

Development of the Pi Nora for Conservation According to Theories of the Creative Economy

การพัฒนาปีโนราเพื่อการอนุรักษ์ตามแนวคิดเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์

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ปีโนราเป็นเครื่องดนตรีประกอบการแสดงโนรา ซึ่งเป็นการแสดงพื้นบ้านภาคใต้ของประเทศไทย มีสำเนียงเป็นเอกลักษณ์แตกต่างจากดนตรีของภูมิภาคอื่น ๆ อย่างชัดเจน ปีโนราเป็นทรัพยากรทางวัฒนธรรมที่มีเรื่องราวแวดล้อมสะท้อนให้เห็นวิถีชีวิตของชาวใต้ที่น่าสนใจ แต่การสืบทอดปีโนราสู่คนรุ่นใหม่มีน้อยจนเสี่ยงที่จะเกิดการสูญหาย ทั้งที่สามารถใช้แนวคิดเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์มาพัฒนาเพื่อสร้างเป็น

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ผลิตภัณฑ์ชนิดใหม่ก่อให้เกิดประโยชน์ทั้งทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคม ผู้วิจัยจึงดำเนินการศึกษาวิจัยเรื่องการพัฒนาปี่โนราเพื่อการอนุรักษ์ตามแนวคิดเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ โดยการวิจัยครั้งนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ มีความมุ่งหมาย 3 ประการ คือ 1) ศึกษาอัตลักษณ์และภูมิปัญญาของปี่โนรา 2) ศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบันและปัญหาของการอนุรักษ์พัฒนาปี่โนรา และ 3) สร้างแนวทางการอนุรักษ์และพัฒนาเพื่อสืบทอดปี่โนราตามแนวคิดเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ ผู้วิจัยเก็บข้อมูลจากกลุ่มตัวอย่างจำนวน 63 คน ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) อัตลักษณ์ของปี่โนราคือ เป็นเครื่องดนตรีที่มีความเป็นมาสัมพันธ์กับบริบทด้านความเชื่อเรื่องผี ความเชื่อในศาสนาพราหมณ์ และความศรัทธาในพุทธศาสนา ปี่โนรามีบทบาทต่อสังคมคือสามารถสร้างระบบความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างคนในสังคมเดียวกัน และระหว่างมนุษย์กับสิ่งศักดิ์สิทธิ์ 2) แต่ตอนนี้มีปัญหาเกี่ยวกับการถ่ายทอดความรู้ 3) ในด้านแนวทางการพัฒนาปี่โนราตามแนวความคิดเศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ ผู้วิจัยได้สังเคราะห์แนวทางการพัฒนาจากผลิตภัณฑ์ 21 ชนิด ซึ่งเป็นผลจากการประชุมเชิงปฏิบัติการได้ข้อค้นพบ 5 แนวทาง

คำสำคัญ: การอนุรักษ์ การพัฒนา การสืบทอด ปี่โนรา เศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์

Abstract

The pi nora is a wind instrument used to accompany traditional nora performances in Southern Thailand. Despite some similarities to other musical forms in Southeast Asia, this particular genre of music is different from the music in other regions of the world and the instruments reflect the local environment and the lifestyle and culture of the Southern Thai people. However, there is very little inheritance of pi nora playing methods from the older generations to the new, which is putting the continued development of the instrument at risk. The creative economy is one way to add value to the instrument and generate new

economic and social benefits of inheritance. Therefore, this qualitative investigation was set up to conserve and develop pi nora. The three research objectives were 1) to explore the identity and traditional knowledge concerning the pi nora, 2) to study the current conditions and problems with inheritance and development of the pi nora and 3) to create a conservation and development model for the inheritance of the pi nora according to the principles of creative economy. Data was collected from 63 purposively selected individuals. Results show that 1) the pi nora is an instrument whose origin is closely related to spiritual beliefs, Brahmanism and Buddhist faith. The instrument helps build relationships between people in society and between humans and religion; Nevertheless, 2) there is an inheritance crisis that must be addressed; 3) in terms of the method for development of the pi nora according to the principles of the creative economy, the researchers synthesised development methods of new products and determined 5 suitable steps.

