting knowledge can be traced back to the Vedic period in India and still some traditions strictly and some traditions partially follow the respective rules given they strongly believe that unless traditional methods are not respected, it is hard to be successful in artistry. Following early scholars, Goutam puts it 'unless the student stays with his teacher and constantly learns and practices music with the teacher's guidance, it will be very difficult for him to evolve into an artiste' (Goutam, 2001: 178).

The North Indian classical music encompasses several genres besides two of them are wide spread i.e. *Dhrupad* and *Khyāl* which are practiced in both vocal and instrumental classical music.

Here, instrumental music is discussed in relation to transmitting music particularly focusing on the Ālāp in Khyāl and Dhrupad traditions. In current instrumental practices, it is hard to separate both as individual style though vocal practitioners, especially Dhrupad performers are been able to differentiate Dhrupad clearly from Khyāl in practices. Even though Khyāl appears as independent, in practice, it borrows elements mainly from Dhrupad, Thumri and Tappa of northern India².

The methods of teaching Ālāp can vary according to the teacher in terms of his own principles, taste, current mood, and disciple's condition³. Mostly in Hindustani classical traditions, the mood of Rāgas is taught through Ālāp while the Carnatic tradition initiates teaching Rāgas from the main compositions, which contain the essence of the Rāga in abstract shape. The teacher's choice always decides what kind of strategies could be suitable for the disciple to approach the Rāga. The pedagogy of Ālāp in the DagarGharānā is very important in this matter as it emphasizes the Ālāp rather than other sections of Dhrupad practices. Sanyal and Widdess describe two approaches to the teaching of Ālāp in the DagarGharānā which are also omnipresent in other Indian traditions.

1. Teaching phrase by phrase to memorize so that memorization leads ultimately to a process of recreation or teaching one or two phrases that encapsulate the Rāga which can be called path to the Rāga. These phrases can be sung at or near the beginning of Ālāp.
2. Teaching by example and imitation. In this process, the student is expected to sing by keeping to the grammar of the Rāga and style of the Gharānā rather than imitating exactly the teacher's renderings (Sanyal and Widdess 2004: 132).

Today, non-conservative teaching approaches are followed by many musicians, especially in the matter of teaching students from abroad and part time learners. Most of traditional classical musicians have switched to adopt non-traditional pedagogies in the case of convenience and requirement of distance learning⁴.

The final objective of these various methods of teaching is the disciple to become a musician who is capable to perform creatively even though the learning and the teaching approaches have not initially required the student's creative ability. Creativity is a very important quality which is inherent or can be developed within a person, especially who learns arts like north Indian classical music. Sharma cites Mammata's (1050-1150) idea that there are three elements i.e. inborn talent, proficiency, and training that cumulatively contribute to poetic creativity. This idea similarly functions also towards one's creativity in music (Sharma 2000: 382). In Ālāp singing, creativity is exhibited through improvisation that is performed in a given framework which can be only achieved through experience and training. Here, the word 'training' can be perceived as a combination of two words i.e. leaning and rehearsing. The term 'Riāz' is used in the field of Indian music that connotes not merely self-training in developing skills, but also a process of self-navigation in discovering one's own specialization regarding the subject through employing psycho-physical expressions of oneself. That means that individuality is an essential principle in achieving creativity.

There is a strong belief amongst some musicians and scholars in India that one's singing reflects his own nature (personal communication with teachers at Banaras Hindu University on 25, April 2007). In general, one's nature is built up according to the rules, conventions, and compartments in a specific culture or society and inherent attributes are developed and relatively modified throughout so called perspectives. Similarly, it is observable that a well-trained classical musician embodies his nature through Ālāp for it is the most freely expressive aspect which is produced in a framework of rules and regulations in classical music genres in north India⁵. Sharma states 'in Indian music, the three functions of creativity, viz., imagination, execution and evaluation are discharged simultaneously while in western art music, these functions are performed at three different stages by different persons' (Sharma 2000: 385).

² Therefore, in this paper, Ālāp in instrumental music will not be separated as it is done for Dhrupad or Khyāl.

