

อีแซว : การสร้างมาตรฐานศิลปะการแสดงพื้นบ้านจังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาวิจัยเพลงอีแซว: การสร้างมาตรฐานศิลปะการแสดงเพลงพื้นบ้าน เพลงอีแซวจังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี ครั้งนี้ มีความมุ่งหมาย เพื่อศึกษาประวัติความเป็นมาศิลปะการแสดงเพลงพื้นบ้าน เพลงอีแซว จังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี เพื่อศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบันและปัญหา ศิลปะการแสดงเพลงพื้นบ้าน เพลงอีแซว จังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี และ เพื่อสร้างมาตรฐาน ศิลปะการแสดงเพลงพื้นบ้าน เพลงอีแซว จังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี ผู้วิจัยใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัย เชิงคุณภาพ (Qualitative Research) ด้วยกระบวนการการวิจัยและพัฒนา (Research and Development : R & D) โดยเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากเอกสาร (Document Analysis) และข้อมูลภาคสนาม (Field Study) อย่างต่อเนื่องตามกรอบความมุ่งหมายของการวิจัย ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) ด้านประวัติความเป็นมา อัตลักษณ์ ของศิลปะการแสดงเพลงพื้นบ้าน อีแซวจังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี ประกอบด้วย วิถีชีวิตของคนในชุมชน การสืบทอดการแสดง จากครอบครัวและเครือญาติโดยมีการถ่ายทอดความรู้กับการแสดงจากรุ่นสู่รุ่น 2) ด้านสภาพปัจจุบันและปัญหา การเข้ามาของสื่อสมัยใหม่ เศรษฐกิจและสังคมของ ประเทศไทยเปลี่ยนไป การค้าขายขยายตัว การมีเทคโนโลยีสมัยใหม่ ๆ เข้ามา การมีความ บันเทิงให้เลือกสรร เช่น โทรทัศน์ ภาพยนตร์ การแสดง และดนตรีสมัยใหม่ เช่น คาราโอเกะ ซีดี ภาพยนตร์ ในสถานการณเช่นนี้ การแสดงเพลงพื้นบ้านภาคกลางที่ไม่ปรับวิธีการแสดง ก็เริ่มเสื่อมความนิยมลงไป 3) ด้านการสร้างมาตรฐานศิลปะการแสดงเพลงพื้นบ้าน เพลงอีแซว จากการรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยการใช้เครื่องมือในการวิจัยกับผู้เชี่ยวชาญศิลปินพื้น บ้านอีแซวมากำหนดเป็นมาตรฐาน 6 ด้านเพื่อใช้กับกลุ่มตัวอย่าง ดังนี้ 1) ด้านบุคลากรผู้แสดง 2) ด้านคำกลอน 3) ด้านท่ารำ (ใช้ทำร่างมาตรฐาน) 4) ด้านเครื่องแต่งกาย 5) ด้านเวที แสง เสียง เครื่องดนตรี 6) ด้านระยะเวลาการแสดง

คำสำคัญ: อีแซว, ศิลปะการแสดง, จังหวัดสุพรรณบุรี, เพลงพื้นบ้าน

Ee-saew: Standardisation of Local Performing Arts in Suphanburi Province

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Abstract

This investigation, "Ee-saew: Standardisation of Local Performing Arts in Suphanburi Province", has three main aims: 1) to study the background and history of the traditional Ee-saew music in Suphanburi Province; 2) to study the current conditions and problems with the traditional Ee-saew music in Suphanburi Province; and 3) to create performing arts standards for traditional Ee-saew music in Suphanburi Province. This is a qualitative research using a research and development method. Data were collected from document analysis and field study according to the three research aims. Results found that 1) the identity of the Ee-saew music of Suphanburi is inextricably linked to the lifestyle of people in the local communities. The music is inherited through the family unit, as older generations pass on the traditions to younger generations. 2) However, the growing influence of modern media in everyday society has caused an influx of new technologies, including television, cinema, karaoke and new performing arts. Traditional performing arts have not adapted and, consequently, their popularity has declined. 3) From the results of document and field investigation, the researchers created a set of performing arts standards for traditional Ee-saew

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music in Suphanburi Province. It was concluded that there should be six indicators for standardised traditional Ee-saw music in Suphanburi Province: 1) performing artists, 2) lyrics, 3) dance postures, 4) costumes, 5) staging, lighting, sound and musical instruments, and 6) performance duration.