Keywords: Conservation, creative economy, development, inheritance, pi nora

Introduction

Southern Thailand is a region that is particularly suited to creative economic research because it is an area with the oldest continuous cultural history in Southeast Asia (McCloud, 2018), and there is a stable and continuously developed cultural identity. One of the most prominent features of Southern Thai culture is a combination of traditional music and performing arts. Pongpaiboon (1997) argued that the physical geography of Southern Thailand (intense heat caused by

proximity to the equator and strong winds caused by proximity to the ocean) is reflected in the temperament of its people, who are resilient and decisive. These characteristics are abundant in the local culture, especially the dance postures and strong, rhythmic music. There are two particularly famous forms of Southern Thai musical performance art, which are nang talung and nora (Nootong, 1993). Nora was inherited in Southern Thailand from the thalassocratic city-state Srivijaya in the thirteenth century (Naksen, 1996). The lead instrument in the nora performance is the pi, a traditional wind instrument similar to the oboe. The importance of the pi is in its ability to reflect the postures of the dancers, which adds to the aesthetics and emotions of each performance.

Previous academic studies concerning nora performances have focused primarily on the dancers. Where research has considered the music, it has mostly been about the content and form of the music, rather than individual instruments. This necessarily means that the value of the individual instruments has been reduced, at least in the public eye. This is especially true for the pi, which plays a crucial and central role in the entire nora performance. Pongpaiboon (1997) argued that the most important part of Southern Thai music is the ‘rhythmic cement’ that holds the performance together. He further explained that while percussion instruments had been reasonably well inherited, the pi had not been so fortunate. Evidence for this is the lack of new pi music in traditional nora performances and part of the solution may be the creative economy.

The creative economy is a term popularised by scholar John Howkins in 2001 to highlight the economic importance of more

imaginative ‘industries’, rather than the traditional resources of land, money and the workforce (Howkins, 2002). Many of these ‘industries’ had been present in society for hundreds, if not thousands of years, but the term really gained popularity with the development of the internet and the realisation that they held the potential for large-scale employment opportunities. The creative economy does not describe a sector of the economy, rather a collection of activities that depend of the creative talent of individuals. The concept has been wholeheartedly embraced in Thailand, particularly by the tourism sector, where souvenir manufacturers use new innovations to popularise traditional cultural items for use in modern society. This has also been driven by the government emphasis on cultural heritage and intellectual property as rich economic resources (Newbigin, Rosello & Wright, 2010). This recent trend has seen transformation of traditional Thai products through the OTOP (One Tambon One Product) scheme and has revitalised Thai cottage industries, including basketry, pottery and silk. It is hoped that similar techniques and vision can be applied to musical instruments to help conserve the pi nora.

The pi is clearly an important instrument for traditional Thai culture, made clear by artistic representations of the pi in temple murals, such as the Rama IV era carvings on the ceiling of Matchaminawat Temple, Songkhla Province. However, its place in the creative economy of Thailand has not yet been developed. This investigation into the role and inheritance of the instrument is thus crucial to maintaining traditional culture and is also consistent with a national Thai drive to use

cultural heritage as a mechanism for developing the country. It is also a way to help preserve a cultural form that is declining (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2003).

Research Objectives

This is a qualitative investigation with three research objectives:

1. to study the identity and traditional knowledge concerning the pi nora
2. to study the current conditions and problems with inheritance and development of the pi nora
3. to create a conservation and development model for the inheritance of the pi nora according to the principles of the creative economy

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative investigation that analyses documents and field research. The research area for field investigation was purposively selected as three Southern Thai provinces, namely Pattalung, Nakorn Sri Thammarat and Songkhla. These locations were chosen because they are in the Songkhla Lake Basin, which is considered the origin of nora performing arts and has a continuous history of the pi nora being used to accompany nora performances. In addition, the Songkhla Lake Basin is home to a number of famous national pi nora musicians.

The research population was composed of people in the Songkhla Lake Basin area and the research sample was purposively selected from these individuals. The sample was divided into three groups. The first group, key informants, was the group of individuals who

provided most detailed in-depth information and was composed of one pi teacher in each province and one local academic of culture from each province. There was a set of three criteria for selection of the teachers: 1) they were recognised national musicians; 2) they were acknowledged as experts by the local society (through invitations to lecture on their subject at local institutions or through invitations to judge local music competitions); 3) they were recommended by members of the research population as experts in the pi nora. There was also a set of three criteria for selection of the academics: 1) they were current or former directors of provincial culture centres or educational institutions that taught the pi nora; 2) they were nora teachers or pi nora teachers in academic institutions; 3) they were recommended by members of the research population as experts in the pi nora. The casual informant group of 15 individuals was composed of two pi players from each province, two pi creators from each province and one nora ensemble leader from each province. The general informant group was composed of audience members at nora performances; the number of individuals was unspecified.

