

The Melodic Construction of *Pero Vaz de Sequeira*, a Historical Music-Drama in Ten Cantos and Three Epistles

Annotation

This analytical essay is one of the subprojects of *Pero Vaz de Sequeira*, an opera commemorating the Quincentenary of Portugal-Thailand Diplomatic Relations (1511–2011).

The purposes of this analysis were:

- 1) to examine the melodic construction of the opera and its compositional styles;
- 2) to analyze and identify its musical systems such as the leitmotifs and motivic structures and other compositional techniques.

The results are the categorization of the leitmotifs into three groups: 1) Siam, 2) Portugal and 3) Symbolic Gestures. The motivic structures are categorized into three systems: 1) Tonal, 2) Multitonal and 3) Atonal. Each system is also grouped into types according to their styles. For the Tonal System, there are 25 motivic structures grouped into six types: a) Ordinary, b) Baroque, c) Siamese, d) Portuguese, e) Arabic, and f) Derivative. For the Multitonicity System, there are 19 motivic structures, also grouped into six types: a) Ordinary, b) Siamese, c) Portuguese, d) Minimal, e) Major-minor, and f) Derivative. For the Atonal System, there are only six motivic structures in only one type.

Keywords: operatic composition, Luso-Thai opera, Thai history 1684.

Introduction

The opera *Pero Vaz de Sequeira* is a project commemorating the Quincentenary of Portugal-Thailand Diplomatic Relations (1511–2011). It is dedicated to the Duke of Bragança HRH Dom Duarte Pio, the project's honorary patron. The musical score was published in its entirety in 2011 and was presented to the Portuguese Embassy in Bangkok for the Quincentenary celebration in Portugal in 2012. The composer conducted a documentary research, in order to construct synopsis, libretto and character portrayal. It was presented at the World Conference on Education Sciences held at Sapienza University of Rome, Italy, in February 2013 (Srikananda 2011: 270–278). The musical score and the documentary research have been used as composition and research methods in graduate-level composition class at Kasetsart University's music department since 2014.

The synopsis is drawn from many contemporary accounts of the French and the later Siamese chronicles. The main source, however, was from the recently found reports of the mission itself to the Portuguese Viceroy of India. This account gave us a new insight that is very different from the widely available French documents especially the role of Dona Maria and Ok-pra Petracha. The libretto, also compiled from the same resources by the composer, is written in a free verse form.

The story of Dom Pero Vaz de Sequeira's embassy to Siam in 1684 is one of the most fascinating diplomatic maneuvers ever taken on the Siamese soil. Despite its recent public resurgence in parallel to the Quincentennial celebration, it remains relatively unknown outside the circle of Thai-Portuguese scholars (Seabra 2005: 10).

In 1684, Dom Pero Vaz was appointed ambassador to the Courts of Siam and Cambodia. Initially, he was to reaffirm the diplomatic relationship with the Siamese especially for the privileges already granted to the Portuguese residents there since the time of King Naresuan the Great. He was also secretly instructed by the Viceroy to gather information regarding the French activities in Southeast Asia. When the embassy arrived in Siam, they had to overcome many obstacles in order to accomplish their missions. Through information received from Dona Maria, Dom Pero found that the ambitious scheme of her husband, the Greek adventurer Constantine Phaulkon – King Narai's favorite – would lead to the complete takeover by the French and thus the end of everything including trade and the ancient friendship between Portugal and Siam. Dom Pero tried to persuade King Narai on many occasions to expel the French but to no avail as the King was such a progressive monarch and wished to open his Kingdom to the world. However, the King promised that he would not let any foreigners to interfere with the Portuguese in Siam.

At the same time, a Siamese noble Ok-pra Petracha was aware of the French intentions and was willing to take actions in order to protect the King and the Kingdom. This Ok-pra was to be elevated to the Siamese Throne after the demise of King Narai and expelled the French with the help of Dom Pero in secret.

Although Ok-pra Petracha, Dona Maria and Dom Pero had different motives, no one can deny the fact that each of them did a significant part in order to preserve the independence of the Siamese. More than 300 years passed by, one is remembered as a usurper, the other one a cook and slave, and the last one almost disappears from history all together. The composer would like to dedicate this music-drama in their memories. They are truly the unsung heroes.