Keywords; Ee-saw, Performing arts, Suphanburi province, Traditional music

Introduction

Thai culture is an important part of national heritage. It defines the behaviors of people within the society and is a model for everyday lifestyle. In addition to the national identity, each region of Thailand has a specific and unique culture that reflects local society, customs and geography. It is crucial to the maintenance of local identity to preserve local culture. However, if that culture is simply conserved with no thought towards adaptation and progress in the modern world, the identity will stagnate and become ‘backwards’.

Local dance and music make communities lively and colorful. They have enriched local societies for centuries, especially those rooted in spiritual beliefs and history. Indeed, beliefs have often shaped the musical traditions and dance postures in local ceremonies, resulting in the regional differences visible in nationwide ceremonies today. Nevertheless, there is a frequently heard complaint in regions throughout the country: “we have a problem supporting and continuing local traditional dance and music.” (Puangbut, 1988: 17)

Local traditional music is a valuable part of culture that instills pride in local people and provides a source of mutual interest. Jutaporn Sirisampan argues that there are four key purposes of local traditional music: 1) it reflects local culture; 2) it is a medium for the expression of feeling; 3) it is a positive instrument for teaching; and 4) it is a positive form of mass media (Sirisampan, 2010; 178–182). Usually, traditional music is notable for the simplicity of its lyrics and emphasis on amusement and entertainment. Invariably, the lyrical content of traditional music concerns stories of love and hurt.

There are many traditional musical forms in Suphanburi Province. These songs are popularly played at various festivals and on important days where there are large temporary gatherings, such as *Songkran*, New Year, *Thod Kathin* and *Thod Pa Ba*. Traditional songs are also closely linked to agricultural practices and these

songs are sung at rice harvest ceremonies, including *pleng prob gai*, *pleng ruea* and *pleng Ee-saew*. While traditional music was at its height in years gone by, the form is currently on the wane and has dramatically decreased in popularity in recent years.

The Ee-saew song begins with the traditional Wai Kru ceremony performed by both males and females. The male then begins the call and the female responds. This call and response style is common to local traditional songs in central Thailand. In the past, the song was known as *pleng yua*, literally ‘provocation song’. As the Khaen (a large bamboo mouth organ) reached Suphanburi from the Northeast, musicians began to incorporate its sound in the Pleng Yua performances, causing the name to change to Pleng Khaen. Hand clapping was one way of keeping the rhythm of the music, so some people referred to the song as Pleng Dob Paela (‘song of the exhausting clap’). From these origins, the music and singing developed continuously and uniquely until the song style became known as Pleng Ee-saew (‘the teasing song’). The most believable reason is because the singers stand, sing and tease each other all night long. Some lyrics have been taken from the Choi music of neighboring Ang Thong Province to lengthen the Ee-saew performance.

The supposed origins of the Ee-saew song are in Wat Pa Lelai Worawihan temple in Suphanburi Province. In the past, people would travel from surrounding regions to join ceremonies and festivals at the temple. Songs were sung to entertain the visitors and this is how the Ee-saew song was born. In the fifth and eleventh months of the year, the song is incorporated into ceremonies at the temple. However, due largely to the advance of modern technology and mass media, the younger generations have little interest in the Ee-saew song, instead preferring Western, Korean and Japanese music. It is necessary for the Ee-saew performers to adapt and become more relevant for younger audiences so that their music is not lost.

It is for this reason that the researchers were keen to study the background, conditions and development of Ee-saww music in Suphanburi music to help make it become more accessible and interesting for contemporary society.

Research Aims

This investigation has three main aims:

1. To study the background and history of the traditional Ee-saww music in Suphanburi Province.
2. To study the current conditions and problems with the traditional Ee-saww music in Suphanburi Province.
3. To create performing arts standards for traditional Ee-saww music in Suphanburi Province.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative investigation. Data was collected from document analysis and field research. The investigation commenced in July 2016 and concluded in April 2017. The research area was purposively selected as Mueang, Si Prachan and Don Chedi Districts in Suphanburi province, Thailand. The reason for the selection of these three locations was because they were the origin of the traditional Ee-saww performance, and also because they are home to Ee-saww performance groups that have operated for over ten years.

2. Private Sector

- a. One national performer

3. Community Members

- a. Three District Culture Officers (one per district)
- b. Three local experts in Ee-saew performance (one per district)

The casual informant group was composed of individuals able to provide data on contemporary Ee-saew performance and practice, including details about performers, lyrics, language, dance moves, costume, sound, lighting and performance duration:

1. Performance leaders
 - a. Three heads of Ee-saew performance groups
2. Performers
 - a. 27 Ee-saew performing artists

The general informant group was composed of individuals not affiliated with the performing artists, including audience members and contractors:

1. Audience and contractors
 - a. Nine audience members
 - b. Three contractors
2. Members of the general public
 - a. Nine members of the general public and visiting tourists

The field data was collected by a variety of methods, including structured interview, unstructured interview, participant and non-participant observation, focus-group discussions and a workshop. The collected data was validated using Denzin's triangulation principles (Denzin, 2006). This data was then collated into groups according to the three research aims. The data was subsequently analyzed using analytic induction and typological analysis. The results are presented here as a descriptive analysis.

