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The Sundanese Pop Music of Nano Suratno: Between Tradition and Adaptation

ABSTRACT: *Talking about Sundanese pop music principally means talking about the concept of Sundanese music itself, which is, indeed, packaged differently. Historically, commercial music (pop music) in developing countries, such as Indonesia, did not destruct the originality of "sounds" in its local pop music; rather, it enriched the local music. The imported pop culture is a resource, a source of information on new sounds, instruments, and ideas, which can be exploited by local artists to create "a different taste of music" based on their capabilities. Popular music today is made for commercial purposes, even a commodity; however, sometimes it does not lack quality. Consequently, it is very difficult to make something original in popular music, for if originality is emphasized, people will sense that there is something uncommon in the song. On the other hand, if it lacks originality, its quality will be lowered. The aim of this paper is to discuss on Sundanese pop music. The issues covered: the existence of pop music, the existence of recording industries and Sundanese pop music, and local identity and Sundanese pop music industries, more specifically concerning the case of Nano Suratno that known as Nano S. Based on the conducted study, two hypotheses were put forward. Firstly, the Sundanese pop music of Nano Suratno is based on creative considerations; where in quality, uniqueness, and adaptation are maintained. Secondly, the Sundanese pop music of Nano Suratno is a spirit in counter balancing the national pop music industries.*
KEY WORDS: *Popular music, Sundanese pop music, figure of Nano Suratno, tradition, structuration, adaptation, and local identity.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on research for my doctoral dissertation on Sundanese pop music. Talking about Sundanese pop music principally means talking about the concept of Sundanese music itself, which is, indeed, packaged differently. Martin Hatch's research outcomes on "Popular Music in Indonesia" (1989:47-69), revealed in detail that historically commercial music (pop music) in developing countries, such as Indonesia, did not destruct the originality of "sounds" in its local pop music; rather, it enriched the local music. The imported pop culture is a resource, a source of information on new sounds, instruments, and ideas, which can be exploited by local artists to create "a different taste of music" based on their capabilities (Hatch, 1989).

Martin Hatch's explanation invites further discussion, for example, that the term of "popular music" is problematic matter. What is "popular music"? Basically, I have not found a clear definition for this term. As inquired by Dieter Mack: (1) Is popular music the same as the term of popular music itself?; and (2) Is the definition of the term of popular music similar for every ethnic group, culture, and era? (Mack ed., 1995:12).

The answer for the first question is

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quite easy; take for example the Indonesia national anthem, "*Indonesia Raya*" (the Great Indonesia). This song is in fact very popular among Indonesian people. Then, can this song be categorized into popular music? Absolutely it is not, because the song has its own sublime function. According to Dieter Mack, a piece of music with political functions cannot be assessed with a set of criteria for music, for the important thing is not the music's elements, but its text and functions (Mack ed., 1995).

The answer for the second question, "*Is the definition of the term of popular music similar for every ethnic group, culture, and era?*" is much more difficult. This is so because the term "popular" is linked to the impression of "being connected with the community". The term is related to something being known, liked, and easily understood by a large number of people. It is asserted, then, that popular music is entertaining music that is acceptable for a large community.

Popular music today is made for commercial purposes, even a commodity (Mack ed., 1995; Toynbee, 2000; and Barker, 2011); however, sometimes it does not lack quality. The problem is society in general does not pay attention to the aspect of quality. Society's perception of popular music is based on whether they like it or not. This translates as popular music departing from society's interest; even musicians create their works merely to fulfill the need of common people.

Hence, because the music is to fulfill the need of a large number of people, it cannot be too heavy on them. Consequently, it is very difficult to make something original in popular music, for if originality is emphasized, people will sense that there is something uncommon in the song. On the other hand, if it lacks originality, its quality will be lowered.

That is my perception of popular music. How about Sundanese pop music? This paper will precisely discuss that specifically the Sundanese pop music created by Nano Suratno or known as Nano S.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I employed Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration for model analysis (Giddens, 2010). It does not mean that I claim the theory to be appropriate for this research, but I regard the theory as methodologically appropriate for the context of this research and because it orients towards social practices. Nevertheless, the approach needs to be combined with post-structuralism, especially Julia Kristeva's intertextuality, in order to gain a holistic tool of analysis (cited in Piliang, 2003).

