

PERFORMING LOCALISED HYBRIDITY IN THE 1960s MALAYSIAN POP YEH YEH

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Abstract

The term 'Pop Yeh Yeh' refers to the genre of Malay popular music that emerged in the 1960s in Malaysia and Singapore. Notably influenced by Western pop groups of the era, such as The Beatles, The Shadows and The Rolling Stones from the United Kingdom (UK), the genre is characteristically known for its *kugiran* (an upbeat guitar band). The *kugiran* consists of three guitars and a drum set that mirrors the configuration used by Western bands of the time. However, musicians of the Pop Yeh Yeh genre were often criticised by veteran musicians as amateurs who lacked proper musical training, and producing poor-quality songs. This article shows that despite sharing many similarities with the music of popular bands in the 1960s UK, local musicians the likes of M. Osman & The Mods, as well as A. Rahman Hassan & Orkes Nirwana, were inspired to localise and make the Pop Yeh Yeh genre their own. Markedly, in integrating Malay *asli* (Malay dance music with ornamented melodies) vocal styles, the Malay language and lyrics about the Malaysian way of life with Western surf rock rhythms, vocal harmonies and musical forms. Likewise, the Malaysian fashion sense and images symbolic of Malaysia were also deliberately used on album covers. Therefore, this article demonstrates how these musicians used regional aesthetics of hybridity through which Malay elements are combined with Western and other elements in their attempt to localise the Pop Yeh Yeh genre. The results are collated from three different research methods. These include analysing the music of local musicians recorded on 45 rpm vinyl records, obtaining information from Malay entertainment magazines from the 1960s through the 1980s, and conducting interviews with people in the music industry.

Keywords: *Pop Yeh Yeh, localisation, hybridity, Malaysian popular music, kugiran*

INTRODUCTION

Inspired by Western popular music of the 1960s, Pop Yeh Yeh is a music genre that is accompanied by an upbeat guitar band known as *kugiran*, an abbreviation of *kumpulan gitar rancak*. *Kugiran* comprises the use of three different guitars (the lead, rhythm and bass guitars) and a drum. Occasionally, an electric organ or keyboard is also used.

It is popularly assumed that the term 'Yeh Yeh' was taken from the song 'She Loves You, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah' by The Beatles (Lockard, 1998; Pereira, 2011). From the mid-1960s through the early 1970s, Western bands such as The Beatles, The Shadows and The Rolling Stones enjoyed immense popularity among Malaysian and Singaporean teenagers, who in turn formed their very own *kugiran* bands. Accordingly, their music imitated the musical styles and instrumentation of the Anglo-American pop rock genre. The youth music culture in Malaysia and Singapore during this time was described as vibrant and creative (Adil Johan, 2018), although it was not without its share of reprobation by veteran musicians, who considered the Pop Yeh Yeh genre 'too loud', and its musicians as amateurs or unskilled musicians who 'only played three chords, did not tune their instruments properly and did not read music' (Dairianathan & Phan, 2005, p. 152). In *The Bright Star*, P. Ramlee was quoted to have said that the (pop rock) music gave primacy to loudness over song quality. He anticipated that poorly produced songs would eventually give rise to a future generation vulnerable to negative elements and ill-discipline (Harding & Sarji, 2002, p. 215-216).

By examining the lyrics and musical styles of eight popular Pop Yeh Yeh songs in 1960s Malaysia, this article aims to show that despite the genre emulating the musical styles of popular Western bands, local musicians were able to inject Malay musical elements influenced by the emergence of *bangsawan* theatre and Malay films in the first half of the twentieth century in their music, and in so doing, give a lyrical intensity to songs of love and heartbreak. Interestingly, this brand of hybridity or *kacukan* has thrived in the Malay Archipelago since before the coming of colonialism (Tan, 2021).

The emergence of Pop Yeh Yeh marked a significant shift in Malaysian music, transitioning from Malay film music to a genre popularised by the youth (Adil Johan, 2018, p. 183). Even so, extensive documentation on its development and musical characteristics appears lacking. Questions about its lyrical content and musical elements remain unexplored. Therefore, this article hopes to fill the gaps of its current literature. Categorized into four sections, the first specifies the theoretical framework and methodology used. This is followed with a detailed description of Pop Yeh Yeh's development in Malaysia and a review of its existing literature. The

third section analyses the lyrical themes, while the fourth section identifies the genre's musical style in songs that melded together popular Western and localised elements.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article draws theoretical insights from select books and articles. In the book *Made in Nusantara: Studies in Popular Music*, Adil Johan and Mayco A. Santaella (2021, p. xiii) emphasise that historically, popular musicians in Nusantara adapted Western music but added their own local musical styles and hybrid aesthetics to create novel expressions. However, the practice of blending Western and local musical elements was not unique to Malaysia alone. In his article "Revisiting the 'Traditional' and the 'Popular' in Maritime Southeast Asia: Towards a Nusantara Popular Praxis", Santaella (2021, p. 30) further expounds the influence of global genres and iconic bands that resulted in the development of national genres in Nusantara. As such, these national genres shared similar rhythms, chord progressions, singing styles and aesthetics. The *kugiran* is a case in point.

In the article "Revisiting Post-Cultural Imperialism: Singing Vernacular Modernity and Hybridity through the *Lagu Melayu* in British Malaya", published in the same book, Tan Sooi Beng (2021, p. 65) observes that hybridity and localisation could already be found in the first half of the twentieth century coinciding with the release of early popular Malayan music. Also known as *Lagu Melayu* (Malay Song), this music featured an ever-evolving mix of Malay and Anglo-American elements to create a localised modernity, alongside Chinese, Middle Eastern and Indian influences. To illustrate, although the *Lagu Melayu* was typically sung by *bangsawan* or Malay opera performers with nasal and tense vocals (2021, p. 68), and included the local rhythmic patterns of Malay social dance music, *pantun* verses and independent heterophonic lines; it was also supported with an array of Western musical instruments such as the piano, drum kit, plucked bass, violins and Western harmonic triads. Generally, the swing and big bands that performed *Lagu Melayu* in the late 1940s and 1950s incorporated more Western instruments and dance rhythms like the waltz, foxtrot and tango. But solemn lyrics that lamented Malaysians' struggle to make a living in the cities, Malay nationalism and the desire for independence from the British colonialists were also layered through (Tan, 2021, p. 69).