³ The standard charge levelled at *Gharānā* musicians around the turn of the century was that they taught in bits and pieces without telling even their own students the name of the Rāga. *Gharānā* pedagogy, its critics asserted, trafficked a little too much and a little too deliberately in obfuscation (Bakhle, 2005: 231).

⁴ Chaurasia is sensitive to the situation of the students at the conservatoire: "I don't want anybody to use [notation], but I'm not here all the time, so they have to record and they have to write" (Chaurasia, 2003, 0:22) (Schippers, 2007: 5).

⁵ Tradition here does not mean something static or rigid; it is a continuous flow of creativity that finds room within a given framework (Sharma, 2000: 385).

Currently, most musicians of Indian classical music have adorned their performance by adhering musical elements such as vibrato, harmonic progressions and equally tempered scales, which are on the one hand considered unique to western art music and taboo in Indian classical music on the other. They do so in order to individualize their performance and to adapt to singing styles that are increasingly consumed through a large audience throughout the country. Global competitiveness is one cause of breaking rules seen from the perspective of Indian music culture. Another cause is mainstreaming in order to become more similar to successful productions from the perspective of the global market. The experience of exclusion from the global market when keeping musically unchanged leads in many cases to self-correction that contradicts traditional musical behavior. In result, those, who sustain within the frame of traditional musical transmission, move to the periphery of the regional music market. They can succeed only through a relatively stable audience that depends on relatively stable social constructs given through set conditions such as the cast system implying educational preferences. Representing conservatism, these musicians will further limit their individual creativity for the sake of memorializing past idols.

Seen as a metaphor in social communication and in relation to changing social needs in India, we could understand the transmission process as balancing stability on the one hand and breaking rules through performing creativity beyond the learned phrases thus serving in the context of changing needs on the other. The following scheme may visualize the metaphorical idea:

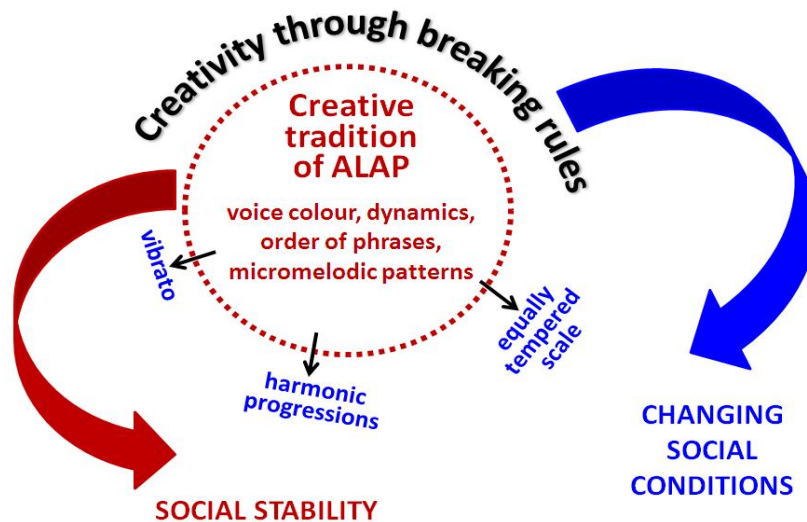


Figure 1: Scheme showing interconnections between different types of creativity: the traditional creativity and the creativity through breaking rules. Both serve different aims of social communication.

The scheme implies a number of questions asked in social sciences on social stability and changing social conditions in India. Good examples are Krishna (2004)⁶ from a practical viewpoint of an Agrarian society or Bhawuk (2003:19), who investigates Indian spirituality and creativity saying the following:

“Since creativity can be construed as a socio-cultural behavior, as is apparent from the study of geniuses, it is important to study the influence of culture on creativity, else we may make the mistake of imposing the western notion of creativity on other cultures and find people in other cultures not creative. Therefore, future research should examine the socio-cultural aspects of creativity”.