Structuration theory by Anthony Giddens focuses on the study of a twin structure, namely structure-agency as duality. Anthony Giddens' structuration is intended to end "imperialism" that is in the intersection of subjectivism (interpretive sociology) and objectivism (sociology/sociologism). The concept describes structure as a recurrent and perpetual social phenomenon, which is a product and a cause of interaction (*cf* Jazuli, 2003:44; and Giddens, 2010).

According to Anthony Giddens, structure is an exact procedure on how the actions of an agent are expressed consciously (deliberately). The connection between an agent's actions and their structure is of mutual bargaining, where an agent constructs a structure, and the reverse is true. Humans become agents because of their roles in constructing structure, and as agents, they are not absolutely free, even though they can be creative because agents are tied by the scenario of the structure that constructs them. Structure shapes and is shaped by social interactions (Giddens, 2010).

Therefore, structure does not only forbid, but also allows agents to act. Anthony Giddens stated that agency involves humans' practical activities in an intent of constructing a social world, which means that there are productions and reproductions of structure in a more specific context. Anthony Giddens' way of thinking that is more concerned with the dynamic aspect of the process influenced the concepts used in his method of analysis; for instance, the use of the term "positioning oneself" rather than "status" (which has an impression of being static) and the concept of space as "locality or region" rather than "place" (*cf* Jazuli, 2003:45; and Giddens, 2010).

Anthony Giddens proposes an analysis model which states that structure covers a

set of rules and resources which have three dimensions: *signification, domination* (a manifestation of power differences), and *legitimation*. The dimension of *signification* includes structures pertaining to symbols, meaning, naming, and discourse. Meanwhile, the dimension of *domination* covers the structure of mastery of certain things. The dimension of *legitimation*, on the other hand, pertains to justification, recognition, and normative rules revealed in the law order (Giddens, 2010).

Interaction will involve communication, power, and morality. Modalities are linked to interpretation, facilities, and norms. There are in minimum three sources available for agents intending to construct the social world, namely: *meaning* (something known), *power* (pattern of domination and division of interest), and *moral* (value system). In a larger scale, all phenomena are patterns of interaction, and are regarded as structures as long as they are systematic, regular, permanent, and reproducible by the next generation of agents (*cf* Jazuli, 2003:46; and Giddens, 2010).

Departing from the above explanations, the characteristics of Anthony Giddens' structuration can be divided into two concepts, namely: (1) Structure and agency are two sides of a coin, which are inseparable. Structure relates to materialized or visible phenomena in interaction and action, while actors act as agents; and (2) Structuration gives more emphasis on the interaction process between structure and agency (Giddens, 2010).

Thus, through structuration theory, Anthony Giddens positions structure and agent as mutually supporting duality. He contends that agents are active and creative subjects. He denied opinion that agents are dolls created by external rules and structures as proposed by the theories of functionalism and structuralism. Further, he believes that agent and structure are the reciprocation between individuals and social powers (Giddens, 2010).

Structuration theory attempts to criticize the theories of functionalism and structuralism that are trapped in the dualism or determinism of structure and agency. For instance, in functionalism, individuals are positioned as important elements that determine the changes of structure. Meanwhile, structuralism puts aside agency because individual actions are believed to be determined by structure. Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration reconciles the two aforementioned theories with a concept of mutually completing duality. With duality, structure and agency becomes interactive (*cf* Sutrisno & Putranto eds., 2005; Giddens, 2010; and Barker, 2011).

In line with Anthony Giddens' theory is *post-structuralism*. The theory emphasizes not only the centralities of cultural systems as target for analysis, but also how agents of subjectivity interact with and are constructed by cultural structures. In structuralism, cultural analysis opens and orients towards a single and universal truth. On the other hand, for post-structuralism, such an idea can be misleading because truth can be affected by situation and condition (*cf* Lajar, 2005; and Giddens, 2010).

One of the figures of post-structuralism, that will be referenced in this research, is Julia Kristeva. She introduces the term of "intertextuality". The concept can be explained as a text or a work of art is related to the dimensions of time and space. Hence, there must be relations between one text or work and another in the same space, and between one text or work and the earlier one in a timeline (cited in Piliang, 2003).