Following from the two previous decades, Pop Yeh Yeh music of the 1960s similarly featured an example of localised hybridity. The Western popular music form (verse and chorus), harmony and instruments remained, but was also made more nuanced with the addition of Malay rhythms, vocal techniques and styles, and lyrical observations about local affairs, themes and circumstances. According to

Adil Johan (2018, p. 194) in *Cosmopolitan Intimacies: Malay Film Music of the Independence Era*, the Pop Yeh Yeh musicians first copied the musical styles, harmonies and instruments of the West. This soon gave way to a localising project that witnessed the translation of English songs into local languages, and eventually, the creation of original compositions whose lyrical expressions teemed with the musicians' growing pains as Malaysian and Singaporean teenagers. In her article "Syncretic Cultural Multivocality and The Malaysian Popular Musical Imagination", Pillai (2013) concurs that most Pop Yeh Yeh music from the 1960s borrowed heavily from Western rhythmic patterns, but retained the *asli* vocal techniques.

Based on Stuart Hall's (1991, p. 42-49) viewpoint of the identity as an ever-evolving process that adapts the past to the present, especially in postcolonial societies, we will next demonstrate how Pop Yeh Yeh musicians created a new musical identity by combining local (old) and Western (new) musical elements to form a new genre of music.

METHODOLOGY

This article builds on Bruno Nettl's (1964) methods of field- and labworks for synchronic research, but contextualises it using historical ethnomusicology methods proposed more recently by scholars like McCollum and Herbert (2014) and Tan (1993, 2021). As such, it provides an expansive understanding of how the Pop Yeh Yeh genre is intertwined with historical processes and cultural changes, as well as its impact on musicians, the recording industry, technology and mass media of the 1960s.

Historical ethnomusicology combines archival research (newspapers, magazines, vinyl records) with ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews with field experts to connect past practices with current ones. Two of these interviews were conducted formally, with professionals from music and event management and graphic design backgrounds, separately. Verbal consent was obtained from both interviewees to ensure their willing participation and for the use of the information provided to be included in this article. The first interviewee, Paul Augustin is a musician who rose to fame in the 1970s and 1980s. He is also the organiser of the Penang Island Jazz Festival which ran annually for 14 years, and the director of Penang House of Music (PHoM). Augustin is also co-author of *Just for The Love of It: Popular Music in Penang, 1930s-1960s* alongside James Lochhead (Augustin & Lochhead, 2015). The second interviewee is Mustaffa Ahmad Hidzir (popularly known as Tapa). He is a photographer and a graphic design graduate from Universiti Teknologi Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA). In 1979, Tapa became

the first Malaysian employed by EMI (Electric and Musical Industries) to design record covers for local artistes and has since moved to designing album covers.

In this article, musical analysis of the genre will be based on eight songs (listed in Table 1) by Malay musicians who sang in the typical Pop Yeh Yeh style of the 1960s, to explore the lyrical themes, musical styles, instrumentation and the identification of Malay music elements. The songs were obtained from digitised vinyl records, YouTube and internet websites for a comparative study of the music performed by Western and Malaysian bands. Further, digital tools such as online archives and music notation software were used to retrieve newspaper articles and notate the music to be analysed. While the song lyrics were transcribed from audio files of online sources and magazines, with their lyrical themes and music elements.

Relevant books and journal articles from the library of Universiti Sains Malaysia and PHoM also expanded information on the topic. Books on Malaysian pop rock music of the 1960s and Malaysian music include *The Music of Malaysia: The Classical, Folk and Syncretic Traditions* (Matusky & Tan, 2017); *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Lockard, 1998); *Just for The Love of It: Popular Music in Penang, 1930s-1960s* (Augustin & Lochhead, 2015); and *65 Tahun Muzik Rock Di Malaysia: Dari Rock Proto Ke Glam Rock Melayu* (Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, 2023). Local entertainment magazines from the mid-1960s through to the 1980s such as *Fanfare*, *Utusan Radio dan TV (URTV)*, *Lagu2 Filem & TV*, *Seni Majallah Muda Mudi*, and *Berita Filem* also published interesting data. These ranged from record label advertisements, invitations to audition for competitions or to submit tapes to recording companies; to interviews with bands and musicians, and write-ups on artistes, concerts and competitions.

Table 1: List of analysed Pop Yeh Yeh songs

No.	Song Title	Name of Artiste	Year Released	Record Label & Catalogue Number
1	<i>Sebentok Chinchin Berlian</i>	Salim I & The Wisma	1968	TNA, MEP-412
2	<i>Desa-ku Permai</i>	S. Jibeng	1968	Play Boy Record, NFEP 5037
3	<i>Malaysia Baru</i>	M. Bakri & Swallows Combo	1965	Parlophone, EGEP. 587
4	<i>La O Be</i>	Kassim Selamat	1966	Columbia, CHK. 1055
5	<i>Suzana</i>	M. Osman	1964	Eagle Record, TK1003

6	<i>Tak Mengapa</i>	A. Rahman Hassan	1966	Ngee Fat Record, NFEP 5007
7	<i>Chok Chok Kundong</i>	Mike Ibrahim & The Nite Walkers	1971	Parlophone, S-EGEP. 713
8	<i>Yale Yale</i>	M. Ishak & The Young Lovers	1967	Philips, 437804 PE

LITERATURE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF POP YEH YEH IN MALAYSIA

In the early 1960s, before the emergence of Pop Yeh Yeh, Malaysian youths of all ethnicities were ardent fans of Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard & The Shadows and Connie Francis. Swept up in the craze, many attempted to reproduce the rock and roll genre and electric guitar-based music. Thus encouraged, competitions were held locally to scout for talents who most resembled these Western acts and the winners were awarded titles such as ‘The Elvis Presley of Malaysia’. Rocky Teoh and Vince Chu were among these winners. They mimicked Elvis Presley's style of singing and fashion, while remaining faithful to their own song compositions (Augustin & Lochhead, 2015).

