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Paper & Production Work on

"Sound **Saññā** Project : Asia STORYTELLING : Ancient Cultures and Values revisit."

Presentation by Ng Wei Chin (Singapore)

Creator of Sound **Saññā** Project (Project Registered for copyright)

website: theveryquietstudio.wix.com/soundsanna

Contact: wq@theveryquietstudioasia.org / theveryquietstudio@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The work was motivated by seeing the eminent loss of Asia heritage especially of our Values and Wisdom as the World moves to become homogeneous similar in city construction as well as diluted with delusion of life and minds. Ancient stories are chosen for this purpose, as many are source of philosophies and ingredients to great novels. These stories are traceable, not hard to accept but hard to achieve as they implied.

The most influential form of storytelling is by far the cinema... However the creator feels at times over exposure to impressionistic images and repetitive discriminatory visuals, common sense may become scarce and imagination, commonplace. Hence Sound Sanna was created to only apply cinematic soundtracks to its stories recited to evoke visuals and imageries of individual minds.

In audio production, the cost is much lesser compared with storytelling through full cinematic experience. The outreach can be for less well to do countries using CD player as well as for First World countries with car stereos. Children and Adults are able to appreciate and enjoy the same elements, as long as the stories are clearly expressed with meaningfulness in themselves to draw them in. Asian Stories are not necessarily Kingly feuds, but dramatic moments intertwined with life experiences expressed allegorically. In fact, subtext is the main text in many ancient stories.

Sound saññā

Sound Saññā is a project name self explanatory if one is aware of our sensory conditioning. It is a genre created for human ears, evoking perception of ancient stories through soundtracks. It is intended to bring on the 'cinematic feel' without the cinema visuals, as we are shown too much, and imagine too little.

It is a known analysis among buddhists, all beings are made of nāma and rūpa: Mind and Matter. Another understanding towards our sense of being is through the Five aggregates: rūpa (Material), vedanā (Feelings), saññā (Perception), sa khāra (Volition), viññā am (Consciousness). Depending on the form of existence, and related past kamma, all beings' five aggregates differ from one another.

saññā is a Pali word which the English term define it's meaning as 'Perception'. However though 'perception' is neutral in meanings, it already hinted a diminutive slant where 'reality' is not fully understood nor even reconciled within. How we perceive someone may differ greatly from who he/she really is. How we see reality will also determine how we react to its presentations. Neither saññā nor the five aggregates cannot determine who we are, but existentially, we are shaped by perceptions and other aggregates, as gratification sets us up.

In the 5 aggregates compounded reality - it is usually not easy for the human mind to penetrate beyond sensory stimuli. "Reality" is then conditioned through derivatives of the six sense doors: Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and heart consciousness. With mindful abiding and wise influences, we may slowly dust away the shroud, and reveal our own nature within. And what better influences, than ancient stories atypical from modern trappings of over dramatization, so we may recognize the similarity of minds who have already got over their own barriers and in search of liberation.

Asian Stories: Ancient Buddhism Stories

Asian values were predominantly shaped and influenced by old religions & philosophies: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, legends, folklores and life experiences that custom a highly complex stream of conscious evolution in our manners and thinking processes. These philosophies greatly touched and inspired a few thousand of years of literary works and lifestyles among Asians. Some of these stories are traceable but many are hearsay may be 'risky' to simply adopt and live by.

The Project initially wishes to address the impact of globalization towards ancient living wisdom in Asia, and to bring to mind the urgency of cultural dilution as modern life demands homogeneity. The progressive loss of Asia heritage as we adopt systems via powers, mindset via marketing, lifestyle via pride, challenge the core of Values and Wisdom, worldwide.

We are now experiencing the tip of man-made disasters through 'nature adjustment' at the turn of 21st century. Should spiritual houses become self serving and disillusionment of mundane life builds further states of depression, the lucky minds will follow their own stream consciousness, first to survive and second to navigate, then reflect, for the healthy ones; the unlucky ones, a longer cycle of samsara.

Unlike music, stories take its own time within our minds to mature, or brings on a lasting impact to our lives. Furthermore stories we listen to or hear about, provides us navigation through life. At crucial moment, its wisdom can manifest itself with profundity beyond our time. Through these intuitive "historical lessons" , spirituality remains a large part of our imagination when illumination starts to set in when we question or when we seek.

The project took on Asian Stories as its initial declaration, with Ancient Buddhism stories as its pilot for the obvious reason that both are interlinked and mutually mirroring each other's subtlety of ethical and well being concerns. Likewise, for development of Asian Stories, they should contain similar wisdom planting, recognizable and harmonizing in each culture they serve. It is hence important that stories propagated are fruits of understanding, of relevance and inspirational to our spiritual and mental well being.

Significance of Project Process

The Project took The Very Quiet Studio on a six years quest and research on making the right choices, seeking hard-to-meet Teachers who would endorse the work through applying their voices to each story. Finally, matching right kind of musicians to support the work and concept. Each ancient demonstrate a characteristics of a practitioner: Great Gratitude, Great Compassion, forgiveness, goodwill, kindness and Great promise. The factors of "Happy Ending" lie not in the spiritual attainment nor status of any authority. With the encouragement after each successful voice recording, and collaborative creation by the musicians from other faiths, the full CD was finally printed on 19 Feb 2015. Examples of stories as follow:

Hen Feud is adapted from Dhammapada Pakinnakavagga verse 291.