In conjunction with Yasraf Amir Piliang's explanation (2003), Chris Barker has argued that textual meaning is not stable and cannot be put into a single word, sentence, or text (Barker, 2011). Meaning does not have a single origin; instead, it is resulted from relations among texts, namely intertextuality.

According to Ferdinand de Saussure (a structuralist), meaning is resulted from the difference of one sign from another in the same system (cited in Barker, 2004 and 2011); while according to Julia Kristeva (a post-structuralist), the concept of intertextuality refers to the accumulation and generation of meanings across texts, where all meanings depend on other meanings generated and or deployed in alternative contexts (cited in Piliang, 2003).

Structuration theory is the main foundation of this research, while the theory of intertextuality (post-structuralism) will be the supporting theory. The concept of structure by Anthony Giddens, with its three dimensions of: *signification, domination,* and *legitimation*, is the tool for analysis in addition to the concept of intertextuality.

The dimension of *signification* in Sundanese pop music of Nano Suratno (known as Nano S.) is related to the naming of Nano S. as the songwriter of Sundanese pop songs. This signifies that Nano S. has the ability and authority over the creation of his songs. The discourse of Nano S. as the songwriter of Sundanese pop songs and his products in the forms of cassettes are continuously reproduced, so that cognitively it is planted on people's mind that Nano S. is a renowned Sundanese pop music artist. In addition to the songwriter, Nano S. another dimension of signification in Sundanese pop music is producer.

The discourse of producer becomes one of the gates through which Nano S. enters and conducts his activities in creating Sundanese pop music. When Nano S. is going to sell his songs into the market, he has to meet the person who masters the market, which is producer. The signification of the discourse of arranger is also inseparable from Sundanese pop music of Nano S., because his songs are arranged by an arranger (Yan Achimsa) in such a way that peculiar Sundanese pop music can be created.

In the dimension of *domination*, Nano S. has the rights to write songs based on his desire; however, there is also domination of the producer who has the authority over Nano S. Sometimes Nano S. is asked to write songs for singers who are appointed by the producer. In addition to producer, arranger also has domination over Nano S., in the case where he is assigned by the producer to compose the music created by Nano S. Thus, there are three dominant structures in Sundanese pop music, namely: creator or writer (Nano S.), producer, and arranger. The three agents should understand each of their significance. If one fails, social interaction will be inhibited.

In the dimension of *legitimation*, there is society's recognition demonstrated by the purchase of cassettes produced by Nano S. Not only that his works have been purchased, his works have also made him receive awards the music awards. The recognition and awards can justify that it is Nano S.'s model of Sundanese pop music that is recognized by his community, so that Nano S. can be the icon of Sundanese pop music.

A GLANCE AT THE EXISTENCE OF POP MUSIC IN INDONESIA

The influence of pop music on Indonesian music was begun to be felt in the 1950s, marked by the emergence of gramophone, recording technology by use of vinyl record. This format of recording or gramophone once ruled the recording industry, ultimately pop music. Vinyl records at that time were imported with high price, so that their productions were costly and limited. Recording companies were still scarce, such as Irama, Remaco, Dimita, and Lokananta. With costly production budget and a small number of recording companies, the development of pop music was not really significant (Hatch, 1989:47; and Sen & Hill, 2000:193).

In line with technological advancement around the 1960s, businessmen moved from vinyl record to cassettes. Cassettes had lower cost of production than vinyl records. With lower cost production, the development of recording industries, especially pop music, began to increase significantly. With cassettes being more affordable than vinyl records, the purchasing power of the people increased, and they had the opportunity to listen to products of pop music recording in the forms of cassettes.

The increase in the purchasing power for pop music products had an impact on the security of Indonesian local music. Hence, through the policy of President Soekarno in the Broad Outlines of State Policy in 1959, pop music products were limited, ultimately the Western ones. In his speech on August 17, 1959, President Soekarno urged the youths to fight against what he called the culture of *NEKOLIM* or Neo-Colonialists and Imperialists (Sen & Hill, 2000:195). The content of President Soekarno's speech is as follow:

[...] and you, the youths, you who are certainly anti-economic imperialism and against economic imperialism, you who are against political imperialism, why would there be many among of you who are not against the imperialist culture? Why do many among of you still mimic the *rock-n-roll* style, the *cha-cha-cha* dance, the crazy music, and the like? (cited in Sen & Hill, 2000:195).