This period also observed the emergence of new popular music from Europe, most notably The Shadows, The Beatles and The Rolling Stones which collectively inspired the development of Pop Yeh Yeh in 1960s Malaysia (Burhanuddin Bin Buang, 2001). An English instrumental band, The Shadows blended pop, surf rock and rock in their music. It was also credited for making popular the guitar-based instrumental band sound. Surf rock, characterised by reverb-drenched guitars to resemble the sound of crashing waves, gained popularity in the early 1960s. Vocal surf, featuring harmonies, was pioneered by bands like The Beach Boys (Romanowski et al., 1995). Concurrently, The Twist dance craze and its accompanying music became a global sensation after Chubby Checker's performance in 1960 (Rosenberg, 2019). The Beatles started out as a skiffle band in Liverpool that incorporated various influences like rock and roll and beat music. Later on in their career, they experimented with genres like classical and Indian music. Skiffle music is a genre of British popular music from the 1950s that mixes jazz and folk music. It is usually performed on homemade or improvised instruments (“Skiffle”, n.d.). Meanwhile, The Rolling Stones, formed in 1962, differentiated themselves from The Beatles with a distinctly rebellious image and sound.

From this perspective, Pop Yeh Yeh developed in 1960s Malaysia from the influence of beat music, itself originating from Liverpool in the UK (Adil, 2014; Franks, 2017). Known also as the British beat or Merseybeat, beat music is recognisable for its strong beat, catchy tunes and vocal harmonies, with bands often using simple guitar-dominated setups. The Beatles was one such example, deftly combining skiffle, doo-wop and soul with American influences to shape their distinct sound (Doggett, 2015). This innovation was observed especially in the band's songwriting, with modal mixture, wider chord palettes and extended song forms (Womack & Davis, 2012). The Beatles' meteoric rise to fame consequently propagated the global spread of 'Beatlemania', spawning many similar bands in countries like Spain and Japan.

However, by the late 1960s, beat music had gradually evolved into styles like psychedelic and progressive rock, though it still held strong sway over many Malaysian and Singaporean youths (Macan, 1997). In response, these youths began forming their own *kugiran* bands despite lacking in musical training. Helmed by a lead singer, the *kugiran* bands typically featured electric guitars, bass, drums and the occasional electric organ, and incorporated elements of rock and roll, surf rock and rhythm and blues. The fashion of the time, marked by blue jeans, miniskirts and distinctive hairstyles, also became a symbol of rebellion for these youths (Lockard, 1998).

One of the earliest uses of the term Pop Yeh Yeh can be found in a *Berita Harian* article entitled "Angkatan Pop Yeh Yeh di-Stadium Negara" in 1967 (Pop Yeh Yeh fans at Stadium Negara) (1967), although the term remained largely unused in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, its music was referred to as *muzik kugiran* (upbeat guitar music) or *Muzik Ago-go*. It was only in the 1980s amidst the revival of 1960s popular music in Malaysia did the term finally gain popular traction (Art, 2016).

In the mid-1960s, concerts and competitions were held to discover new talent. Competitions like 'Talentime' appeared at various venues, from radio stations and cinemas to amusement parks, hotels and school halls, in which participants were invited to mimic the likes of Elvis Presley, Connie Francis, Cliff Richard, The Beatles and The Shadows. Oftentimes, these were held in conjunction with the release of new songs or movies. Winners were usually awarded cash prizes and recording contracts, and hailed as the 'Elvis Presley of Malaysia' or 'The Beatles of Malaysia' (Augustin & Lochhead, 2015).

Such competitions were reputed to nurture creativity and talent. Not only did these events encourage bands to compose their own songs and harmonise vocally, but also made compulsory for all band members to play an instrument. The first *kugiran* competition *Muzik Muzik Muzik* was held in 1968/1969; its organiser was Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) (Zainuddin Bendahara, 1969). In 1970, the

competition was briefly renamed *Juara Pop* (see Figure 1), before its final iteration as *Juara Kugiran* (Zainuddin Bendahara, 1970). As shown in Figure 1 (an advertisement for a call to audition for *Juara Pop* in 1970), these competitions urged performers to localise their music through the use of Malay language and disqualifying Western songs unless sung in Malay.

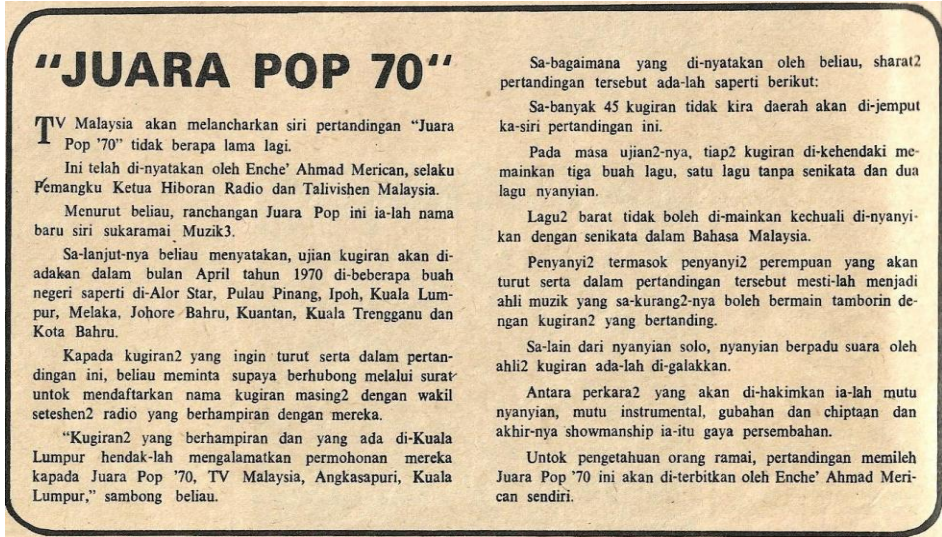


Figure 1: Advertisement for the competition *Juara Pop 70*

(Source: Radio & Talivishen Malaysia [1970].)