Discussing this statement from the perspective of a cultural participant in music practice, the most important part is the call for a specification of creativity in its cultural boundaries. So far, traditional music practice sets the transmission of Ālāp into the highest category of creativity within a given societal frame.

⁶ Who said about the interrelation of traditional knowledge and innovation: “New middle-level institutions are more likely to succeed if they are linked with what villagers already have, especially if they are able to hold the leaders accountable using local knowledge and everyday understandings of right and wrong. Different agency types have developed indigenously, and it is worth examining whether these can be strengthened and helped to acquire value and stability” (Krishna, 2004: 304).

Voice colour, dynamics, the actual order of phrases, as well as micro-melodic patterns can vary individually thus representing the creative understanding of the taught music carrying on the reputation of the teacher and the school.

Seen from the perspective of the globally embedded music production in which many contemporary musicians try to integrate in order to follow their profession under the pressure of changing economic rules, the range of creative possibilities within the traditional frame is demanding on the one hand due to strict learning processes over a long period of time and finally with limited distribution options. On the other hand, modernizing musical expressiveness on the costs of traditional refinement may take only a short time and increases the possibility to reach out into large social strata that are not very familiar with traditional delicacy. Though not all, many take the fast lane to survive instead of holding up inherited musical wisdom.

In whatever direction a musician presenting *Ālāp* is moving, he or she will always construct new exclusions and take a high risk in professional acceptance. Seemingly, the teaching and learning process of creativity in music practice leads currently to a shifting of decisions made regarding the type of creativity that might be portrayed within one’s *Ālāp* performance. The main difference is expressed musically by using or not using of harmonic progressions, vibrato and an equally tempered scale in order to achieve these changes. Without wording the metaphor, there is a clear decision perceived through the audible sense.

In extension of proposed views on Asian metaphors (Holyoak&Thagard 1995: 183-184), their existence can be expressed through non-verbal performance and they are subject to gradually changes instead of serving an unspecified or generally ingrained philosophy. If Tilley (1999) discusses the application of analogies for material culture, here should start a development of applied metaphorical studies taking immaterial culture as a mean of communication and discourse.

3. The Vietnamese *Đạo* and Patterns of Creative Social Networking within Communities

A Vietnamese *Đạo* introduces a piece of music in its essential mood defined by various interval relationships, timbre qualities of different pitches, structural orders within the piece, micro-melodic patterns and in setting a tempo at the end of this introductory section.

Though a *Đạo* is only considered to be the “prelude”, the ”abstract” or the pre-positioned “summary” of a traditional musical piece, a music student has to work hard on its shape and originality. Playing a *Đạo* well needs much longer studies than following the basic framework of a metrically solid piece.

If we put the determinants of playing a *Đạo* into a table and find metaphorically parallels in social communication, we may understand better, why this prelude is so demanding in Vietnamese society:

Musical determinants within a <i>Đạo</i> (representing a Dieu’s primary rule set)	Implied problems to be solved	Metaphorical application in Vietnamese society
interval relationships	identifying the system (the tonality)	learning through observing and acting in society
timbre qualities of different pitches	hierarchies defined by pitch quality	differentiate qualities in social status
structural orders within the piece	hierarchies defined by timely order	experiencing social power orders
micromelodic patterns	interconnectedness within a frequency space	social reality check
setting tempo	setting the speed of the following process that must fit to the production mode as well as to the perception by the audience	creative adaptation and “doing the most out of given possibilities” within a society

Table 1: Table Showing Musical Determinants Within a *Đạo* Representing A Dieu’s Primary Rule Set, The Implied Problems to be Solved and Possible Metaphorical Applications in Vietnamese Society.

The effort to meet all requirements of playing a *Đạo* well is measurable in terms of appreciating its originality. This originality derives from the deep understanding of primary rules within the represented *Điệu* (the given musical system), and its individual interpretation. But yet another set of rules overlaps the dealing with musical determinants. This secondary set of rules includes the rule of not being imitative or not copying each other. The broadly varying ensemble sound is more important than the single achievement in playing a solo *Đạo*. Further, the individuality has to adopt to one's own musical position that considers experience in musicianship, age and status within the local community of musicians. A young newcomer who just arrived cannot 'overplay' an experienced musician from that position. However, not a few newcomers obtained their first public recognition by breaking this rule and turning orders and hierarchies, such as Cao Van Lau in Bac Lieu, who not only played over, but composed a piece in a newly created *Điệu*, that became later on dominating in a renovated tradition of musical drama (KiềuTấn 1993).