Through his speech, President Soekarno encouraged Indonesian youths to love Indonesian art. President Soekarno's policy inspired artists to create pop music that is peculiar to Indonesia, one that is more nationalistic. Thus, the artists looked for a form that truly represents the music of the indigenous in order to fulfil society needs of pop music.

The policy affected the rigor of recording artists and producers to produce a genre of pop music from Indonesian band groups. The produced pop music with a "sense" of nationalism that emerged was still at the level of language and mimicry. Indonesian band groups also still copied those from abroad, for example *Koes Plus* was copying *The Beatles*, *Gito Rollies* was copying *Rolling Stones*, and *God Bless* was copying *Deep Purple* (Hatch, 1989:60-61; and Sen & Hill, 2000:196).

These Indonesian band groups were very popular among the people. This made a promising market for pop music. With the increase in pop music market around the 1970s, music producers formed an association named ASIRI (*Asosiasi Industri Rekaman Indonesia* or Recording Industry Association of Indonesia) as the only representative of recording industry that is acknowledged by the government of Indonesia, with its headquarter in Jakarta.

The formation of ASIRI, in fact, affected the existence of local music in the regions. Producers of regional/local music who were not registered with the association began to spread in the whole archipelago (Sen & Hill, 2000:196). They produced local music collaborated with a genre of pop music. This was done in order to balance the existence of national pop music.

About the Existence of Recording Industries and Sundanese Pop Music. The emergence of regional or local music was triggered by the existence of local recording industries producing Sundanese pop music in collaboration with local artists and singers in order to satisfy the need of local people. Producers of Sundanese pop music in general were not members of the ASIRI (*Asosiasi Industri Rekaman Indonesia* or Recording Industry Association of Indonesia). They were prepared to produce Sundanese pop music for rural and municipal markets. They could survive because they could satisfy a form of music most liked in a region, one that could not be satisfied by national companies under the ASIRI. The songs produced were pop in style using Sundanese language and sung by local artists (Sen & Hill, 2000:196).

The popularity of Sundanese pop music began to soar around the 1960s, along with the development of national pop music. People were once familiar with Sundanese pop songs, such as *Es Lilin* (Lolly Ice); *Bulan Dagoan* (Wait for Me, Moon); *Euis* (Euis is Sundanese female commonly name); *Bubuy Bulan* (Baked Moon); and *Panon Hideung* (Black Eyes), which were popularized by Mus D.S. and accompanied by Teruna Ria orchestra which was led by Zaenal Arifien (Dasriyo, 2009). The songs emerged because of the influence of political situation in the period of Guided Democracy (President Soekarno's government, 1959-1966) that made it obligatory for the creation of music with a stronger "sense" of nationalism (Sen & Hill, 2000).

In the midst of the golden age of Sundanese pop music, a film titled *Panon Hideung* (Black Eyes) directed by Nawi Ismail (1961) was born, showing the performance of comedians Us-Us, Anna Susanti, Eddy Soed, and Noortje Sopandi. The film was a legitimation or recognition for the strong market of Sundanese pop music, even though the song itself in the film was adopted and thought to be a Russian song titled *Ochi Chornya* that was adopted by Ismail Marzuki (Dasriyo, 2009).

If this phenomenon is to be further analysed using Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration, it signifies that Sundanese language — in this case is *Panon Hideung* (Black Eyes) — has already had reflective meanings to accommodate a communication in the film, not only in the Sundanese pop

music. Because there has been a signification in Sundanese language, followed by the language starting to dominate the music and film, eventually *Panon Hideung* (Black Eyes) has a legitimation for a strong market of Sundanese pop songs.

The legitimation or recognition of the strong market of Sundanese pop music drove recording producers to lead Lilis Suryani, who was not specialized in singing local songs, to enter and experience the success of Sundanese pop recording, by singing *Cai Kopi* (Coffee)*, Antosan* (Please Wait)*, Teungteuingeun* (How Cruel of You)*,* and *Cing Tulungan* (Please Help). Even a singer of Padangnese origin in West Sumatera, Elly Kasim, sang *Peuyeum Bandung* (Fermented Cassava of Bandung) created by Sambas, who first popularized the song (Dasriyo, 2009).

