

UNDERSTANDING THE CREATIVE PROCESS BEHIND THE BUDDHIST SONG

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the creative process behind the Buddhist hymn *Breathing In Breathing Out*, specifically chosen for its recognized association with Buddhist meditation techniques. The study employs a qualitative methodology, involving five informants who possess expertise in music studies and Buddhism. Its objective is to investigate the process of creating Buddhist songs and analyze their influence on listeners. The results indicate that 1) songwriting for Buddhism is generally a voluntary pursuit without any external financial support or specified objectives, and 2) the creative process adheres to the four stages suggested by Graham Wallas. Furthermore, the practice of *Breathing In Breathing Out* has a beneficial impact on listeners' mental well-being, improving mental conditions through enhanced concentration, focus, and self-acceptance.

Keywords: creative process; songwriting; Buddhist; Breathing In Breathing Out.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi proses kreatif dalam pembuatan lagu Buddhist yang berjudul *Breathing In Breathing Out*. Lagu ini dipilih karena dianggap lagu yang berkaitan dengan praktik meditasi Buddhist. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif yang melibatkan lima informan yang dianggap memahami bidang kajian musik dan buddhisme, penelitian ini menginvestigasi proses kreatif dibalik lagu Buddhist dan dampaknya kepada pendengar. Temuan dalam penelitian ini sebagai berikut 1) penulisan lagu pada lagu Buddhist bersifat sukarela, tidak ada pendanaan khusus dari sponsor yang digunakan dalam membuat lagu buddhis, 2) terdapat empat fase dalam proses kreatif berdasarkan Graham Wallas. Sebagai tambahan, lagu *Breathing In Breathing Out* memiliki dampak yang positif bagi mental, menambah konsentrasi, fokus, dan penerimaan diri.

Kata kunci: proses kreatif; penulisan lagu; Buddhist; Breathing In Breathing Out

1. Introduction

Music is consumed in everyday life, music cannot be separated from everyday life, because it mediates the experiences that each individual has (Nowak, 2016) (Wigati et al., 2022). As a social phenomenon, music acts as a medium for

expressing human activities, history, and conflicts, thus reflecting the creative processes within communities. In Buddhist rituals, music plays a crucial role in fostering mindfulness between the soul and the mind (Hahn, 2015). The term "creative" often relates to problem-solving abilities in various studies. For instance, Mark A. Runco and Garrett J. Jaeger (2012) define creativity as the capacity to solve problems using novel methods (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). In the field of education, creativity involves applying diverse and innovative strategies (Mayer, 1989). Similarly, Johanes Kristianto defines creativity as the ability to address problems with various methods and new strategies (Kristianto, 2022). This concept of creativity is intrinsic to musicians, as musical works are viewed as products of creative endeavors that encapsulate ideas and concepts in new compositions.

Music can be broadly categorized into instrumental and vocal forms, each with distinct characteristics. Unlike instrumental music, vocal music includes lyrics as a form of verbal expression, guiding listeners' perceptions. The lyrics can lead to varied interpretations and emotional experiences upon hearing a song.

Research by Hahn on the creative process among undergraduate students reveals that songwriters are influenced by their backgrounds. For example, songwriters from rural areas may have different perspectives compared to those from urban settings, even when addressing similar themes. Each songwriter adopts a unique approach, as illustrated by the renowned songwriter A. T. Mahmud. Karsono describes Mahmud's songwriting process, which involves drawing inspiration from his natural surroundings and home environment (Karsono, 2016).

Understanding the methods employed by songwriters is essential for exploring their creative processes. Songwriting serves various purposes, including entertainment, education, and spirituality. For instance, the song *Breathing In Breathing Out*, composed by Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh from Vietnam, is esteemed within the Buddhist community for its lyrics that address breathing techniques commonly used in Buddhist rituals. This song is significant as it accompanies Buddhist meditation rites.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Creative Process

In this study was used Graham Wallas thought to framing the creative process, Graham Wallas formed 4 phases containing preparation, incubation, illumination, verification. These theory chosen because representation to songwriting (Wallas, 1926). There are further explanation from those phases: 1) Preparation phase, in this phase a songwriter collecting information; 2) Incubation phase, in this phase released from problem, then deep thinking in subconscious; 3) Illumination phase, in this phase songwriter get an idea or concept from subconscious; 4) Verification phase, in this phase someone examining their thought from previous phases (Sadler-Smith, 2015).