The advertisement in Figure 1 stipulates the criteria for the *Juara Pop 70* audition:

- Forty-five bands irrespective of district/state are invited to join the competition;
- Bands must play three songs during the audition: One instrumental and two with vocal accompaniment;
- Western songs cannot be played unless sung in *Bahasa Malaysia*;
- Heedless of gender, all singers entering the competition must also be a musician who can at least play a tambourine with the competing band;
- Aside solo singing, band members are encouraged to harmonise vocally; and
- Judging is based on the quality of singing and instrument playing, arrangement, composition and showmanship.

The commercialisation of popular music in the 1960s coincided with the emergence of recording contracts, as well as the growing influence of radio and live performances. These new developments extended the reach of the Pop Yeh Yeh

genre. Artistes and bands were offered recording contracts by local and international record companies with the promise of radio airtime (Augustin & Lochhead, 2015). The songs were recorded on a 7-inch 45 rpm extended play (EP) record that was popular in the late 1950s through the 1970s, owing to its affordability and easy production. Furthermore, local entrepreneurs saw the high demand for records as a business opportunity to start their own record companies and to scout for talents. Examples of Malaysian record companies to have recorded Pop Yeh Yeh music include Malaysia Musical Industries (MMI), Life Records, Mutiara Records, M. Shariff Scope and Ruby Records.

Localisation elements were also evident in record covers. For instance, Sanisah Huri's (1973) album *Gadis Panca Delima* (Girl with Five Jewels) featured the singer in a local traditional costume (Figure 2), while Jamali Shadat's *Melawat Desa Ku* (Visiting My Village) depicted an illustration of a fruit orchard (Figure 3).



Figure 2: Album cover of Sanisah Huri's *Gadis Panca Delima* (S-EGEP 754) featuring the singer in traditional clothing (Source: Penang House of Music archive).

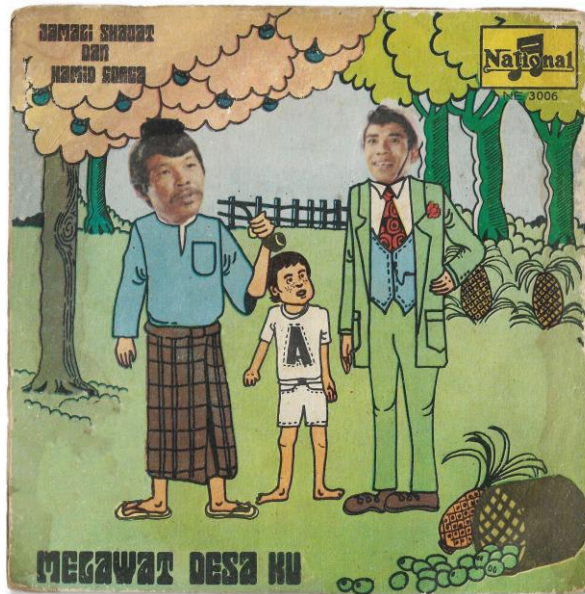


Figure 3: Album cover of Jamali Shadat's *Melawat Desa Ku* (LMEP 8772) depicting an illustration of a fruit orchard
(Source: Penang House of Music archive).

According to Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail (2023), the Pop Yeh Yeh era began in 1964 with the release of *Suzana* by M. Osman and petered out in 1969 with the significance of the Woodstock festival, when local bands began experimenting with other music genres instead. However, other sources (Lockard, 1998; Burhanuddin Bin Buang, 2001; Art, 2016) point to 1971 as the concluding year for the genre. Despite the difficulty in determining its chronology (Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, 2023), it is generally agreed that Pop Yeh Yeh's decline in popularity occurred in the late 1960s and grew out of fashion by 1971. Lockard (1998, p. 226) compares the genre's then waning popularity to the 1960s style Western rock music that suffered a similar fate following the events post-Woodstock. On the other hand, Burhanuddin Bin Buang (2001, p. 12) attributes the decline to a shifting focus of local youths who began gravitating towards 'foreign artistes who were much more radical', such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath and Jimi Hendrix.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Lyrics and Themes on Love, Relationships and Heartbreak

Song lyrics of the Pop Yeh Yeh era were deeply entrenched in youthful concerns and aspirations (Burhanuddin Bin Buang, 2001). Sung in Malay, these songs delved

into the universal themes of love, relationships and heartbreak (Adly Syairi & Naza Mohamad, 2020).

For example, L. Ramlie's *Dara Pujaan* (The Girl I Adore) (1966) and Fatimah M. Amin & The Clans' *Oh Teruna* (Hey Young Man) (1966) told tales of love and devotion. Jeffreydin's *Termenung* (Pensive) (1967) captured the bittersweet essence of parting and hopeful pining for a reunion. Salim I & The Wisma's *Sebentok Chinchin Berlian* (A Diamond Ring) (Salleh Ismail, 1967) tells the story of how the singer buys a diamond ring to propose to a girl. She accepts the ring but leaves him after just a month. Heartbroken, the singer acknowledges the role of destiny and the need for patience and acceptance in the face of life's uncertainties.

Occasionally, Malay customs and proverbs would be used in love songs. As shown in *Sebentok Chinchin Berlian* (A Diamond Ring), the verse '*Sa-bentok chinchin permata berlian, ku beli untok ku nak bertunang, ku suroh ibu-ku meminang*' (A diamond ring, I bought for my engagement, with this ring my mother proposed) denotes the Malay cultural practice of parental involvement in marriage proposals. While the Malay proverb '*tanam padi tumbuh-nya lalang*' (rice was planted, but weeds grew instead) conveys misfortune and how strenuous efforts do not always guarantee desired outcomes. Please note the spelling discrepancy of '*sebentok*'. The spelling '*sebentok*' was copied from the album, while '*sa-bentok*' was taken from a magazine.