Table 2: Procedure for the analysis of field data concerning a method for standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province, Thailand.

R & D	Input	Process	Output
Stage 1	Data concerning standardisation of traditional Ee-saw performance in Suphanburi province Data concerning Ee-saw performances in Thailand, focussing on Suphanburi province	Analysis of data concerning standardisation of traditional Ee-saw performance in Suphanburi province Analysis of data concerning the development and continuation of traditional music Analysis of traditional music in the research area SWOT analysis of Ee-saw music in central Thailand	Results concerning standardisation, development and continuation of Ee-saw music, as well as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to Ee-saw and traditional music in central Thailand.
Stage 2	Methods for the standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province Government policies supporting traditional music Potential (the budget allowance for traditional performing arts in the three districts)	Design for the standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province Focus group concerning standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province	A method for conservation and development of traditional music in Suphanburi province Conclusion of opinions concerning the standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province

Stage 3	Method for standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province Preparation of explanation and follow-up of results from field research	Testing of method for standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province at workshop Explanation Follow-up of results	Conclusion of method for standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province Opinions concerning explanation and follow-up of results
Stage 4	Evaluation form for method of standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province Documents concerning the method of standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province	Evaluation of method for standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province: indicators, criteria and evaluation Improvement of conservation and development	Concluded method for standardisation of Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province

Results

The background and history of the traditional Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province.

The researchers gathered data from document analysis, observation and interviews concerning the background and history of traditional music in Suphanburi province. The results show that the identity of the Ee-saw music of Suphanburi is inextricably linked to the lifestyle of people in the local communities. The music is inherited through the family unit, as older generations pass on the traditions to younger generations. In addition, there are local experts who teach the musical form, as well as rarer, more academic channels of inheritance in the fine arts departments of local educational establishments. There are specific differences between the different musical groups in Suphanburi province and each troupe can be distinguished by their

dance postures and singing. Nonetheless, the primary objective of each group is to entertain their audiences. Each group has strict traditional performances that are true to historical customs, as well as adapted modern versions that are suitable for individual commissioned performances.

The components and musical procedures of performances in the three communities are very similar. The performance stage is raised one meter and has an area of approximately 40m². The background used is made from colour vinyl. Performances can also take place in wide arenas and on the stages of commissioned halls. The costumes tend to follow traditional styles popular in the local area. Usually, male performers will wear a colourful Chong-kraben (a loincloth, pulled up between the legs) and a short-sleeved round-necked shirt with three buttons (called a Suea-miskree). If the colours are plain, the material will be silky to create a more luxurious look. Male performers will also wear a Pa-kao-ma (a piece of patterned fabric tied around the waist). Female performers will also wear a Chong-kraben and a colourful, patterned round-necked shirt. The instruments used in the performance are the Ching (finger-cymbals), the Krab (percussion blocks) and the Klong Rammana (a small frame-drum). There may also be a Mong (gong), Klong Yao (long shoulder-drum) or Chab (cymbals). Sound and lighting systems are usually rented for the performances. The show generally stars five male and five female performers, although these numbers are not fixed. The steps in the performance are the same for each of the groups: an opening Wai Kru, followed by the performance proper and then a closing chant to pay respects to the host and audience.

The beliefs surrounding the Ee-saew performances are similar in each of the three studied districts of Suphanburi province. Musicians must perform an annual Wai Kru ceremony to pay respects to their teachers. If this custom is not observed, local beliefs state that the musician may fall ill. The instruments used in the Ee-saew performances are highly respected and must be treated properly, which means they

cannot be stepped over or moved with the feet. Prior to each performance, a standard Wai-Kru procedure will be held to wish for a successful performance and the enjoyment of the audience members.

The performance steps in each of the three districts are similar. For the Wai Kru ceremony, a Paan Kamnon or Paan with betel nut, betel vine, tobacco, incense sticks, candles, flowers and money (usually 6 saleung or 6 baht) is offered. Some people also offer a bottle of spirits. Males pay their respects first by sitting or squatting on their heels and praying to monks, parents, and teachers, respectively. This is in order of seniority. After this there is a chant to the host and also an act of apology for the lyrics that are to follow, saying that the teasing is merely a part of the lyrics and not reality. This is an essential custom.