Figure 2: Standard Instrumentation of the South Vietnamese Ensemble Tradition “ÂmNhạcTàiTửNam Bộ”: ÚtTy, Ba TuAnd VũChỗPreparing a Recording Session In 1999 (Photo: GisaJähnichen).

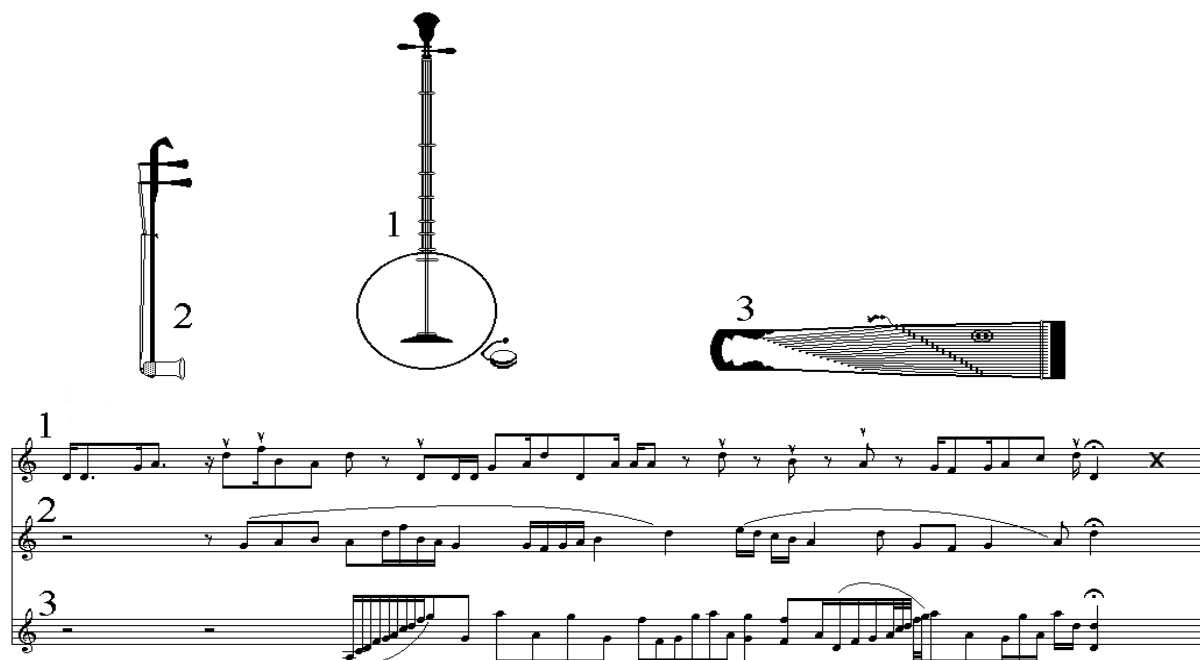


Figure 3: Musical Functions Within a Standard Ensemble – 1= Rhythmic Accentuation (+ Use of Small Slit Drum Song LangThat Follows the Fermata With the Last Joint Note, See X); 2= Melodic Line; 3= ‘Sound Filling’ Over the Whole Space of Frequencies. (Drawings and Transcription: GisaJähnichen).

Music teachers who are committed to transmit all these different layers of rules and determinants see themselves in the situation that they have to first work out the various *Điệu* in detail. Then they may come step by step to its implications and – considering the individuality of their students – to an individual proposal of interpretation.