Data was collected in the field by participant and non-participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, focus-group discussion and a workshop. Secondary data was collected from related documents, music recordings and Internet sites. All collected data was validated by means of investigator, methodological and data triangulation. Any anomalous data was highlighted and the results were re-recorded in the field. The data was then collated into categories according to the three research aims and analysed by analytic induction

and typological analysis according to the qualitative research principles of Supang Jantavanit (2003). The data was also compared to documents and previous studies on adaptation of Thai products within the creative economy. There have been numerous domestic studies of the OTOP programme and how traditional cultural knowledge has been transformed by creative economic principles (Tuamsuk, Phabu & Vongprasert, 2013). These success stories range from weaving (Prempre, Chantachon & Wannajun, 2014) to pottery (Wanichakorn, 2013), dance (Kasempholkoon, 2011) to culinary arts (Pangkesorn, 2013), and have helped conserve local arts. These accomplishments in knowledge management were used as the basis for a successful model of pi nora conservation. The results are presented here as a descriptive analysis.

Results

The identity and traditional knowledge concerning pi nora

The researchers examined academic literature and conducted informal interviews with general, casual and key informants to determine the identity and traditional knowledge concerning pi nora. The results found that pi nora is a form of reed oboe local to Southern Thailand that is used to play traditional nora and nang talung performances, for both ceremonies and entertainment. There has been continuous development of the instrument, which has resulted in different sizes of the instrument. Interviews with pi players in the research area showed that there are two popular sizes of instrument: 42cm in length and 39 centimetres in length. These measurements have been found to best suit modern music. The sound of the

instrument varies in each province but the importance of the instrument does not change, especially in ceremonial nora performances, where, according to local audiences, the pi cannot be omitted.

Local residents revealed that originally, the instrument was carved from woods growing in the local area but now over the years there has been greater experimentation and more durable woods are used. Originally, the pi was either homemade or commissioned at local woodworkers. Thus, there was no standardization of the creative process and it could take any time up to two months. Now, there are specialist artisans creating the instruments, using modern machinery and techniques. Interviews with the artisans suggested that one instrument can take as little as three hours to make. Nowadays the instruments are more ornately decorated than in the past and there are grooves carved into the shaft of the instrument to prevent slipping. Sound testing is the last step in the creation process and the finger-holes are created at specific intervals.

During interviews, pi players highlighted three factors that determine their playing level: their skill at vibrating their lips, their dedication to practice and their song selection. Contemporary music can be adapted for the pi and musicians must learn how to make their music relevant to modern audiences. Often, networks are established to exchange ideas, share techniques and develop the music in teams. Networks are especially important as the sound generated by pi players varies due to the techniques of the individual and regional peculiarities.

The current conditions and problems with inheritance and development of the pi nora

From participant and non-participant observations, as well as in-depth interviews with key informants, the researchers were able to determine the current conditions and problems with inheritance and development of the pi nora. Nora in the local area is sponsored and supported by local institutions, but the specific skill of pi playing is not directly promoted, which has led to its decline. For example, in Pattalung nora performing arts are well-supported by the provincial culture office and other provincial administrative organisations. However, primary education in this important local heritage is limited to workshops on national holidays. In the provincial arts college, even though there is a faculty of music, there is no specific faculty for traditional and local music and no course for the pi nora. In schools, pi nora playing is left to the music department and is restricted to topics on traditional music. Students may learn instruments that interest them. This is insufficient for the continued development and inheritance of the pi nora. In addition, pi instruments are only created at the request of individual musicians. In terms of widening the appeal of the pi nora, there is little creativity. While other aspects of the nora performance have been adapted as local souvenirs, especially the costumes, the pi nora is still produced in the original form. The situation is strikingly similar in Nakorn Sri Thammarat and Songkhla, although there is more systematic inheritance in the Nakorn Sri Thammarat Performing Arts College. However, this is more driven by the

presence of skilled individuals than institutional interest. Overall, there is a lack of skilled pi nora musicians in all three of the provinces studied.

From interviews in all three of the provinces, it was clear that the pi nora is only played for nora and nang talung performances. There has been no development of the instrument outside traditional spheres. Part of the reason for a lack of more frequent performances is that professional pi nora musicians must work as teachers to supplement their income and make a decent living. This is of course caused by the lack of available work as a professional musician, but it also prevents development of more performance opportunities as players must fulfil educational commitments.