2.2. Musical Elements

Melody is an important element of music, the melody referred to sound and duration. There are three movements melody in general; 1) Conjunct is a leap melody movement; 2) Disjunct is a jump melody movement; 3) Mixed is a combination among conjunct and disjunct (Jones, 2013). Except a melody, there are supporting elements in a song such as rhythmic, time signature, and musical form itself. In this study support by previous research, contained by Karsono 2016 explained that Indonesian famous children songwriter A. T. Mahmud was research in writing the song, he is observed around his environment, then pour into the song. In Oleynick's research attempt to define terminology of inspiration from neurology perspective. Inspiration is a power to changing that impacted to individual and communal (Oleynick et al., 2014). To enrich this study, writer attempt to find a position of music in Buddhist rite, from Liu's journal find that what kind of music that suitable to Buddhist rite (Liu, 2018).

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach, interviewing five informants from diverse backgrounds: two academics, two persons from the Buddhist community,

and one Buddhist songwriter. These informants were selected based on their esteemed reputation within their respective fields. Data collection methods included interviews, audio-visual recordings, and document analysis. While the researcher served as the primary interpreter, the initial data was derived from interviews and audio-visual recordings. Following the interviews, the researcher conducted verbatim transcriptions and applied coding to the data, which was then condensed for presentation to readers. It's important to note that the interviews were conducted in Bahasa, with only the key points transcribed into English.

4. Discussion

4.1. Aim to Songwriting

After interviewing the informants, it became evident that the primary aim of Buddhist songwriting is to enrich Buddhist art and culture, with a specific focus on music. The informants revealed that there was not a singular, special motivation behind the creation of Buddhist songs. However, they emphasized their initiative to write Buddhist songs stemmed from a conscious recognition of the scarcity of Buddhist-themed music approximately 30 years ago. Despite the potentially high production costs involved, they undertook the endeavor themselves in an effort to fill this cultural gap.

“Buddhist’s art is non profitable. If I thought this is a profitable things. I’m not did this. Exactly, my motivation is this song so exist, who wants to sing can sing this song, that is it, I fund my self” (J, TPLB 4).

Except these motivation, made Buddhist’s song to express myself after got aesthetic experience.

“No, the song is not a special treatment to make, that is express my soul only. Depend on what I feel” (J, TPLB 1).

Time flies, conscious of Buddhist’s arts actually big enough, it proves through request Buddhist itself.

“Request for example to Kathina’s song, people request to me, because the song not exist yet. I made on 1993. Because the

request, the I imagine on Kathina, rain is down, long frequency, The Venerable on “saung”, he stands on “saung”, he scared to leap because the grass so long perhaps” (J, TPLB 2).

During an interview with an informant from an academic background, it was noted that "Breathing In Breathing Out" should not be classified solely as relaxation music. Instead, the song is characterized by its powerful lyrics, which serve to persuade listeners to engage in meditation. The lyrics of this song effectively guide listeners through the process of inhaling and exhaling, acting as a directive for meditation practice.

“... if we said about relaxation, this music (Breathing In, Breathing Out) that is not enough claims make someone rilex, whether from sound, from sound not made us relaxed, but instructionally that it attempts to inhale, exhale, than imaging that we are water, flower, then imaging deep space, then strong as mountain dan earth, it impacted to instructs to someone who listen a song. But for relax, I think this song not filled the criteria. Because I think if meditation song, there is contemplating this” (AA, TPLB 1).

4.2. Creative Process

Based on Graham Wallas's theory, the creative process unfolds through four distinct phases: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. These phase beginning with preparation. In the preparation phase (1), the songwriter engages in the initial gathering of information, drawing from both aesthetic experiences (such as exposure to various forms of art, music, and literature) and non-aesthetic experiences (including personal encounters, emotions, and observations). This phase serves as the foundation for generating the basic idea upon which the creative work will be built. By collecting diverse sources of inspiration and knowledge, the songwriter lays the groundwork for the subsequent stages of the creative process.

