



The Teaching Process of Lao Traditional Music

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Abstract

This article used the principles of ethnomusicology study such as documentary and fieldwork studies. This article aims to demonstrate the teaching process of Lao traditional music that preserves present Lao society. The result shows that the teaching process of Lao traditional music has two teaching processes that are from government and private schools. In the past, before becoming music students, the students of both processes had to pass the teacher's selection process and the Wai Kru ceremony before commencing their study. In the teacher's selection process, teachers would evaluate how determined the candidates were, and if they passed this process, they had to join the Wai Kru ceremony to become music students completely. The Wai Kru ceremony is the ceremony in which students pay respect to their teacher. In the end, if they underwent the ceremony, they would completely become music students. In the teaching process, teachers in each institute taught by oral teaching, which is one of the most common teaching processes in South East Asia, especially in Lao, Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia. The teacher hummed, sang or played an instrument for a musical phrase or melody to students, and then they had to play along that melody until finishing the piece without notation. At present, in the government teaching process, they open the National School of Music and Dance for youths who are interested in music and performing arts to conserve and improve music art. They have created the curriculum including general subjects and professional subjects. In the professional subjects, they have kept the oral teaching process up until present. Nowadays, they have developed their notation for saving their pieces and then used those scores for teaching. Therefore, since the past to present, they have maintained the traditional music culture and also developed their teaching process to pass on the art of music to the next generation.

Keywords: *Teaching process, Lao traditional music;*

1. Introduction

Lao traditional music has been one of important things in Lao culture for a long time. According to music scholars in terms of history of Lao traditional music, they found evidence about Lao traditional music since Chao Fa Ngum period, which was the foundation of Lao traditional music in the royal court [1]. Then, Lao traditional was continuously developed from royal court until the dark era of all Lao traditional cultures, which was after Lao changed its governance in 1975. All of the traditional cultures were frozen by the government and then after 1980, the dark situation of traditional culture was eased up gradually. Lao traditional music came back and played a role in the society again, not for the royal court but for preserving all Lao people.

Lao traditional music is played for two significant purposes: the first is for entertainment. In the past, Lao traditional music was played in the royal court in order to welcome visitors of the king or to accompany performances such as Phalak-Phalam, Lao Ramayana performance accompanied by the Pinphat ensemble. In the folk culture, Lao traditional music also has the role for entertainment such as to welcome guests in the wedding ceremony and celebration ceremony. The second significant role is for rituals. For royal courts and villagers, they play traditional music for rituals such as royal ceremony in the court, ordination ceremony, Wai Kru ceremony (ceremony of saluting teachers), funeral, even wedding ceremony in which the traditional music is played in a ritual part as praying to gods and Buddha. Therefore, Lao traditional music has been essential for maintaining the society and keeping traditional music alive in the globalization. Another thing that makes Lao traditional music survive is the teaching process.

2. Content

In terms of teaching process, its importance is not less than other parts of Lao traditional music because if there is no heir for preserving traditional music, the music will die someday. In the past, Lao traditional music was learned in the Lao royal court. Music students were by the oral teaching process without notation or notes recording. Then, after the Lao changed its governance, the government built the National School of Music and Dance and created a curriculum for teaching students. Thus, this section will discuss the two teaching processes of Lao traditional music.

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2.1 Teaching Process in Private School

This teaching process is considered as an important process that keeps Lao traditional music alive in the present. This section will discuss the teaching process from the past to present which has been used to teach in the royal court and private school or house of music as appearing in Lao society.

In the past, the first private school that taught Lao traditional music was the royal court in Chao Fa Ngum period as a result of the import of Khmer instruments into Lan Xang Kingdom. Then, the Khmer musical style was combined with the Lao traditional music style and became the foundation of Lao traditional music. It spread into the folk music culture in the end.