1. The Musical Structure

The opera is divided into two parts. Each part contains five cantos or scenes. There are also three “epistle” scenes, each at the beginning, in the middle between the two parts, and at the end. They serve as monologues in the form of “letter reading” being recited by the *Pero Vaz* character, and accompanied by the Baroque (or Mock-Baroque) music, reflecting the period of when the story took place.

Each of the three epistles is accompanied by a prelude, an interlude, and a postlude respectively. Each of them contains the “water” motive as each epistle scenes occur on a ship. The prelude contains the original water motive. The interlude contains the Siamese version of the motive while the postlude contains the retrograde version.

2. The Musical Language and Compositional Techniques

The music of *Pero Vaz* includes systems of leitmotifs and motivic structure. They function similarly to the compositional techniques employed by Richard Wagner in his music-dramas. However in *Pero Vaz*, the leitmotifs and the thematic music function differently from one another. The analytical models are employed using techniques found in “A Guide to Musical Analysis” (Cook 1992), “Materials and Structure of Music” (Christ 1966), and “The Structure of Atonal Music” (Forte 1977).

The leitmotifs only serve as reminders to the audience of a certain main idea or cause that complements the action and are often interwoven into the singing lines such as the musical imprints of the two states of Siam and Portugal or the symbolic actions of the embassy’s prime mission and the treaty affirmation.

The motivic structure, on the other hand, only functions as the vehicle of the storyline at that particular moment, thus evoking certain sonic image, environment or atmosphere at the moment. Some are associated with the cultures portrayed in the story such as the Siamese *Pipaat*, the Portuguese *Fandango* and the Arabic presence when referring to Malacca. Some serve as a historical link to the music of the period (17th century Baroque music) and the Siamese ritual chant. Some serve as atmospheric development (musical soundtracks) such as “water”, “nature” and “inside the palace” motives. Some only functions to compliment certain actions or feelings such as mysterious, anger, proclamation, surprise, sacrifice, heroic deeds and celebration.

2.1. Leitmotifs

There are six leitmotifs, which can be subdivided into three pairs. The first pair is associated with the origin of the embassy – Portugal. The second pair is associated with the place where the story is taken – Siam; and the last pair is symbolic gestures namely the “motive of the mission” and the “treaty affirmation”.

2.1.1. The “Siam” leitmotifs derived from the two Royal Anthems of Siam

The first anthem is an ancient anthem traditionally performed in the presence of the king on the throne by Brahmins the *Sankha* (conchs), the *Trae Lāngpōng* (Hindu trumpets) and the *Ban-dau* (a type of Hindu drum).



Figure 1. The ancient Siamese Royal Anthem

This leitmotif usually appears along with other musical material being played at the same time and only partially. It appears where there is a reference to the King of Siam. The anthem itself can be found in Canto 7 when the embassy is formally presented to King Narai using the horns to imitate the *Sankha* and the cor anglais, alto saxophone and trombone to imitate the *Trae Lāngpōng*.

The second anthem is derived from the current Thai Royal Anthem where there are two parts taken:



Figure 2. Leitmotif (in 2 versions) derived from the current Thai Royal Anthem

It usually appears where there is a reference to the Siamese State. In contrast to the former, this anthem is never used in its entirety in the opera.

2.1.2. The “Portugal” leitmotifs derived from the two National Anthems of Portugal

The first anthem was also served as the Portuguese Royal Anthem, *Hino da Carta*, from 1834 until the proclamation of the First Portuguese Republic in 1911. Only the first few measures of the introduction section is being employed as leitmotif and is used where there is a reference to the King or the Prince Regent of Portugal.



Figure 3. Leitmotif derived from the Portuguese Royal Anthem

The second anthem, *A Portuguesa*, is the current National Anthem of Portugal. As applied to the former anthem above, only the first few measures of the introduction section are being employed as leitmotif and are used where there is a reference to the Portuguese State.