The success of Sundanese pop music in the popular music at that time was still not oriented towards locality. The lyrics were, indeed, in Sundanese language, but the instruments and rhythms still tended to refer to Western music. This means that Sundanese pop music in the 1960s had not yet highlighted its local nuance, so that the colour of Sundanese music was not dominantly heard. Even the song of *Cing Tulungan* (Please Help) by Lilis Suryani was accompanied by *rock-n-roll* style of music.

LOCAL IDENTITY AND POP MUSIC INDUSTRIES: THE CASE OF NANO SURATNO

The popularity of Sundanese pop music continued until the 1970s, with the emergence of a song titled *Badminton* by *Mang* (uncle) Koko with a strong local nuance. The song was succeeded by Nano Suratno (known as Nano S.) who created Sundanese pop music that truly had Sundanese musical nuances. Nano S. modified *kawih* (traditional Sundanese vocal art) with Western musical instruments. The combination of Sundanese musical instrument, such as *suling* (Sundanese flute made of bamboo) and *kendang* (a two-headed membrane drum used in the *gamelan* ensemble) with guitar, keyboard and drum, created a difference nuance compared to the previous era (the 1960s). The modification of *kepesindenan* (a traditional singing style)

ornamentation developed by Nano S. in Sundanese pop music became something unique and dominant.

To deconstruct the Sundanese pop music of Nano S., I believe, a very basic transformation in the concept of music has occurred, namely the transformation from traditional concept of music into hybrid concept. The traditional concept pertains to authenticity and integrity of Sundanese music, while the hybrid concept is linked to adaptation and fusion, from Sundanese traditional music into Sundanese pop music.

It is undeniable that even though Nano S. is a traditional artist, he is still adaptive to popular culture. This can be seen from his song titled *Kalangkang* (Shadow) which was sold for 3 million copies (Sen & Hill, 2000:200; and Achimsa, 2004:28). The song, which was initially created for *kawih* (traditional Sundanese vocal art), was then modified by Nano S. into Sundanese pop music, without eliminating the aspects of Sundanese traditional musical instruments, such as *kenongan* or small *gong* (the position of *kenong*, which is a horizontal *gong* in a stand used in *gamelan* orchestra) and *go'ongan* (the position of *gong*, which is the most important instrument of *gamelan* orchestra).

In reality, what Nano S. did had an impact on the society who showed enthusiasm for the song of *Kalangkang* (Shadow)*,* a version combining Sundanese and Western musical instruments. The song was successful both artistically and commercially. As attested to by an arranger of Nano S.'s Sundanese pop songs, Yan Achimsa (2004), the song of *Kalangkang* (Shadow) is a special song. It was amazing both for its gains and its popularity. The success of the song even exceeds some Indonesian songs that were once popular. Commercially, it is clear that the song was very profitable, with double earnings, ultimately for the recording company. To date, the song is still popular and marketable. Hence, it can be inferred that hybridity and fusion of different styles of music do not only blur the lines between local and global music, but also assimilate local identity (traditional art) and pop music industries (business).

The above phenomenon implies changes in

the point of view and processing of Sundanese music, especially the Sundanese pop music of Nano S., as a result of a social life. Status of Nano S., as an agent and his works and products, is adapted from social and cultural changes. The impact of the adaptation is a shift from traditional music into pop, to follow the needs and desires of agents and the society. Nano S.'s view that desires changes is based on the spirit of contemporariness.

There is duality in Nano S.'s position as an agent and structure. Nano S. becomes an agent because of his role in the structure; and as an agent, Nano S. is not absolutely free, even though he can be creative, because he is tied to the scenario of structure that constructs him, and the reverse is true. Structure shapes and is shaped by social interactions. Therefore, this discussion is not concerned with determining the central role of the two (agent-structure); instead, it focuses on the interaction between the two, and its impact on Nano S.'s works.

In that case, from the aspect of signification, Nano S. as a creator or song writer has the brevity to take the attitude of contemporariness. Then, there is a relation between agent and his music. His role as an agent is demonstrated by his ability to adapt the incoming concepts along with the popular culture into his own music, which is traditional music. Through his creativity, he dares open new possibilities of meanings. In other words, as a creator, he dares create his own discourse (music), in the midst of a discourse that has already been a mainstream in the global society, ultimately when compared to other works of Sundanese pop music that are more sensational, popularly imaginative, and tend to be vulgar.