“For example, song that I want to make is “*Sang Guru*”, in middle 1995. I went to Lodan Monastery, Master Wei Xiong. And I knew Master Wei Xiong. Yes, it possible he forget me at recent. He invites me to sightseeing the monastery, the big monastery not finish yet built. The monastery is long and Master Wei Xiong told

me about Buddha. He described the painting of Buddha, about Angolimala. I very impressed his explanation” (J, PK, Preparation 1).

“...*Hadirkan Cinta* then on 95 I seen people’s life. Then night late people went to discotheque, I seen that. Very crowd, it’s boomastic life I thought, I work not far from Stardust discotheque. People went they house at late night. That’s crazy” (J, PK, Preparation 2).

Except through direct experience based on reality, there is another way to collecting information, it is heard the vary music, depend on song’s purpose.

“Yes, yes, clearly inspiration came from many source, heard song for example, references made easier to write song. Maybe same if we write novel. If we rarely read some novels or storiette, it sure we find difficulties, isn’t it? So, choose words will difficult. So, listening activity it must be requently. Like observe I thought, if I want to make rock music, I heard rock in some weeks, even monthly to make rock theme song” (AA, PK, Preparation 2).

“Long Process, so I embodied with the information of style, technique, but instantly, it accumulated from long time ago, it is sediment” (OB, PK, Preparation 2).

After collected information, next phase is (2) Incubation, this phase a songwriter let go himself from problem, then thought on subconscious.

“I Impressed after I arrived at home, during half hour I write song, I made Sang Guru, that’s it (J, PK, Incubation 1).

“So I wrote “Pernahkah kita renungi tentang arah langkah dalam hidup kita?” Actually we are, include me, are we caontemplating? We live at this world, where we step going on?” (J, PK, Incubation 3).

Another informant said that need to analysis to build an idea, for example make tables as material base., when attempt the formula he automatically influenced from music they heard.

“Yes, itu must be analyse. So, must create, these step before create.” (AA, PK, Incubation 1)

“mapping before build a composition, like tables filled material” (OB, PK, Incubation 1).

“Yes, like that. So, as I said it possible any Debussy’s style on my works, it suddenly expressed with myself, but I’m not projected Debussy’s style in my works” (OB, PK, Incubation 2).

When we thought it in subconscious, informant got idea or concept it called (3) Illumination. This phase, informant got idea from subconscious, except that another informant got idea from musical analysis.

“*Terkadang hati kita terpana menatap kemilau dunia* (Joky-Hadirkan Cinta’s lyric). it meant sometimes people expensive car, luxury building, big house, people stunned, it told much treasure” (J, PK, Illumination 2).

“So, there are process, it called trial and error. As I said before, there are evaluation, then analysis, evaluation, and create” (AA, PK, Illumination 1).

“For example rock music, we got idiom from rock musik, distortion for example, booming low frequency, like that. That is idiom then assume as charachteristic of these genre or charachteristic of next music that we want to make it” (AA, PK, Illumination 1).

There is considering language and musical aspect to make melody or syllabis that put on words on song. That mentioned words have light and heavy, like melody movement, whether up or down. This considering, actually part of conscious kidnap strategy that made listeners drifting away to song’s nuance.

“It possible to apply to vocal, vocal music positioned as music instrument also. It will be timbre if lyric involved into song. I’m not sure about terminology in vocal term. For example word “pergi”, “per” has heavy accent than “gi”, it will be considered, “per” can use higher note than “gi”. (OB, PK, Illumination 1).

“Kidnap a conscious people, bring them to the “jail” of their mind, in term musical momentum. That’s organic strategy, it meant present a simple motive, growing through variation, through development. It seeding be symphony, people kidnap to those momentum.” (OB, PK, Illumination).

The last phase of creative process is (4) Verification, this phase a songwriter examining their mind. Informant J, said that solution of phenomenon is articulate his feeling through song.

“Yes, that’s the solution, “*Hadirkan cinta, satukan rasa di dada, pancarkan kasih pada sesama (Joky-Hadirkan Cinta).*” (J, PK, Verification 1).