Zhu (2003: 254) points out that “One of the outstanding values among the Vietnamese enterprises was maintaining harmonious relationships within the enterprise even though they operated in a market environment.[...] in Vietnam, the bonus computation does not reflect a large degree of influence by personnel evaluation, but via organizational performance.” Then he summarizes that, for example, the incentive scheme is still following a collective orientation, thus marking a fundamental social tradition.

We can clearly find this way of thinking in traditional ensemble performances in which the joint outcome is superior to the performance skills of single musicians. In some cases, musicians outstanding in virtuosity are perceived as disturbing or even contra-productive within a traditional music ensemble (Lê Văn Phở 2010). From this viewpoint the secondary rule set of not being imitative while joining a group performance has to be seen as a demand for creativity that can only be carried out through co-socialization within and adaptation of a performance environment. Therefore we can observe a field of tension between adaptation to a group and the strict demand for individualisation. Both parts depend on each other. Without further musicians, the *Đạo* becomes a solo performance that calls for non-group type of playing.

This kind of practice is taught namely in formal music education for the purpose of solo staging in a rather non-traditional context of performance. On the other hand, a *Đạo* appears not only tasteless but wrong, if instruments parallel each other in melodic patterns and rhythmic accentuation. That means, too, that a musician has to know more than his own preferred way to play a *Đạo* in order to avoid imitative playing. The sharing of musical functions such as keeping an arching melodic line (assigned to bowed string instruments, the flute or the one-string box zither⁷), the rhythmic exploration of the metric space (assigned to the plucked string instruments which often are specialists in keeping the metrically important little slit drum for marking time units⁸) and the filling of sound spaces (assigned to the 16-string half tube zither or the Vietnamese guitar⁹), helps in structuring one’s own interpretation (Jähnichen 2007). Nevertheless, becoming a good musician, cross-functionality and individual identity in approaching a *Đạo* played in ensemble is of utmost importance.

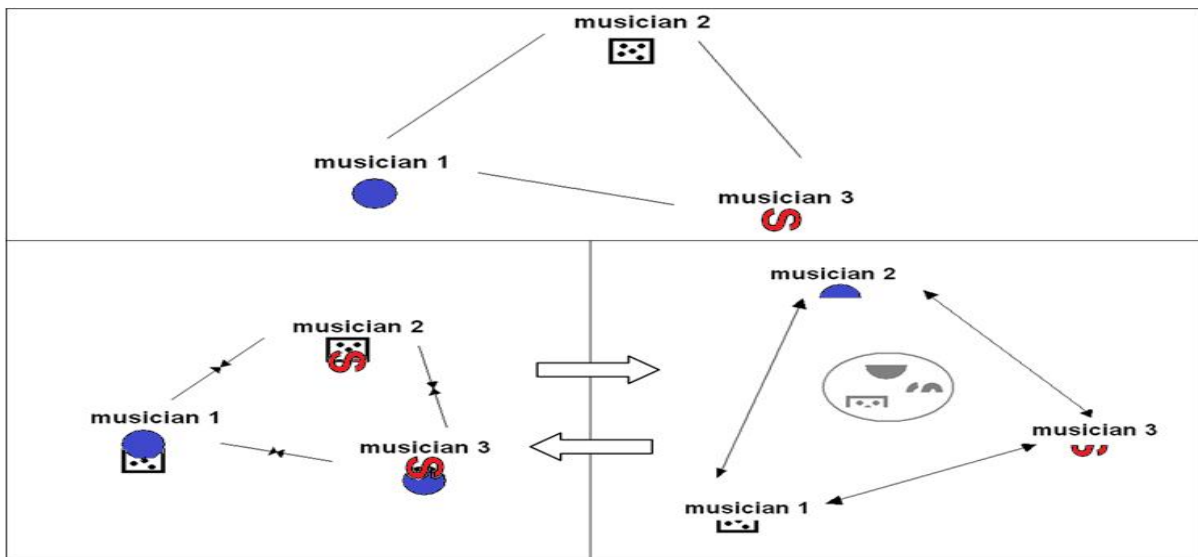


Figure 4: Scheme Showing Orientation during Ensemble Playing of a *Đạo*. Mostly, Instruments Start to Play One after Another, Then Adopting to Each Other And Finalising the *Đạo* in a Way That Indicates a Tempo on which Each Musician Agreed Upon.