Salim I & The Wisma - *Sa-Bentok Chinchin Berlian* (1968, MEP-412) (Retrieved from: *Lagu2 Filem & TV*, October 1968)

<i>Sa-bentok chinchin permata berlian</i>	A diamond ring
<i>Ku beli untok ku nak bertunang</i>	I bought for my engagement
<i>Ku suroh ibu-ku meminang</i>	With this ring my mother proposed
<i>Pada si gadis rupawan</i>	To the beautiful girl
<i>Pinangan ku telah di-terima</i>	She accepted my hand in marriage
<i>Di-sambut dengan gembira</i>	It was a happy moment
<i>Ku dengar hati-ku mesra</i>	My heart was filled with joy
<i>Lalu menjemput sanak saudara</i>	With clan and relatives gathered
<i>Sayang jodoh tak panjang</i>	Sadly the happiness was brief
<i>Bahagia hanya sa-bulan</i>	Just a month or so it lasted
<i>Apa nak di-kesalkan</i>	But then there is nothing to regret
<i>Tanam padi tumbuh-nya lalang</i>	If rice was planted but weeds grew instead
<i>Kudrat Tuhan ku bersabar</i>	Bless the Almighty that I remain calm
<i>Jodoh di-tangan Tuhan</i>	Destiny is in God's hands

*Jangan selalu di-kenangkan
Jika di-kenang merosak badan*

So I will not dwell too much
Nor continue to suffer

Localised Lyrics

Although local singers were initially influenced by Western songs that usually revolved around the themes of love and relationships, this was gradually eclipsed by the popularity of Indonesian pop songs in the 1960s. Thus inspired, they began writing songs that reflected their own culture and experiences instead. According to singer A. Ramlie:

Makin lama lagu2 pop Indonesia, pada saya makin bagus. Kerana dengan lagu2 tersebut, membangkitkan semangat kita untok menggubah lagu yang dengan tak langsung ingin menandingi lagu2 mereka. Dan lagi, pengaruh lagu2 Indonesia lebeh berguna bagi diri muda mudi kita dari pengaruh lagu2 Barat. Saya tak segan mengakui, yang saya sendiri terpengaruh dan mengubah fikiran saya dari sering menchipta lagu chinta kapada lagu yang berchorak lain, umpama-nya lagu2 yang berunsorkan perjuangan, ibu dan ayah serta seruan kapada perajurit tanah ayer dan sa-bagai-nya.

(The more I listen to Indonesian pop songs, the better they seem to me. Because these songs inspire me to compose songs that indirectly compete with theirs. Furthermore, the influence of Indonesian songs is more beneficial to our young people than Western songs. I will not hesitate to admit that I have been influenced and have changed my mind from frequently composing love songs to songs with different themes, such as those inspired by struggles, parents, calls to soldiers, etc.) (“Membidas Lagu2 Pop Indonesia”, 1967, p. 36).

Malay singers who localised their lyrics by creatively drawing on their personal experiences and familiar surroundings found better resonance with audiences. They sang about the environment, their love for their country, and even found inspiration in children's song lyrics. More importantly, they leveraged Malaysia's multicultural diversity by incorporating the many different languages into their songs. This naturally stood them apart from other bands.

Songs about Nature

Nature and the environment were also popular themes. M. Shariff's *Keindahan Pantai* (The Beautiful Beach) (1970) and S. Jibeng's *Desa-ku Permai* (My Serene Village) (1968) celebrated nature's splendour with their encapsulation of the serene

beauty of beaches and villages. The lyrics in *Desa-ku Permai* painted an idyllic picture of a peaceful night in the village, capturing nature's beauty and the close-knit community spirit, while expressing S. Jibeng's pride and attachment to his village. The imagery and language exude a sense of calm, unity and appreciation for the simple yet meaningful way of rural living. S. Jibeng was also noted for his use of personification as a literary tool to attribute human characteristics to objects. An example of this is seen in the line '*daun nyior menari-nari*' (the palm leaves dance and sway).

S. Jibeng & The Tun's Five - *Desa-ku Permai* (1968, NFEP 5037) (Retrieved from Lagu2 Filem & TV [June 1968])

<i>Bulan terang menyinari</i>	The moon shines bright
<i>Bintang jiwa sama menyeri</i>	And the stars sparkle
<i>Malam indah berseri</i>	The night is beautiful and radiant
<i>Daun nyior menari-nari</i>	The palm leaves dance and sway
<i>Angin malam sayup deru</i>	The night breeze blows softly
<i>Awan menghias langit biru</i>	Clouds adorn the blue sky
<i>Desa-ku luas terbentang</i>	Above my sprawling village
<i>Dari jauh indah di-pandang</i>	Beautiful even from afar
<i>Itu-lah desa-ku permai</i>	Serene is my village
<i>Penghuni-nya sangat ramai</i>	Abuzz with caring folk
<i>Hidup saling bantu membantu.</i>	Who live in harmony

Patriotic Songs in the Pop Yeh Yeh Style

Patriotic songs were also arranged in the Pop Yeh Yeh style. The song *Malaysia Baru* (A New Malaysia) was originally sung by Aziz Jaafar in 1963 in the film *Kasih Tanpa Sayang* (Love Without Affection). It was later recorded by M. Bakri in 1965 with Swallows Combo. The lyrics emphasise the importance of unity, purpose and mindfulness in creating a meaningful and fulfilled life. It also calls attention to the different types of love, including love for one's nation (*bangsa*) and philogyny, and forwards the suggestion that love is integral both on a societal level and in personal relationships. In the last verse, the lyrics '*...mari kawanku, berpimpin tangan berganding bahu, segera capai cita yang satu, di alam Malaysia baru*' (So come my friend, let us join hands and hasten, to achieve our goal, for a new Malaysia) shows the

performers' patriotism in their encouragement of fellow countrymen to band together to build a better Malaysia.

M. Bakri & Swallows Combo - *Malaysia Baru* (1965, EGEP. 587) (Retrieved from Zulhelmi Mamat [n.d.]

*Andai hidup tak punya cinta
Pada bangsa maupun wanita
Hidup tak punya ertinya
Kenikmatan tidak dirasa*

What is life without love
For the country or even for women
Life will have no meaning
Joy there will never be

*Cinta bangsa rasa mulia
Cinta wanita rasa bahagia
Menjadi kita penuh daya
Mencipta hidup sempurna*

Love for the nation feels noble
Love for a woman brings happiness
They fill us with motivation
Then life becomes ideal

*Andai kita lalai sertalah lupa
Masa akan lari sia-sia
Jiwa kosong tak berharga
Dunia bukan syurga*

When we are careless and we forget
Precious time will be wasted
An empty soul has no value
There is no heaven on earth

*Oleh itu mari kawanku
Berpimpin tangan berganding bahu
Segera capai cita yang satu
Di alam Malaysia baru*

So come my friend
Let us join hands and hasten
To achieve our goal
For a new Malaysia

Songs from the Different Languages Spoken in Malaysia and Singapore

Given Malaysia's diverse population, singing translations of popular songs have been a common practice since the early twentieth century (Tan 1993, 2021). Language barriers were dismantled as artistes from one ethnic group performed songs by those of other ethnic groups, in hopes of appealing to a wider audience and market.