Figure 4. Leitmotif derived from the current National Anthem of Portugal

2.1.3. The “Symbolic Gesture” leitmotifs

The first leitmotif in this category is the “Mission”. It is derived from the first two measures of the Embassy’s Presentation (or the Imperial) Anthem of 1684, of which later on, André Cardinal Destouches, a young French musician who accompanied Simon de la Loubère’s mission to Siam in 1687, made famous as *Une chanson Siamoise* set to the Siamese lyrics and published in de la Loubère’s book, *Description du Royaume de Siam* in 1691.



Figure 5. The Embassy’s Presentation Anthem

This leitmotif usually appears along with other musical materials being played at the same time. It appears where there is a reference to the motive of the mission. The anthem itself can be found in Canto 7 when the embassy is formally presented to King Narai.

The second leitmotif in this category is the “Treaty”. In contrast to others being employed in this opera, this leitmotif has no derivative origin.



Figure 6. The “Treaty” leitmotif

It only appears four times and always accompanies other leitmotifs only where there is a reference to the affirmation of the treaty.

Although there are other short musical passages that behave similarly to the leitmotif, however they only serve as atmospheric or merely as sound effects and are interwoven into the fabric of the music itself and are not assigned as leitmotifs. These are, for example, the “sunrise” that occurs during the “water” music in the First Epistle, Constantine’s snobbish “entrance-exit” mock-anthem in Canto 5, or the “Time-ticking” and the “Siren” in Canto 9, all of which are parts of the larger schemes being employed.

2.2. Motivic Structures

The opera’s framework is built upon three musical systems: tonal, multitonal and atonal. While most of them relate to one another often borrowing many elements from the others, many of them also operate independently due to the function usage (such as the “water” and “nature”) of that particular part. Each of them appears several times throughout the opera.

2.2.1. Tonal System

The tonal system comprises nearly 40 percent of the opera. There are 25 tonal motives used, and are assigned Roman numerals according to the order of appearance. They are categorized into six groups according to their similarities: Ordinary, Baroque (or Mock Baroque), Siamese, Portuguese, Arabic and derivative.

Ordinary tonality is comprised of musical material that contains ordinary Western classical tonality with progressive chordal structures. Ten ordinary tonalities are used:

Table 1. Ordinary tonality

No.	Tonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Tonal I: Introduction	First Epistle
2	Tonal III: Plea	Canto 1
3	Tonal VIII: Reply	Canto 3
4	Tonal IX: Resolution	Canto 3
5	Tonal X: Advice	Canto 3
6	Tonal XIII: I Remember	Canto 4
7	Tonal XIV: Petracha	Canto 5
8	Tonal XV: Surprise	Canto 5
9	Tonal XX: Proclamation	Canto 7
10	Tonal XXIV: Recitative	Canto 8

Baroque tonality comprises musical material that employs Baroque counterpoint or other Baroque music techniques such as the figure-bass and ornament usages. This technique is employed to reflect the time period of when the story took place (late 17th Century). There are only two Baroque or Mock Baroque tonalities used:

Table 2. Baroque tonality

No.	Tonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Tonal II: Anticipation	First Epistle
2	Tonal XIX: Imperial Anthem	Canto 7

Siamese tonality comprises musical material that employs the Siamese or Thai tonality such as pentatonic or the use of the Mixolydian mode derived from contemporary Thai *Luk-tung* music. Some of them were developed from the Thai traditional music itself such as Tonal V and XXI while Tonal XVII is derived from the Ancient Royal Anthem itself. Six Siamese tonalities are used:

Table 3. Siamese tonality

No.	Tonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Tonal IV: Siamese	Canto 2
2	Tonal V: Siamese Interlude	Canto 2
3	Tonal XVI: Siamese Water	Interlude
4	Tonal XVII: Siamese Ancient Royal Anthem	Canto 7
5	Tonal XVIII: Chant	Canto 7
6	Tonal XXI: Nature	Canto 8

Portuguese tonality is comprised of musical material that contains Portuguese elements such as ornamental usages from *Fado*. Two Portuguese tonalities are used:

Table 4. Portuguese tonality

No.	Tonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Tonal VII: Portugal	Canto 2
2	Tonal XII: Portuguese Home	Canto 4

Arabic tonality is comprised of musical materials that employ the Arabic sound which is used in connection to the Islamic influence of the Malaysian city of Malacca, a former Portuguese colony. Although only one musical phrase is used, it is constantly presented (especially the augmented second interval) in the vocal parts whenever the “Arabic” feels are called upon:

Table 5. Arabic tonality

No.	Tonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Tonal VI: Arabic	Canto 2

Derivative tonality consists of musical material that is derived from other already-existing musical material of a different tonality. In this case, all are from the atonal group. Four derivative tonalities are used:

Table 6. Derivative tonality

No.	Tonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Tonal XI: Derived from Atonal IV	Canto 3
2	Tonal XXII: Derived from Atonal III	Canto 8
3	Tonal XXIII: Derived from Atonal II	Canto 8
4	Tonal XXV: Derived from Atonal V	Canto 10

2.2.2. Multitonal System

The multitonal system contains both polytonality and progressive-tonality and comprises nearly 40 percent of the opera. Twenty multitonal motives are used and are assigned Roman numerals according to the order of appearance. They are also categorized into six groups according to their similarities: ordinary, Siamese, Portuguese, minimal, major-minor, and derivative.

Ordinary multitonality comprises musical material that exhibits the linear multitonal tendency. There are seven ordinary multitonalities:

Table 7. Ordinary multitonality

No.	Multitonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Multitonal I: Water	Prelude
2	Multitonal II: Annunciation	Canto 1
3	Multitonal V: False Promise	Canto 2
4	Multitonal VI: Heroic	Canto 2
5	Multitonal XII: Scheme	Canto 5
6	Multitonal XIII: Palace	Canto 7
7	Multitonal XIV: Celebration	Canto 7

Siamese multitonality comprises musical material that is developed from the Siamese tonality but modulates progressively. There are two Siamese multitonalities being used:

Table 8. Siamese multitonality

No.	Multitonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Multitonal VIII: Siamese Home	Canto 4
2	Multitonal IX: Siamese	Canto 4

Portuguese multitonality comprises musical material that contains multitonal usage in addition to the already-existed Portuguese elements. There is only one Portuguese multitonality (in this case a polytonal one) used:

Table 9. Portuguese multitonality

No.	Multitonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Multitonal XVII: Fandango	Canto 7

Minimal multitonality is comprised of musical material that combines minimal music aesthetica with progressive-tonality. There is also only one minimal multitonality used:

Table 10. Minimal multitonality

No.	Multitonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Multitonal XX: Minimal	Canto 9

Major-minor multitonality comprises musical material that is derived from *Fado* music practice using both a major key and its parallel minor (or vice versa – a minor key and its parallel major) successively. Thus, only two forms are applied here:

Table 11. Major-minor multitonality

No.	Multitonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Multitonal IV: Minor-Major	Canto 2
2	Multitonal XI: Major-Minor	Canto 5

Derivative multitonality, as in derivative tonality, comprises musical material that is derived from other already-existing musical material of different tonalities. In this case, four are derived from the tonal group and three from the atonal group:

Table 12. Derivative multitonality

No.	Multitonal No./Name	First appeared in
1	Multitonal III: Derived from Tonal III	Canto 1
2	Multitonal VII: Derived from Atonal III	Canto 3
3	Multitonal X: Derived from Tonal XIV	Canto 5
4	Multitonal XXV: Derived from Atonal II	Canto 7
5	Multitonal XVI: Derived from Tonal V	Canto 7
6	Multitonal XVIII: Derived from Tonal XVIII	Canto 8
7	Multitonal XIX: Derived from Atonal V	Canto 8

2.2.3. Atonal System

The atonal system comprises roughly 20 percent of the work. There are six atonal motives and they are categorized according to their structural appearances and technical usages. They are assigned Roman numerals according to the order of appearance.

Table 13. Atonal system

No.	Name/Musical Figure	First appeared in
1	Atonal I: Demanding	Canto 1
2	Atonal II: Gloomy	Canto 1
3	Atonal III: Furious	Canto 1
4	Atonal IV: Anger	Canto 1
5	Atonal V: Announcement	Canto 2
6	Atonal VI: Urgent Flight	Canto 8

3. Vocal Parts

The score calls for 14 vocal parts (six leading roles, three secondary roles, and five minor roles) for 11 singers: a soprano, an alto, three tenors, five baritones, and a bass. Apart from the ordinary operatic singing style, there are many other vocal techniques applied in the vocal lines as well such as the *Sprechstimme*, spoken monologues and the use of falsetto in male parts.