⁷ In Vietnamese: *cò, sáo, tiêu, or bầu.*

⁸ In Vietnamese: *kìm, tỳ bà, sến, or nhật.* The *kìm*-player keeps mostly the so called *song lang*, a small flat slit drum with an integrated wooden beater that is played with the foot.

⁹ In Vietnamese: *tranh and ghitaphím lôm.*

Here we may find another metaphorical access to how social networks operate that require intimate knowledge about production modus, preferences, accessibility and status of participants. Accordingly, musicians shift during playing the *Đạo* their function as described above (in the following scheme marked with different signs) or they explore spatial density in narrow intervals, then again moving away from closeness to distance. One very interesting principle is the tendency to balance between different musical functions and individual interpretations of the other participating musicians. This type of networking is also metaphorical for social relationships as being named typical for the Vietnamese cultural context. Nguyen ThanhTuyen calls this phenomenon as ‘bamboo fence’ construct that provides shelter of traditional values in balancing distances between rural and urban, between global and national and between generations (Nguyen ThanhTuyen 2010:74-75).

While Tannen (1998: 258) argues that Asian rhetoric was devoted not to devising logical arguments but to explicating widely accepted propositions, the case of teaching, learning and finally practicing a *Đạo* is far more complex than just following blindly a rule set that is historically imposed on a cultural situation in change.

Different from surrounding cultures, the Vietnamese concept metaphorically represented through the audible result embraces high flexibility and an interpretation of individual creativity that bases on a holistic understanding of an actual culture that is moving in a global stream. It seems to be less vulnerable and offers many possibilities for re-interpretation. Thus rule breaking such as shown in solo representations of former ensemble music within the boundaries of the given society can be easily translated as substitutive performance.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Taking both examples in their similarities of orally transmitted traditional creativity and their differences in social implications as metaphors, we may ask the following questions:

- Are all changes caused through creativity and creativity caused through changes in social conditions welcome in the same way by the communities concerned?
- How can we effectively interact within the field of tension among traditional and rule-breaking creativity?
- What could be the outcome of a more analytical approach to the ‘quality of changes’ within society and what of it is already reflected in music practice?
- How do roles in culturally patterned creativity change through varying conditions in social life?
- How are individuals positioned within a society that requires continuous adaptation to changes and how do they express their view on these changes in positioning?
- How are these individuals represented within music practice?
- What can we draw from observation of all named processes above with regard to social changes within large cultural areas?

The Indian *Ālāp* practice shows alternatives within a traditional concept yet a narrow way for breaking rules. Many new creative elements within *Ālāp* derive from Western art music models thus they will only work within parts of the society which are less bound to tradition and who do not differentiate in communalities of culture. The Vietnamese *Đạo* practice may indicate that individuality has different levels in reaching creativity. Playing solo means not only being solely responsible for the creative outcome, but the combination of different musical roles that have to be taken over within the performance. In result, collectivism as a still highly favored precondition of creativity is a preferred model in which the single person is creative in terms of network strategies. Changing roles call for the ability to steadily adapt to changing conditions.

Finally we may consider the growing consciousness for life quality that makes changes becoming an object of consideration instead of an imposed cultural behavior. People, both in India or in Vietnam, are going to make cultural and communicative choices even under changing conditions. In music practice, especially in those traditionally very creative parts such as *Ālāp* in India and *Đạo* in Vietnam, alternatives are given and continuously negotiated.

Creativity is in summary a culturally patterned category that depends on communication strategies given in a society. The perception of creativity may always change though a cultural typicality can sustain over a long period of time. Those parts of a cultural practice that are recognized as highly involving creativity are potential indicators of transmission methods in relation to the resulting impact on society. Though any other performance detail may call for creative development, the chosen elements show clearly how multilayered and different Asian cultures deal with creativity in their very own understanding.

Therefore, we propose to look further into micro-social fields of studies such as music practice, to find answers on the questions raised in this context.

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