Ahmad Daud is one such artiste to have recorded the Malay renditions of *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, retitled as *Aku Mohon Janji* (Promise Me) and *Forget Domani* retitled as *Dek Jangan Bimbang* (Don't Worry). Likewise, Maggie Wong and the band The Jungle Lynxs recorded Chinese covers of *From Me to You*, *Eight Days A Week* and *World Without Love* by The Beatles. Singers like Evey Lyn and Simon Junior also adapted English and Chinese pop songs into Malay, demonstrating the era's cultural amalgamation and creative versatility.

Similarly, the band Kassim Selamat & The Swallows, who were Singaporeans of Bawean ethnicity, composed and recorded the song *La O Be* (Changed) in the Bawean language to distinguish themselves from other *kugiran* bands (Siara, 1980). The lyrics of *La O Be* expresses the singer's frustrations in a romantic relationship. It follows a reflective trajectory of a happier time that is met with confusion upon noticing changes in his partner's behaviour and the dispiritedness that follows in awaiting her answer to his query.

Kassim Selamat & The Swallows - *La O Be* (1966, CHK. 1055) (Retrieved from Young [2012])

<i>Setulu bule kape rakan</i>	Before I was a happy man
<i>Neng kene bule la ngastabe</i>	But now my heart is sad
<i>Setulu malem eberek masem</i>	Last night you threw me a smile
<i>Arapa bule tak tau</i>	But why I do not know
<i>Arapa bule tak tau</i>	I do not know
<i>Arapan arapan alek</i>	Why, why my dear
<i>La au be ti naju bule</i>	You have changed oh my love
<i>Atong ku atong ku alek</i>	Waiting for you my dear
<i>Bule ngastabe</i>	I feel truly frustrated

Hybridity and Localisation in the Music of Pop Yeh Yeh

In contrast to the sophisticated big band and full combo music of the 1950s that demanded musical expertise, Pop Yeh Yeh was more accessible to aspiring musicians. This new wave of pop music featured a catchy danceable beat, simple repetitive lyrics that resonated with the youth, memorable sing-along melodies and easy-to-learn musical chords.

As mentioned, some pop musicians also gave free rein to their creativity, infusing local Malay elements with Western pop music to differentiate themselves from their Western counterparts. This section therefore analyses the diverse musical styles of Pop Yeh Yeh, highlighting the fusion of Western pop influences with local Malay musical elements.

Several key characteristics define the Pop Yeh Yeh genre. The first specifies the use of the *kugiran* instrumentation that is led by a lead singer. Its music often follows a Western surf or rock drum rhythm in a 4/4 time signature, accompanied by a melodic and rhythmic bassline that typically plays the chord's 1st, 3rd and 5th notes. It also features reverb guitar effects and vocal harmonies by band members, alongside melodic guitar lines that weave between vocal lines. The songs usually

follow a verse-chorus form with repetitive chord progressions that commonly comprise 3-4 chords (I, IV, V and vi). Minor tonalities are also a frequent feature, as are vocals in the Malay language to showcase *asli* vocal styles.

Pop Yeh Yeh Songs Based on Western Popular Music

The majority of early Pop Yeh Yeh singers took cues from Western pop styles. They were especially influenced by renowned instrumental bands like The Shadows (UK) and The Ventures (US) (Rasheed & Saat, 2016). The song *Suzana* by M. Osman & The Mods is widely regarded as the first Malay pop song, according to the article *Mengenang Kembali Pelopor Lagu Pop Melayu* by Rosie Hashim (1976). Its composition and performance were centred on the use of the Malay language. However, it also incorporated musical elements from Western rock and roll as shown in the highlighted sections in Figures 4 & 5.

The musical score for the chorus of 'Suzana' is presented in a multi-staff format. It includes staves for Voice, Lead Guitar, Rhythm Guitar, Bass Guitar, and Drum Set. The tempo is marked as 140. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score shows a repetitive chord progression of Bb, F, C, and F. The lyrics are in Malay. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 5.

Tempo: 140

Chords: Bb, F, C, F

Lyrics (System 1):
Oh Su - za - na meng-a - pa wa - jah - mu mu - ram sa - ja
Gem - bi - ra lah Su - za - na bi - la ki - ta ber-su - a

Lyrics (System 2):
tia - da se - in - dah bu - lan tin - ngi di a - wa - n
lu - pa - kan de - ri - ta ohi Su za na

Figure 4: The overall instrumentation, chord progression and surf rock rhythm used in the chorus of *Suzana* by M. Osman (1964) (Transcribed from source: M. Osman & The Mods [1964, TK1003])

The song first follows the usual structure of a pop song. This includes verses, a chorus and a solo section. Instrumentally, it features a lead vocal, rhythm guitar, lead guitar, bass guitar and drums, that align closely with the setup of popular Western acts from the 1960s, such as Cliff Richard and The Shadows (refer to Figure 4).

Next, the song uses chord progressions and song structures that are similar to the 12-bar blues commonly found in 1950s rock and roll songs (see Figures 4 and 5). It uses the chords I, IV, V and vi (F, Bb, C and Dm) set in the F major key, with a verse chord progression of I - V - I - IV - I - V - I and a chorus progression of VI - I - V - I (see the highlighted section in Figure 4). Additionally, the song features a guitar solo that follows the 12-bar blues chord progression (see the highlighted chords in Figure 5). The bass line complements the rhythm by playing eighth notes (matching the drum pattern) and accentuates the chord tones (the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the chord) (see the highlighted section in Figure 4).