“Try articulate my feeling, *Hadirkan Cinta*. Actually if our heart fulfilled of love, we can see the beautiful world, just try it.” (J, PK, Verification 3).

Informant OB said if would to verificating his mind, he discussed with music player, what note that written rational enough to play, because each instruments have different fingering range. Usually, after verificated by music player, it possible he revised melody or harmony, without change the core of song.

“At least, it possible when player put their finger to musical instrument, it must be precisely.” (OB, PK, Verification 1).

“Sure, it change little a bit, maybe timbre not quite changing, but that’s strategy, playing on voicing for instance. For instance timbre, augmented timbre dominantly like that, but many voicing that we can use.” (OB, PK, Verification 3).

4.3. Impact to Listeners

After listen *Breathing In Breathing Out*, informants got a new experience when meditating, because they are not use song to accompany their meditation. But after heard songs simultaneously, there is conscious that built. Meaning of lyric make informants could be contemplating themselves, there is reinforcement through these song. Previously, they feel like a bad person, but after heard its song emerges conscious and encourage the to think positive.

“Yes, it’s true the main thing in meditation is we visualized what we think, for example *Breathing In* it means we try to inhale, *Breathing Out*, sooner my breath is comfortable.” (NG, Impact 2)

“Then we visualized that we like the flowers that are blooming, then we like refreshing dew.” (NG, Impact 3)

“Yes, the important thing is feel more relax. Feel relax, then any something awaken myself, previously feel lack confident, its like I feel many negative in my soul, I’m nothing. After I did meditating use these song, which is I understand of lyric meaning it gives effect.” (NG, Impact 4)

Other informant feels same thing also, she felt that if not heard these song, impacted to her motivation. I felt there is positive encouragement to think more focus, then the circumstances be peacefully. Then, she could control her mind, it is sturdy.

“So, how I can explain? Mind is easily shaken. But when heard song simultaneously with meditating, it impacted to me. It is encouragement to control my mind to more focus, then the circumstance be peacefully” (YS, Impact 2)

“... if meditating use these song it more spirited, previously I felt lazy to meditate” (YS, Impact 3).

Music academics respond that actually it possible there is correlation to listener emotional, because when said one word, it has obvious meaning. But, different thing when listeners heard instrumental music. There is no obvious meaning on its work.

“Emotionally I don’t know, it perhaps. But, the obvious thing is lyric presences made listeners indentificate semantic meaning. That’s it. It surely, it sure of semantic issue. But, if instrumentalia music, it sure there is not semantic meaning. There is no obvious meaning. For example “*malam*” changed to “*makam*”, listeners have consiousness about those meaning. But if do re mi or do re ri, there is no obvious meaning.” (OB, Impact 1).

5. Conclusion

Generally, the primary aim of Buddhist songwriters is to contribute to the enrichment of Buddhist art, particularly within the realm of music. Notably, Buddhist songwriters independently fund their work as a means of documenting Buddhist artwork, ensuring that their songs can be incorporated into Buddhist events. Despite its name, "Breathing In Breathing Out" isn't intended solely for relaxation; rather, its strength lies in its lyrical content, which guides listeners towards contemplation on the meaning of breathing.

The creative process behind "Breathing In Breathing Out" can be outlined as follows: (1) Preparation: Songwriters gather information from both aesthetic and non-aesthetic experiences, often drawing inspiration from a variety of sources, including listening to numerous songs. (2) Incubation: Following the information-gathering phase, songwriters step back from the problem at hand, allowing ideas to

incubate in their subconscious. Some songwriters may employ analytical methods, such as creating tables, to further develop their ideas. (3) Illumination: As ideas surface from the subconscious, songwriters utilize both musical and linguistic aspects to integrate lyrics and melodies, aiming to create a cohesive song that captivates listeners' consciousness. (4) Verification: In the final phase, songwriters thoroughly examine their ideas and the overall composition of the song.

They may also collaborate with musicians to ensure precise execution, particularly regarding musical instrument fingering. Importantly, any adjustments made during this phase aim to enhance the song without compromising its harmony and melody. Ultimately, through this creative process, Buddhist songwriters aim to produce music that not only enriches Buddhist art but also resonates deeply with listeners, encouraging contemplation and introspection.

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