The vocal lines are constructed with emphasis on appropriate syllabic rhythms and phrasings in the English language. In addition, the parts where Thai language is employed, the correct pitch-classes of the Thai language are also taken into consideration. This is evidenced in the parts sung by the two Siamese officers in Canto 1 (measures 127–132) using upward intervals for the rising tone of the *jattawā* sound such as the words *kau* (ขอ) and *sin-ka* (สินค้า); the downward intervals for the dropping tone of the *tō* sound such as the word *tan* (ท่าน); and using the lower tone for the *ek* pitch-class when following words from other pitch-classes such as the word *sing-kaung* (สิ่งของ) when following the word *kon* (คน).

mf

Rao kau hai tan sa-daeng rai-gaan sin-ka gam-lang kon, sing-kaung lae aa-wud.

mf

Rao kau hai tan sa-daeng rai-gaan sin-ka gam-lang kon, sing-kaung lae aa-wud.

Example 1. Vocal lines with a transliterated Thai libretto

4. Instrumentations

The score calls for a conventional medium-sized orchestra (one piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, one cor anglais, two clarinets, one bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, one tuba, three timpani, two percussion players, and strings) with an addition of the alto saxophone and the classical guitar.

The alto saxophone, being an instrument with many qualities that resemble the human voice whether it be the tonal complexity or flexibility, is suitable for accompanying or cueing the vocal lines. The example below (measures 175–179) demonstrates how the alto saxophone accompanies the vocal an octave above.

175

A. Sax

Pero

mf

And I would like the Cap-tain-Ma-jor of the Por-tu-guese ban-del to come on board as he was al-rea-dy

179

in - formed of my ar - ri - val and would bet - ter ex - plain things to you gen - tle - men.

Example 2. The alto saxophone supports the vocal line

The presence of the classical guitar, as an Iberian instrument and one of the most recognizable Portuguese sounds, helps set up the tone of the opera with the *Fado* and *Fandango* playing styles. Moreover, being a plucked

string instrument is also appropriate for the Baroque tonality employed throughout the opera, especially in the Epistle scenes where the score calls for the Baroque music setting as in Example 3 below:

The image shows a musical score for a string instrument, likely a classical guitar, in a Baroque style. The score consists of seven staves, numbered 63 through 77. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 40. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and various ornaments. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written in a single system with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The dynamics are marked with a forte (f) dynamic.

Example 3. The classical guitar playing in the Baroque style

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Istorinės-muzikinės dramos „Pero Vaz de Sequeira“ melodinė sąranga

Santrauka

Autorius analizuoja savo operą „Pero Vaz de Sequeira“, skirtą Portugalijos ir Tailando diplomatinių santykių (1511–2011) penkių šimtų metų sukakčiai paminėti. Ši analitinė esė yra viena iš kūrybinio projekto sudedamųjų dalių.

Analizuojant operą, buvo keliami tokie tikslai: 1) ištirti jos melodinę sąrangą ir stilistinę įvairovę; 2) įvardyti ir išanalizuoti muzikines sistemas (pvz., leitmotyvus, motyvinės struktūras) ir kitokias kompozicines technikas.

Išskirtos trys leitmotyvų grupės: 1) Siamo, 2) Portugalijos, 3) simbolinių gestų.

Motyvinės struktūros priskiriamos trimis sistemoms: 1) tonalumo, 2) politonalumo ir 3) atonalumo. Kiekvienoje sistemoje motyvinės struktūros grupuojamos pagal tipus, atitinkančius kurį nors stilių. Tonalumui priskiriamos 25 motyvinės struktūros, grupuojamos pagal šešis tipus: a) paprastą, b) barokinį, c) siamiečių, d) portugalų, e) išvestinį. Politonalumui priskiriama 19 motyvinių struktūrų, taip pat grupuojamų pagal šešis tipus: a) paprastą, b) siamiečių, c) portugalų, d) minimalistinį, e) mažoro-minoro, f) išvestinį. Atonalumui priskiriamos 6 motyvinės struktūros, priklausančios tik vienam tipui.