In terms of teaching process in private schools from the past to present, before becoming music students, candidates were required to pass the teacher's selection process and Wai Kru ceremony, and then they could become music students completely. In the past, the traditional music was taught in private classes because in order to acquire expertise and skills, teachers had to be strict with their students. The private classes were taught by watching, remembering and doing, so people who would study traditional music would be based on teachers' consideration. If the teacher considered that the person had good attitude, intention, diligence and tolerance, then the person would become a music student [2]. After the teacher's selection process, the next process was joining Wai Kru ceremony. This Laotian Wai Kru ceremony is a ceremony in which students pay respect and express gratitude to their teachers for giving kindness and knowledge to the students [3] and making the students be able to have a career in the field of traditional music. After the Wai Kru ceremony, the teaching process begins. The teacher will be in front of the class and teach by oral teaching as they hum, sing or play the instrument to students two or three times. Afterward, the students have to sing or play along that musical phrase or melody properly without pieces notation, [4] and the process continues until finishing one piece. Until now, there have still been the Wai Kru ceremony and oral teaching in many private schools in Vientiane, the capital city of Lao, or Luang Prabang, a central city in the northern part of Laos. The aforesaid indicates students' respect toward teachers and what the education system in private schools has been like from the past to present.

2.2 Teaching Process by Government

In the past before Lao changed its governance, a private school or royal court was the place where students learned traditional music taught by oral teaching without notation. The government had never established a music school until 1959 when Music and Dance School was established. The purpose was to train students to be musicians and performers in order to help publicize the art of music and performing art. Thus, this was the beginning of traditional music school by the government, and the establishment of this school was a huge transition in music education in Lao. As a result, teachers started to use note and notation in the teaching and learning process for first time [5]. In 1970 Music School of Patriotic Lao was established. The purpose was similar to that of Music and Dance School, which was to teach Lao music and classical music and train musicians and performers in other provinces.

After Lao changed its governance, in 1976, National School of Music and Dance was established. During the first period of establishment (1996-1988), there were only a primary curriculum (4 years) with significance on Lao traditional dance and music and a music theory in this curriculum to provide knowledge and skills for students, as well as preparing them for further study. Subjects in this curriculum included the core subjects, such as introduction to the music theory, notes reading, history of western music; general subjects; and major subjects as traditional dance, traditional music performance, western music performance and voice. Graduates could become professional performers and musicians. In the later period (1989-1997), the academic executives and teachers changed the primary curriculum from 4 years to 3 years and designed an intermediate curriculum (3 years). In the latest period (1997), a new curriculum was designed by adding and dividing courses for suitability in each level. The primary curriculum has been divided into 3 curriculums: the 4-year primary course (traditional dance, traditional music performance and electron), the 5-year primary course (Western brass instrument and accordion), and the 6-year primary course (Western string instrument and piano). In addition, the intermediate curriculum has been divided into 2 curriculums: the 3-year intermediate course (traditional dance, traditional music performance, electron, Western brass and string instrument Western instrument) and the 4-year intermediate course (composition and orchestration, and voice). However, at present, some of the courses, such as composition, orchestration, have been closed because of lack of teachers [6].

3. Conclusion

According to the information above, it can be concluded that Lao traditional music has a long history since Chao Fa Ngum period as a result of the import of Khmer instruments into the royal court, the musical style of which was later combined with the Laotian style. Lao traditional music has two important roles: for entertainment and for rituals. In terms of teaching process, there were two types of teaching process found in Lao traditional music such as teaching process in private schools and teaching process by the government.

In terms of teaching process in private schools such as the royal court or music house, before becoming music students, candidates had to pass the teacher's selection process and Wai Kru ceremony. In the teacher's selection process, teachers would consider people based on their attitude, intent, diligence and tolerance. If the candidates passed, they had to join the Wai Kru ceremony for saluting music god teachers and real teachers. In terms of teaching, teachers taught by oral teaching such as humming, singing or playing a melody to students a couple of times, and then the students had to remember and play along that melody until finishing the piece without music score or notation.

In terms of teaching process by the government, it began in 1959 as Music and Dance School was established, and then in 1960, there was a big change in Lao music education in which teachers started to use notation for learning music along with oral teaching. Later, there was development of Lao traditional music education when the curriculums for traditional music and dance were improved to produce musicians and performers. The main purpose was to publicize the art of Lao music and dance to both local people and foreigners. However, the author believes that if the teaching process by government were the growth of the new generation, it would not become this considerable without a solid foundation like the teaching process in private schools.

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