The Sundanese pop music of Nano S. is able to open a new discourse which comes from "within" the Sundanese culture itself and sort out the "outside elements" which are suitable for Sundanese pop music. Thus, from the aspect of signification, Nano S. is an active and productive musician and Sundanese pop song writer, who is adaptive to the market. Even his album at that time dominated the market of Sundanese pop music. Through the domination, he gained legitimation and recognition from the society who purchased his cassettes. The legitimation was proven by the high sales of his cassettes that reached 3 million copies. Even his song, *Kalangkang* (Shadow), made it possible for him to earn two award nominations from BASF Award dan HDX Award in 1989 (Achimsa, 2004).

Recently, on May 25, 2013, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia, through the Department of Tourism and Culture of West Java Province and its Center for Cultural Park Management, in an event of activating the Cultural Park of West Java Province titled *Nu Kantun ti Nu Ngantun* (works of the late Nano S.), performed Sundanese pop and traditional music of Nano S. This is the way the government legitimates Nano S.'s works.

Another important aspect is the position of Nano S. and his works, which are recognized by various levels of society. In Sundanese traditional music, he is a maestro. In addition, in contemporary music, he has been internationally recognized. His contemporary music has been performed in 2010 in the Netherlands and Germany at the event of the Second IGFA (International *Gamelan* Festival Amsterdam). In the case of Sundanese pop music, his name is already familiar as a Sundanese pop song writer. In this case, as a traditional artist, he is very adaptive, accommodating, and communicative, especially in terms of global music development.

In addition, based on preliminary studies on his works and interviews with several related parties, it can be concluded that Nano S. is able to dramatize meanings and forward the customs of Sundanese people in the form of imagination, so that a peculiar Sundanese pop song can be created. Nano S. can conserve Sundanese ethics, Sundanese art, and Sundanese literature, and balance out the aesthetic and entertainment elements (Setiawan ed., 2004).

Nano S.'s competence makes him deserved to be called as "local genius" because of his ability to adapt, absorb and select, and modify his music with the popular culture, so that peculiar Sundanese pop music can be created. He is able to take the role of an agent of socio-cultural changes and an agent of community's

entertainers. The mixture becomes very natural because that is an effort of supporting his works to attract appreciators.

CONCLUSION [1]

As agents, Nano Suratno (known as Nano S.) and other Sundanese pop music artists always interact with their structure. They could be agents because they take an active role in the structure of Sundanese pop music industries. Nano S. is a Sundanese traditional musician with undeniable abilities, but some aspects of his being as an artist changed as soon as he entered the Sundanese pop music industry, which he admitted to be flooded with money (Nano S., 1995).

Based on this study, I would like to propose two hypotheses. *First*, Nano S.'s entrance into Sundanese pop music industry was based on creative consideration. What I mean by "creative consideration" is that the Sundanese pop music of Nano S. has quality, uniqueness, and ability to adapt with the genre of pop. In writing Sundanese pop songs, Nano S. still uses instruments such as *kecapi* (kind of plucked stringed instrument in Sundanese music), which translates into the fact that he still maintains his tradition, where the aspects of *kenongan* (small *gong*) and *go'ongan* in Sundanese traditional music are still employed, even though not as a whole. To observe his lyrics, it is clear that Nano S. masters appropriate Sundanese vocabulary, so that the delivery of messages in his song makes use of metaphors which are probably not easily understood by a majority of people. Nevertheless, even though his lyrics are not easily understood, his songs are highly marketable. This is quite paradoxical when linked to the concept of pop music which gives more emphasis on entertainment, moderation, attractiveness, commerciality, etc.

Second, as agent, Nano S.'s entrance to Sundanese pop music industry was driven by a desire to counter balance the national pop music industry. I believe that if selected properly based on Sundanese cultural values and viewed from the aspects of lyrics, rhythm, instruments, writer, and singer, the Sundanese pop music can be recognized as creative industry that supports regional income. It is time for the government to consider this industry through its policies in the field of trades, ultimately in terms of what kind of music should be protected and promoted by the government.

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