The image shows a musical score for an electric guitar solo in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 140 bpm. The score is divided into three staves, each representing a different guitar part. The first staff is labeled 'Electric Guitar' and features a melodic line with a treble clef. The second staff is labeled 'E. Gtr.' and features a rhythmic line with a treble clef, starting at measure 5. The third staff is also labeled 'E. Gtr.' and features a rhythmic line with a treble clef, starting at measure 9. Chord diagrams are provided for the following chords: F (measure 1), Bb (measure 5), C (measure 9), Bb (measure 11), and F (measure 12). The notation includes eighth notes, quarter notes, and rests.

Figure 5: The use of the 12-bar blues chord progression in the guitar solo of *Suzana* (Transcribed from source: M. Osman [1964, TK1003])

Lastly, like many upbeat Pop Yeh Yeh songs, *Suzana* uses a surf rock rhythm where the beats 2, 2.5 and 4 are accentuated using the snare drum. While the beats 1 and 3 are played by the kick drum, with the 8th notes played on the ride cymbal (see Figure 6).

The image shows a drum set notation for a surf rock rhythm. It consists of a single staff with a double bar line on the left. The notation includes a kick drum (represented by a vertical bar) on beats 1 and 3, a snare drum (represented by an 'x') on beats 2, 2.5, and 4, and a ride cymbal (represented by a vertical bar) on the eighth notes of each beat.

Figure 6: Surf rock drum notation (Retrieved from: Drumeo [2016])

Hybridity and Localisation of the Pop Yeh Yeh Musical Style

Despite the heavy influence of Western pop songs, some Pop Yeh Yeh musicians began experimenting with Malay elements to localise their songs, as observed through the composition of new English and Malay nursery rhyme lyrics, and the incorporation of *asli* vocal styles to make their songs more melodic.

Adapting Western Pop Songs with the Inclusion of Malay Elements

The abovementioned adaptation was viewed as a strategy to localise music from the West. Another notable example is the song *Tak Mengapa* (It's Okay) by the local band A. Rahman Hassan & Orkes Nirwana (1966). The song is an adaptation of *You've Got What I Like* (1964) by the English band Gerry & the Pacemakers. Both these songs share the same rhythm, and melodic and harmonic accompaniment. The instrumentation is also similar, with the exception of a keyboard replacing the guitar (see Figures 7 and 8). The only differentiating factors are the use of the Malay language in *Tak Mengapa* and its lyrical theme.

The musical score for "You've Got What I Like" is presented in five staves. The top staff is for the Voice, with lyrics: "Your smile can make the dark - ness turn to light". The guitar part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The keyboard part consists of chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand. The bass guitar part follows a similar rhythmic pattern to the guitar. The drum set part features a consistent pattern of snare and bass drum hits. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 180. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The guitar part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The keyboard part consists of chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand. The bass guitar part follows a similar rhythmic pattern to the guitar. The drum set part features a consistent pattern of snare and bass drum hits.

Figure 7: Melody, harmony, instrumentation and rhythm of *You've Got What I Like* by Gerry & the Pacemakers (1964) (Transcribed from source: Gerry & the Pacemakers, 1964, DB 7189)

There is also a Finnish adaptation of *You've Got What I Like* titled as *Se Jokin Sinulla On* (1964) by Ronny & The Loafers. The overall melody, harmony, instrumentation and rhythm of the song *You've Got What I Like* by Gerry & the Pacemakers (1964) can be seen in Figure 7, with the version by A. Rahman Hassan in Figure 8. Both songs are in the A minor key and share the same chord progression.

The musical score for Figure 8 is a 4/4 piece in A minor, marked with a tempo of 130. It features five staves: Voice, Voice 2, Electric Guitar, Bass Guitar, and Drum Set. The lyrics are in Malay. The first system shows the vocal melody and accompaniment. The second system, starting at measure 5, continues the melody and includes background vocalizations. The chord progression is Am, Dm, and E.

Figure 8: The different lyrical theme and syllables such as 'aaaaa' and 'pa-ram pa-ram' in *Tak Mengapa* by A. Rahman Hassan & Orkes Nirwana (1966) (Transcribed from source: A. Rahman Hassan & Orkes Nirwana, 1966, NFEP 5007)

A. Rahman Hassan's rendition of the song with the band Orkes Nirwana (see Figure 8) is a slowed-down ballad with Malay lyrics on the theme of heartbreak. Notably, this version includes the addition of background singers, likely musicians chanting nonsense syllables (non-lexical vocables) like 'aaaaa' and 'pa-ram pa-ram'. In this

version, the bass guitar emphasises the 1st and 5th notes of the chord, creating a rhythmic and melodic bassline. The 8 notes played on the hi-hat create a steady driving rhythm. While the lead guitar inserts brief phrases between vocal lines, enhancing the musicality with reverb and delay effects. A. Rahman Hassan uses a crooning vocal style with vibrato, similar to the 1950s popular vocal style. These unique features give the song a distinctly Malay flavour, setting it apart from the original composition.

Malay Nursery Rhymes

Towards the end of the Pop Yeh Yeh era, bands like Mike Ibrahim & The Nite Walkers emerged, embracing the grittier sound of heavy rock bands and the use of guitar pedals and effects (Art Fazil, 2016) (Adly Syairi & Naza Mohamad, 2020). Mike Ibrahim & The Nite Walkers recorded 5 EPs, of which 4 featured a Malay nursery rhyme. By doing so singled them out from other bands and allowed the band to perform songs already familiar to the audience.

Figure 9 showcases the use of the Malay nursery rhyme *Chok Chok Kundong* arranged in the style of a Pop Yeh Yeh song. Mike Ibrahim performed this rendition with the band Titiwangsa in the 1970 edition of *Juara Kugiran*, but he left the band shortly after the competition to record the song with The Nite Walkers instead (*'Saya maseh sayang pada Titiwangsa'*, 1971).

This arrangement calls attention to the band's musical talent in its deviation from the conventional Western pop song harmonic and melodic arrangements. Instead, the arrangement comprises two main sections: a verse and a chorus. It has a 16-bar guitar solo preceding the final chorus and a 16-bar organ solo following the last chorus. Aside the standard instrumentation of guitars, organ, bass and drums, the musicians also included a *tabla* (Indian drum) (*'Pemain tabla India'*, 1971).