In summary, the major problems with the pi nora in the three Southern Thai provinces are a limited target audience, limited realisation of its cultural and economic value, lack of resources and lack of inheritance in modern society. There is also an insufficient curriculum for the pi nora in educational establishments from primary to tertiary education and a shortage of pi players and teachers.

Conservation and development model for the inheritance of the pi nora according to the principles of the creative economy

Following the results of in-depth interviews and observations, the researchers synthesised a conservation and development model for the inheritance of the pi nora according to the principles of the creative economy in five different aspects. This was then presented back to key and casual informants for comment and adjustment during focus-group discussions. The model was then tested with members of the general

public at the “Workshop for Conservation and Development of the Pi Nora according to the Principles of the Creative Economy”. The workshop was held on 10th January 2016 at Patthalung Dramatics College. The respondents approved the model at the workshop. The five aspects of the model were:

1. Change - change the materials used to create the pi nora from traditional materials to materials that are more suited to modern society and that have been proven to add benefit to the sound, appearance and durability of the instrument.

2. Addition - add components to the pi nora instrument to increase the interest and aesthetic appeal of the instrument, developing it as an economic product.

3. Reduction - reduce the size of the traditional pi nora to make the instrument unique and more relevant to modern society.

4. Combination - combine the characteristics of the pi nora with other everyday items to increase the value and realisation of the importance of the instrument.

5. Creation of inheritance media - create varied media to assist in the learning process of the pi nora, including video and audio compact disks, with accompanying literature.

From observation, interviews and focus-group discussions, it was determined that the potential for the pi nora in the creative economy has been untapped. While other products have been transformed by the government driven “one tambon, one product (OTOP)” souvenir scheme, such as traditional fabric used in nora productions, the pi nora has been overlooked. With the help

of local experts, the researchers created a selection of products suitable for transmitting the identity of Southern Thai nora and adding economic and cultural value to the pi nora (Figure 1; Figure 2).

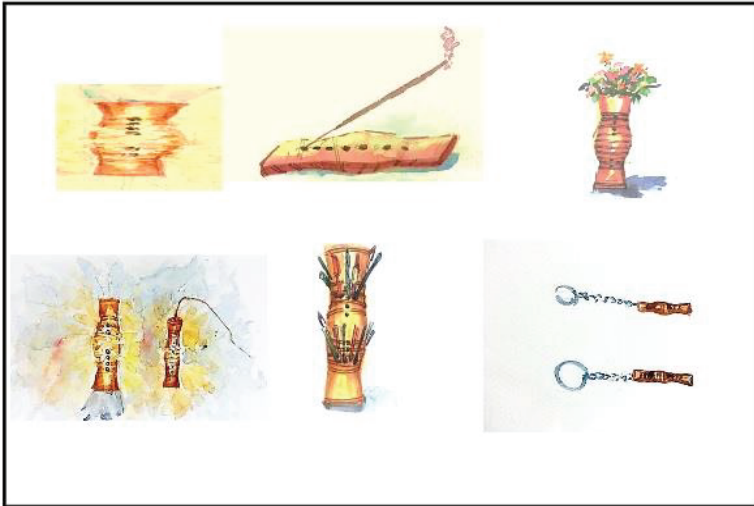


Figure 1 Sketches of product suggestions for transformation of the pi nora as OTOP

Source: Petcharak, 2018

Figure 1 Sketches of product suggestions for transformation of the pi nora as OTOP souvenir (from top left): oil lamp, incense holder, vase, lamp, pencil holder, keyring.



Figure 2 Sketches of product suggestions for transformation
of the pi nora as OTOP

Source: Petcharak, 2018

Figure 2. Sketches of product suggestions for transformation of the pi nora as OTOP souvenir (from top left): fridge magnets, pamphlet, clock, t-shirts, ornament, music box, branding suggestion.

Discussion

The similar characteristics of the pi nora in the three different provinces studied is a classic example of cultural diffusion. This is in agreement with the findings of Kottawut Pornhomali (2009), which showed that the pi nora shares similar characteristics to the pi of Central Thailand and Cambodia, as well as the salai of Northeastern Thailand. According to Somsak Srisantisuk's work on independent invention and parallel evolution, this would be further proof that cultural diffusion is an obstacle to the unique success of independent inventions and the concept of parallel evolution because when a society comes into contact with another culture it will either adopt, assimilate or alter that particular culture (Srisantisuk, 2001). If geographical and political factors allow for two cultures to meet, such as around the Songhkla Lake Basin, those cultures will align (Pongpaiboon, 1997).