The current conditions and problems with the traditional Ee-saew music in Suphanburi province.

In-depth interviews with respondents revealed that, ever since the ‘call and answer’ style of traditional music came into existence, audiences have admired the dance postures, lyrics and sharp wit used in the performances. Modern preferences are no different, and the objective of this type of music in Central Thailand is to identify the better competitor. Those artists considered to be more adept at the on-stage battle tend to garner more popularity with public audiences. However, the growing influence of modern media in everyday society has caused audience numbers to decrease significantly and the shows are not as popular as they once were. Furthermore, a more closely linked global society has helped the boom in the Thai economy. This has in turn created more disposable income for individuals to purchase personal telephones, televisions and foreign music. Consequently, traditional forms of entertainment, including *Ee-saew*, have suffered.

The income of a traditional Ee-saw performer is not enough to earn a living. Therefore, actors and singers are required to pursue their passion for Ee-saw as a hobby or supplementary occupation. They are thus unable to dedicate sufficient time for the further development of their skills or the adaptation of their performances in line with modern preferences. The majority of singers accept work for commissioned events rather than regular shows. One consequence of this instability in the strength of the profession is the lack of new apprentice singers. Coupled with the dwindling popularity of the performing arts, the financial incentives are insufficient in attracting new performers. One other factor putting off younger performers is the perceived difficulty of the singing techniques, as well as the ‘boring’ ceremonial processes required for each performance. The value of the artform among young people is thus continuously decreasing.

The popularity of Ee-saw is not helped by the poor quality of public relations and lack of available information for the public. This is a product of the limited interest and support in the field from local government and private institutions. Any information surrounding local events is minimal and not systematic. Even major cultural festivals on the provincial level lack the required attention for local traditional performing arts.

Performing arts standards for traditional Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province.

From the results of document and field investigation, the researchers created a set of performing arts standards for traditional Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province. These standards were then presented to selected research respondents at focus group discussions for comment and improvement. It was concluded that there should be six indicators for standardised traditional Ee-saw music in Suphanburi province: 1) performing artists, 2) lyrics, 3) dance postures, 4) costumes, 5) staging, lighting, sound and musical instruments, 6) performance duration. Each indicator is composed of four sublevels, each worth 5 points. Thus, each indicator carries a value of 20 points

and the total points available for measuring the standard of the performance is 120 points. To pass the relative criteria scoring, the performance must meet a score of at least 75% in each indicator (15 points). The overall performance is also recorded and a passing score was agreed by research respondents to be 75% of the absolute criteria (90 points).

	Indicator	RELATIVE CRITERIA										Score (20)	Percentage
1	Performing Artists	Love of <i>Ee-saew</i> (5)					Witty (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
		Personality (5)					Sound quality (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
2	Lyrics	Love of <i>Ee-saew</i> (5)					Wit (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
		Ability to rhyme lyrics (5)					Sound quality (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
3	Dance postures	Love of <i>Ee-saew</i> (5)					Wit (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
		Beauty of posture (5)					Standardised postures (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		

	Indicator	RELATIVE CRITERIA										Score (20)	Percentage
4	Costumes	Love of <i>Ec-saew</i> (5)					Traditional characteristics (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
		Impressiveness (5)					Suitability (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
5	Staging, lighting, sound and musical instruments	Stage at eye-level (5)					Loud and clear sound (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
		Instruments used: finger-cymbals, percussion blocks and drum (5)					Lights at suitable brightness (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
6	Performance duration	Approximately 3 hours (5)					<i>Wai-kru</i> ceremony prior to show (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		
		Adequate time for changing costumes (5)					Clearly defined performance date, time and location (5)						
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5		

Discussion

This investigation found a number of problematic conditions of current Ee-saew performance culture and concluded a set of standards for future Ee-saew performances in Suphanburi Province in order to evaluate their quality.

Ee-saew music is part of the local heritage of Suphanburi Province. It originated and was dispersed from this location. The history of the music is over one hundred years old and it initially took the form of a simple call-and-response performance between males and females. After sixty or seventy years, the music was developed and lengthened and the characteristics of the entire performance, including costumes and staging, evolved. The only place or events at which Ee-saew is not sung are wedding ceremonies. The music has a distinct structure and always begins with a Wai Kru ceremony. The beauty of the music lies in the skill and delivery of language use, combined with the sounds of specific traditional instruments: finger-cymbals, percussion blocks and drums.

