Jennifer A. Fraser

Gongs and Pop Songs: Sounding Minangkabau in Indonesia. Athens: Ohio University Press [Ohio University Research in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series 127], 2015, xv + 270 pp. ISBN 9780896802940, price: USD 23.96 (paperback).

Gongs and Pop Songs looks at how *talempong*, the gong row tradition of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, has developed and transformed in the past six decades. Based on extensive fieldwork that includes in-depth interviews, learning and playing the instruments, and living with the community, Fraser has effectively shown that *talempong* has been recreated in diverse styles that co-exist; these styles articulate the multiple ways of being Minangkabau in and outside of West Sumatra. She relates the stylistic transformations to the socio-political and economic changes that have taken place in Minangkabau society during the period of study. Detailed musical transcriptions help the reader to identify the changes in the tunings, melodies, instrumentation and playing techniques.

Fraser's story begins with an analysis of the heterogeneous village ensembles that are played by women to provide background music during weddings and other festive occasions. As a consequence of the failure of a regional rebellion and the establishment of an educational institution for Minangkabau arts in the 1960s and 1970s, graduates who had formal training and worked as full time musicians, created the *orkes talempong* (*talempong* orchestra). Unlike the community tradition, the orchestra used Western diatonic tuning and harmony but incorporated some Minangkabau elements such as contrasting meters, instruments and textures. This orchestra was in line with the agenda of the government that was trying to create a modern national identity.

Subsequently, the 1980s saw the making of *talempong kreasi baru* (new-creation *talempong*)—packaged spectacles for tourist and state events—that employed diatonically tuned instruments and big orchestras conducted by a leader. These orchestras featured harmonized textures and the sectional form; sometimes the synthesizer, bass guitar, or *djembe* were added. As more musicians graduated from the arts institutions and had to make a living, a form of *talempong* that emphasized variety emerged in the 1990s. *Talempong goyang* (mix of *talempong* with rock instruments), in particular, incorporated songs of various genres, indigenous and popular musics of the different regions, rock instruments, and aesthetics of indigenous Minangkabau music, to appeal to a wider audience.

However, the musical changes do not merely reflect the socio-economic political changes. The performers themselves are innovative and are actively

making new types of *talempong*. Fraser asserts that the performers are creating different versions of Minangkabau ethnicities that transcend the local regional identities. To understand human agency, Fraser looks at the backgrounds and training of the creators and the reasons for decision-making. To this end, Fraser has allowed the performers to speak for themselves and drawn on their voices.

The discourses and narratives of the musicians show the complexities and negotiations that take place in the processes of change and the making of identities. They illustrate that there are diverse ways of thinking about and practicing music and different ways to be Minangkabau. This book is a valuable text for those who wish to understand how musical practices can express identities, how and why musical styles change, and the methodologies for experiencing the musics of the communities we study.

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