The traditional knowledge concerning the creation of the pi nora shares three key features with the cultural ecology theory of Julian Steward (1955). Firstly, production depends on the surrounding local environment, as (at least initially) the instruments were carved from locally grown woods. Secondly, culture has become a tool for people to adapt to the local environment. Thirdly, culture and the local environment are interconnected and have a mutual effect upon one another. This is most obvious in the development of machinery to ease the creation process and local planting of more durable and suitable woods.

In a similar fashion to the idea of culture as personality espoused by American anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1934), the culture

of pi nora players is a reflection of the great players that have come to embody the artform. There is a set of national characteristics and a pattern of culture that derive from the model personalities that teach the skill to the new generations. This is why the pi nora, although developing similar characteristics to the pi in other regions, has a ‘dialect’ specific to the Southern provinces of Thailand and different ‘accents’ depending on the teachers in that area.

The current conditions of the pi nora in the three Southern provinces are symbolic of the institutions that allow for the continuation of the art, namely teachers and educational establishments. In addition, the pi nora has been allowed to continue in spite of weak inheritance measures due to its non-material relationship with local society. As a central component of a performing art used in religious ceremonies, the pi nora has a spiritual significance that adds to its durability. While the religious practices remain in society, there will always be a need for their components. Even if the inheritance of the pi nora has been neglected in terms of its entertainment value, it has endured through links to intangible culture (Santisombat, 2004). This is similar to the case of traditional woven fabrics in Thailand before their reinvention as souvenirs for tourists (Makhunton, Chantachon & Phothibat, 2014). Indeed, the results of the workshop indicate that there was greater realisation of the importance of the pi nora among members of the general public from the souvenirs than there would have been from a live musical performance.

The product suggestions made in light of the research findings were based on informant suggestions and the guidelines of the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development and the Thai Office of the National Social and Economic Development Board, which suggest development in two areas, media and product creation. They are intended for the Cultural Product of Thailand (CPOT) programme, which is an initiative by the Thai Ministry of Culture to develop local culture throughout the country in line with the government policy of promoting traditional knowledge to boost the local economy (Kaewbangan, 2009). As has been proven with the success of other facets of traditional knowledge in embracing the creative economy, whole communities can be transformed by creative economic principles (Prempreee, Chantachon & Wannajun, 2014; Tuamsuk, Phabu & Vongprasert, 2013; Wanichakorn, 2013). Moreover, there is huge national economic importance in imaginative ‘industries’, such as Thai music (Howkins, 2002). With all sectors striving towards the same goal of simultaneous cultural conservation and economic prosperity, Thailand is an example of how various agencies can construct a national creative tourism movement in a country, “especially in the light of the Tourism Authority of Thailand branding campaign to stimulate creative tourism to the destination” (Wattanacharoensil & Schuckert, 2016: p.1045). It is hoped that implementation of some of the proposals made in this investigation will see the pi nora become a more integral part of the national consciousness, whilst also stimulating local prosperity.

Suggestions

Following the results of this investigation, the researchers wish to make a number of suggestions.

Suggestions for practical implementation of research results

1. This investigation provides suggestions for pi nora creators, who can use the ideas to develop their own products for the creative economy and increase their own earning potential from pi creation. Some examples of specific products that could be developed are oil lamps, incense holders, vases, lamps, pencil holders and keyrings.

2. Souvenir stalls can increase their own stake in the musical souvenir market by supporting the development of creative economic products based on the pi nora culture. They can make deals with local artisans to stock and sell their goods.

3. Related government institutions should support the development of the pi nora creative economy because it directly benefits the CPOT and OTOP programmes to use traditional knowledge to add value to the Thai economy. The most tangible form of support would be additional funding, although if that is not possible a product-awareness and marketing campaign would significantly boost the market for local artisans.

Suggestions for further investigation

1. Further research should consider the standardization of the pi nora in Southern Thailand. Although it is important to maintain the unique characteristics of local players, it is equally important to create

standardized learning, playing and creation models to ensure that the music of the pi nora has the best possible chance of being successfully inherited by younger generations.

2. There should be further investigation into the history of the pi nora and its development throughout Southeast Asia.

3. There should be multidisciplinary research into the optimum shape and style of the pi nora for modern music.

4. There should be future investigation into the creation of the pi nora from other materials, such as clay and resin.

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