Importantly, the performing artists of local traditional music have a unique platform among local people. With adaptation of the lyrics and messages in the performance, local artists can discuss and teach about current social issues, including narcotics addiction, financial problems and aids. In this way, Ee-saew performers can be great catalysts for social change.

Buapan Supanyot (1992) found that the problems and obstacles to the creation and inheritance of Ee-saew come stem with the performers and the popularity of the music in local society. Conservation of Ee-saew is vital to its inheritance by younger generations.

However, current inheritance of the performance techniques and practices in Ee-saew is achieved by word of mouth, which can be unreliable (Saprasert, 1999). The Office of the National Education Commission (1998) found four methods for the inheritance of traditional knowledge in communities: 1) word of mouth

inheritance between close family, friends and extended relatives; 2) group inheritance; 3) inheritance by participation; 4) inheritance by documentary study. Imjai (2014) found that these practices all contribute to the inheritance of Ee-saew in Suphanburi province. Traditional music in central Thailand requires sharp wit (Waengwan, 1998) and currently needs to be developed privately because it is not expressly taught in academic institutions, which pay most attention to traditional knowledge surrounding beliefs and religion (Tongbut, 1999).

New findings

There is no limit on the number of performers in any given Ee-saew showing. However, in each troupe the responsibilities of each member will be outlined clearly, including the Por Pleng (the male lead singer), the mae pleng (the female lead singer), the Kor Song and Kor Sam (the first and second responders) and Look Koo (unlimited backing vocalists). The two major reasons for current performers taking an interest in Ee-saew were a genuine love of music, especially traditional Look Tung, or exposure to famous traditional singers as a child. Aside from the number of performers, there are also no restrictions on content or themes of the performance. The performance is usually in four parts, with the Wai Kru ceremony always taking place first to pay respects to parents and teachers. There are two types of teacher to whom performers pay respect: spiritual teachers, such as Phra Narai, and human teachers. In addition, performers will pay respects to teachers with whom they have not studied but whose work (music or lyrics) they have borrowed as part of the performance. The Wai Kru ceremony is performed on the floor with a Paan offering placed in front of the chanter or held during the chant. The Por Pleng will sing first, followed by the Mae Pleng.

Related literature

This investigation corresponds to the work of Pattarawadee Puttapirom (2009: 113), which concluded that the inheritance of traditional music culture in central Thailand is an important policy of the Thai government. This is especially true for support in helping local communities realise the value of culture in boosting their reputation and lifestyle. Nevertheless, the inheritance of community culture that is supported by the public and private sectors and has become part of planned conservation projects is most frequently only that of prominent cultural activities. It is generally performed by government officials, students and artists, with very little participation from members of the general public.

The culture and traditional music that is inherited nowadays can be used in a professional context and can be adapted for the preferences of people in modern society. It has evolved over the years from purely entertainment to a professional artform. This includes Ee-saew. The artists must mix traditional musical styles with popular Western influences. Thus, sponsorship from the government is usually with the intention of making the music more popular with visiting tourists and promoting the local cultural identity. It is crucial that the artists remain a key component of this adaptation (Puttapirom, 2009: 110–112).

Suggestions

Following the results of this investigation, the researchers wish to make a number of suggestions for both practical implementation of the the findings and further studies.

The individuals with the greatest power to conserve the traditions of Ee-saew are the lead performers. These individuals should be made responsible for the institutional instruction of traditional Ee-saew music and should be supported by both

the public and private sector to undertake teacher training to maximise their potential. Additionally, the government should realise the potential of Ee-saew performers in combating social problems, including aids, narcotics addiction and poverty. Thus, there should be new government policy and organisations made responsible for the promotion of traditional music as an agent of social change. It is especially important for educational establishments to promote traditional music, including Ee-saew, within the curriculum so that younger generations may learn and appreciate their local heritage. The Ministry of Culture can play a big part in the conservation efforts by organising regular seminars and training events within local communities to promote Ee-saew. This can be accompanied by support from the Tourism Authority of Thailand to promote local traditional music and the associated customs to foreign visitors, thus increasing awareness, reputation and income. The music should be simultaneously embedded as a feature of various annual festivals to create a more stable annual performance program. Finally, the dance can be incorporated into modern media via the local radio stations and television channels. This will increase the audience exposure to local performances.

There are a number of areas in which further research is necessary. Future studies should concern: 1) the strategies for developing Ee-saew in line with contemporary music preferences; 2) the inheritance process for traditional music in Suphanburi province; 3) the role of traditional music in the local communities of Central Thailand; 4) the history and recordings of traditional music in other regions of Thailand; 5) the differences in performance technique and procedure among the four regions of Thailand.

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