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Wim van Zanten, *Music of the Baduy People of Western Java: Singing is a Medicine*

Leiden, Brill, 2021, xxvii + 395 p.

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Texte intégral

- 1 Despite its descriptive approach, this *Music of the Baduy People of Western Java: Singing is a Medicine* asks a question to ponder in its concluding part. “How will Baduy people be able to use their music as a medicine in the coming years?” (p. 272). In the attempts to understand the music practice of an indigenous group called Baduy, Wim van Zanten contextualizes the above question in the social and ecological changes in the past decades driven by economic development and the government-sponsored tourist promotion. This small ethnic group, who persists Islamization, practice an ascetic life, customary rules, and religion called *sunda wiwitan*, is facing the increase of population, the shortage of agricultural land for shifting cultivation, the stipulation of their village to become a tourist site, and the coming of modern technology such as car, motorbike and cell phone. Numbering about 12,000 in 2016, Baduy people mainly live in several hamlets in the village of Kanékés in Banten Province of Indonesia, where they form inner and outer Baduy areas; while some of them reside in a neighbouring village. Even though it is forbidden by their religion, some members of the outer Baduy have used electronic device like cell phone. The significant threat to the sustainability of Baduy modest life, however, is a land shortage for non-irrigated rice field that has been



the core of Baduy way of life. The present book looks at music practice in the Baduy cultural context, particularly major seasons linked to the agricultural calendar, in which, according to the author, music is played for entertainment and rituals—for goddess of rice and in some of the rituals of the rites of passage such as wedding and circumcision.

- 2 The subtitle *Singing is a Medicine* implies the role of music to cure the rice from disease and calm down those who are angry. Locating the role of music in the relations between human, nature, and supernatural beings, the book under review brings to the fore a question about cultural sustainability. Not only is the materials for the making of music instruments—like animal skin for drum—rarely found currently but also the whole condition of agricultural community is under pressure of land shortage and the threat to the primary forest, which is sacred for the Baduy. *Music of the Baduy People of Western Java* provides us this context to understand Baduy music and dance that W. van Zanten recorded. This study and documentation are a result of a long-standing engagement in ethnographic research, which the author carried out since his first encounter with a Baduy man in 1976 followed by periodical and short visits until 2016 (pp.100-101). The restrictions the author recounts about how the customary rules prohibit researchers to enter the inner Baduy area, the recording of the rituals; limit the period of stay in the outer area especially for foreigner; specify the information that are allowed and not to be published; provide us the social landscape of rapport-building between the researcher and the researched community and its challenges. Given these insights and practical lessons in methodology, we should appreciate the commitment in producing a book like this, which is the first attempt to study Baduy music.
- 3 The book comprises of nine chapters and four appendices. The first four chapters provide social context of Baduy music, followed by the four chapters focusing on its music practice, and closed by a concluding chapter. Chapter 1 is an introduction to Baduy people, their division into three groups, and an overview of Baduy music and dance. Chapter 2 recounts about the social organization and leadership, village and hamlets, religion and economic activities. In Chapter 3 the author discusses his approaches, some methodological issues including restrictions for researchers, as well as a brief discussion on the existing sources from the nineteenth to early twentieth century. Chapter 4 describes the context for music practice including the major rituals and seasons according to agricultural calendar, which give us understanding of the interconnection between music and agriculture-based life of Baduy community. The following chapters explains the music concept, instruments and their tone systems (Chapter 5), and the transcription of music, song text, and epic narrative called *carita pantun* storytelling (Chapter 6 and 7). While dealing with great details of music ensemble such as shaken bamboo idiophones (*angklung*) and bronze idiophones (*kromong*), as well as wind and instruments (Chapter 8), some parts of these chapters discuss more technical aspect of musical analysis, which is both beneficial for readers with musical knowledge and challenging for those without it. Chapter 9 concludes the book with summary of the previous chapters and some reflection on the incorporation of *angklung* to the UNESCO representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the opportunity it may give to the efforts of safeguarding the sustainability of the Baduy music tradition.
- 4 I found this book a vivid description of particular music culture and its social context handled with a great care. However, some concepts need to be revisited, such as the use of the concepts of “secular” village head and “spiritual” leaders in terms leadership and social structure. It is unclear to what extent they apply to grasp Baduy way of life. The use of the concepts is likely of Western bias and the question occurs when they deal with the fact that, for the secular village head, “religion is another important issue to be discussed with the Indonesian authority.” (p. 27). Meanwhile, the economic activities including non-irrigated agriculture bears the core values of Baduy religious belief and “the time for planting rice is determined by the spiritual leaders” (p. 108). Yet, it seems the model applied by the author to categorize Baduy music, namely music for rituals for gods and entertainment, which may be erroneous when dealing with the amusing

aspect of sacred rituals. For example, the engagement ritual of the goddess of rice aims “to entertain the ‘children of the rice goddess’, Déwi Asri.” (pp. 15, 116). Likewise, the performance of songs “for entertainment” are related to the ritual ceremonies such as wedding and circumcision, including the one called *Kidung Rahayu* that the author recorded during the fasting months, which “seemed to be used as an incantation to avert evil influences and supply holy prosperity” (p. 223).

- 5 In spite of the above issues, I found rich materials from both fieldwork and previous studies discussed throughout the monograph. Addition to this is the supplement materials in appendices, such as maps of Kanékés Village and its hamlets (Appendix 1), the calendar of Baduy (Appendix 2), list of informants (Appendix 3), and song texts (Appendix 4), which each of them gives fruitful information as the chapters do. In companion to the book is photographs and audio-(visual) recordings that are accessible online on Figshare (DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.c.5170520). The book itself is open access and downloadable on the Brill’s webpage (<https://brill.com/view/title/56932>). We can also consult the original 250 hours audio and 90 hours film recordings and fieldnotes W. van Zanten donated to Leiden University Library. As the explanation about research methodology is beneficial for readers in dealing with ethical issues, this book uncovers possible directions and hence is a worthwhile basis for future research.

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