The cymbal in the drum section beats a driving rhythm with a syncopated feel. Arranged in the B minor key, the song does not use the 4-chord structure commonly found in pop music. Instead, the linear texture between the voices, organ and bass guitar creates a heterophonic sound (see the highlighted parts of Figure 9). The sustained B note in the first voice (Figure 9, bar 1-2) sung with a narrow and tense vocal style creates a drone-like effect. The harmonic foundation is provided by the organ, alternating between notes E and D, while the bass guitar plays a repeating riff with notes E G E (B) D. The lyrical phrases in the second vocal line alternate between notes B and A, with the note E serving as a pickup or anacrusis at the beginning of each vocal phrase. The linear texture created by the voices and instruments is often associated with traditional and folk music and differs from the unified melodies and clear arrangements of 1960s pop music, thereby highlighting the musicians' effort in localising their sound.

The musical score is arranged in a system with the following parts from top to bottom: Voice 1, Voice 2, Electric Guitar, Organ, Bass Guitar, Tabla, and Drum Set. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as 120. The lyrics are: "Hei.. Chok chok kun-dong kun-dong me - na - ri - na - ri ter-hem na pik nya - mak pi-nang se - le - mak pap da-un ja-gung a-nak pu - nai ra - ja A - li". The score includes a triplet of eighth notes in the second system.

Figure 9: The overall arrangement of *Chok Chok Kundong* by Mike Ibrahim & The Nite Walkers (1971) (Transcribed from source: Mike Ibrahim & The Nite Walkers, 1971, S-EGEP 713)

Modern Asli Styles

Asli describes a traditional Malay dance or a slow, melancholic song performed in the quadruple metre. It is typically accompanied by the violin, frame drum (*rebana*), gong and accordion; and characterised by a distinctive 8-beat rhythm played on the *rebana* with a melismatic singing style, where singers ornament the melody with multiple notes on a single syllable (see Figure 10).



Figure 10: Melismatic singing (Retrieved from Haren [2014])

Lyrics of *asli* songs follow the Malay quatrain or *pantun*, a Malay traditional poem that consists of 4 lines with an ABAB rhyme scheme (see Matusky & Tan, 2017, p. 318) and addresses a variety of themes, ranging from love and nature to patriotism and nationalism.

Even so, *asli* songs have since evolved to incorporate major-minor diatonicism and Western musical instruments. Despite the absence of the *asli* rhythm in Pop Yeh Yeh, the melodic lines continue to be coloured by melismatic elements, permitting their inclusion in the *asli* categorisation (Dairianathan & Phan, 2005). An example is M. Ishak's rendition of *Yale Yale* (1967). Originally composed by Osman Ahmad for the 1952 film *Yatim Piatu* (Orphan), M. Ishak gave the song a contemporary twist with the incorporation of electric guitars and a guitar solo to boot.

As with other Pop Yeh Yeh songs, *Yale Yale* adopts Western musical features like the verse-chorus structure and guitar solo. Set in the A minor key, it uses chords i and V (Am, E) in the verse (see Figure 11), and chords i, VII, iv, VI, V (Am, G, Dm, F, E) in the chorus.

The Malay *asli* elements found in the song include the use of the melisma technique (as seen in Figure 11). An example of this technique can be observed in the word *maya* (Figure 11, bar 3). Additionally, the melodic phrases ascending and descending the scale played on the lead guitar (see the highlighted sections in Figure 11) and the motif played on the bass guitar creates a linear texture. These features are characteristic of *asli* music. The use of *asli* melodic elements combined with the *kugiran* instrumentation, repetitive bass motif, reverb guitar effects and Western harmony thus creates a modern *asli* sound.

Figure 11 shows a musical score for the song "Yale Yale" by M. Ishak & The Young Lovers (1967). The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 156. It features five staves: Voice, Lead Guitar, Rhythm Guitar, Bass Guitar, and Drum Set. The lyrics are: "A lang - kah in dah - nya A - lam ma a ya Ber- pus - pa war - na ser - ta ke-in da - han". The Lead Guitar part has melodic lines highlighted in yellow. Chords Am and Em are indicated above the Rhythm Guitar staff.

Figure 11: *Yale Yale* by M. Ishak & The Young Lovers (1967) uses melodic guitar lines and Western harmonies (Transcribed from source: M. Ishak & The Young Lovers [1967, 437804 PE])

CONCLUSION

By examining the lyrical themes and musical elements such as the instrumentation, rhythm, and melodic and harmonic accompaniment of select Pop Yeh Yeh songs, we have shown that Pop Yeh Yeh musicians were moved to blend influences of Western popular music with a localised hybridisation process, in a visible attempt to magnify their Malaysian identities. This endeavour was distinctly prevalent in the popular music of Nusantara in the early twentieth century.

Similar to 1960s Western pop music, Pop Yeh Yeh musicians emulated the lineup of a lead singer, three guitars and drums made popular by Western bands like The Shadows, with song structures typically featuring an intro, verse, chorus,

a bridge section and an electric guitar solo. Pop Yeh Yeh songs, usually set in a 4/4 time signature, embraced variations of surf rock and rock and roll rhythms, along with vocal harmonies influenced by The Beatles. Their repetitive chord progressions (commonly I, IV, V and vi) made it easier for new musicians to learn the music. The practice of adapting and re-releasing Western songs was common throughout the 1960s.

To appeal to local audiences, however, *asli* music elements such as melismatic notes and heterophonic texture were included between vocal and guitar parts. Likewise, Pop Yeh Yeh musicians adapted their song lyrics to reflect the concerns and emotions of Malaysian youths of the 1960s. Themes of love and heartbreak made popular by Western music were recurrent, but the lyrics were rewritten in Malay. These musicians also widened the thematic horizon through their exploration of nature and patriotism. Competitions such as *Juara Kugiran* promoted localisation in encouraging up-and-coming talents to compose their own songs and arrangements, and to sing in Malay.

To close, this article has explored the Pop Yeh Yeh genre as rendered in Malay. Future research in this area may examine the English, Chinese and Tamil recordings of popular music in 1960s Malaysia, to provide a comprehensive overview of the decade's musical landscape. Similarly, a more detailed study of early Malaysian-owned record labels and companies could provide valuable insights into the beginnings of Malaysia's music industry.

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