"Long, long ago, the lady owner of a hen ate its eggs in front of the hen. Later on the hen vowed revenge by eating the owner's offsprings. The hen died and was reborn as a house cat while the lady owner was reborn as a hen in the same house; the cat ate her eggs. This hen then vowed revenge that she would eat the cat's little ones in future. After chasing and killing each other and their

offspring for 500 lifetimes, they finally met the Buddha who enlightened them and resolved the conflict."

The story is exceptionally important and relevant till today, as wars and revenge are still prevalent. Ignorance is the cause of suffering as both the characters do not see their karmic links go way back. The bondage has to be broken by love, metta or kindness.

Banyan is adapted from Jataka Tales, the past lives of The Buddha Sakyamuni. It was rewritten by World War II heroin Noor Inayat Khan.

"Banyan deer and Branch deer rule over 500 deer each. After being chased into the fields of a king's castle, they have to send one deer each day to meet his death. When a mother doe from Branch's herd pleads to postpone her trip to the execution, Banyan takes her place by offering his own life. The king is surprised as Banyan has already been pardoned from the sacrifice."

A famous story like Banyan may seem 'fairytale like' based on an old tale. It is however accepted in Buddhism stories, all beings have their way of communication despite not sharing the same verbal language. The believability of this story is least disputable to believers of Great Compassion.

In relating these stories to adults and young people via sound, it is more effective to utilize audio production, as the cost is much lesser compared with storytelling through full cinematic experience. CDs are accessible to all Worlds but a later change can come through new media as a medium. Another advantage of listening is also engaging without time demand, as our ears are always alert to stimuli unless when we are heedless.

Inter/Intra Faith, Culture and Language Capsule

Cinematic sound concept offers a huge soundscape for creative works. A scene of ancient war can be represented with merely effects and ambience, which the imagination can do the rest. Thereby release our reliance on visuals that colonize our thought processing or even reduce our personal insights as visuals distract.

Beyond Language and across

The storytellers were sought based more on their kindred voice and spirituality practice, than performance ability. As English is not their native languages (except for Ven Sunim Mujin), each dhamma teacher lends their own native accent to the stories they presented. The other reason for this choice was to remind listeners not to 'judge' on the language ability of anyone, especially spiritual teachers. It is through natural voice that we can see the person than of their craftwork

through honing their articulation. The Sangha here forms the first representation of buddhism, and hence the vocals are precious to the delivery instead of applying performance to spiritual knowledge. Each storyteller also adds that specialty flavour to the story they expound.

Stories can also be read in their native languages as well as in English. It is a fact that learning mother tongue languages is lacking in many countries while common universal languages are not encouraged in some others. Through expansion of language boundaries, the following ideas can thus be possible since global village is a foreseeable reality in future.

Education Benefits: Intra Faiths

With storytelling, ancient buddhism stories are transmitted beyond doctrinal exposition. Through new media on old platform like in a CD, Buddhist Charity Organizations or NGO can also provide teaching material assistance for Sunday schools or drama class for enjoyment or that it can also help rebuild social devastation or natural disaster aftermath. It is true that many developing countries require food, lodgings and necessities more urgently than education. However without helping them construct their internal barrage or fortress, and develop interest about sustainable values and healthy mindset, external help can only go as far as it lasts.

Built on Sangha voices and ancient Buddhism ideology, the debut pilot Album "Story Kasina" has the potential to rebuild spiritual resilience through edutainment. With the help of imaginative teachers, children is able to relish in the old values through modern convenience. The stories were not targeting special crowds, but were aimed to keep asian interested in our own heritage and wisdom before bargaining or trading its presumed diminishing returns like many other things.

All three buddhist traditions Sangha members lent their voice for the debut Story Kasina Album. Ancient Buddhism Stories are retold by renown Sangha of all three traditions: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. With much good fortune and auspicious meetings, they endorse the project with their voice contributions. Bhante Dhammaratana Thero, Venerable Mujin Sunim, Sayalay Dipankara Theri, H.H. Phakchok Rinpoche, Ani Choying Drolma, and Dr Lee Foong Ming are the six voices who lend the project their goodwill and support.

Education Benefits: Inter Faiths

Through the use of storytelling, all faiths can also share their stories heritage for understanding to one another's practice. In the light of wide spread violence and intolerance, the world now is in

urgent need to find a common denominator in all religions, so religions are not made scapegoat to political polarization among faiths and people. Storytelling promise approachable religion teachings.

The musicians are from other religions besides Buddhism, who are persuaded into this good project by their own generosity. Amongst them are Imee Ooi, Frank Steiner Jr, Sri Ghanavenothan Retnam, Fero Aldiansya, Nathan Madsen and Pianist Elaine Wu. Only Ms Imee Ooi is a buddhist among the list. The above composers from other faiths were just as supportive and even nurturing to help this creator fulfill the creative instinct to its completion.

All participants, artists, and creators, share similar concerns to globalization in its blinding light as well as in its looming shadows. We wish to keep our spiritual stories alive than be only subsistent on nursery schools propagation or made irrelevant by social deterioration.

Ancient Stories - New Age Telling

Sound Sanna Project idea came in 2008 and was completed with a debut CD Story Kasina in Feb 2015, and launched in October 2015 at 6th Parliament of World Religions.

With the expansion of internet and availability of connectivity, we are able to share stories untold from different continents with one another, and to give them a new life in this new media era.

Older civilizations once depended on traditions and fears, the new world demands:

- 1) Best practices that do not lead to more suffering.
- 2) Cultural and Educational development strategies involving Character Building.
- 3) Religion with integrity, humanity and sensitivities.

Storytelling may not solve all the present problems but it may possibly prevent future ones. The initiator of the Project Sound **Saññā** wishes we may seek a creative approach to all Asian ancient stories, and repair the damage we have caused in our current haste.