

## Transitions and Transformations of Process Learning in Thai String Ensemble

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### Abstract

*This article is part of the research titled “The Development and Principle of “Ketduriyakom” Thai String Ensemble with Piano” aimed to present the development of the learning of Thai classical music through string ensemble bands in Thailand. Thai string ensemble with an addition represents the conceptual transcendence from the string band of the past, shows the adjustment between Thai and non-Thai music, reflects the ideas of contemporary music in its concept as well as performance and ensemble principles that differ and challenge the formulae of Thai classical music performance in the old days. Therefore, the development of Thai classical music bands in different periods reflects the adoption, exchange and values of external cultural currents that have driven the creative energy and stimulated the application of traditional culture to adjust to western influences.*

*Thai string ensemble with an addition reflects the transitions in the instruction of Thai classical music lessons. In the past, the instruction was mainly given at home or in a music school. Due to the oral tradition and one-on-one instruction custom of knowledge transfer, the instruction pattern of all types of Thai classical music was under this learning system. This was changed after Siamese musicians’ ways of life were influenced by the Industrial Revolution and western ways of recreation. New forms of ways of living and learning were adopted in large and various areas, not only in the metropolitan area. Moreover, the development of the printing press transformed the communication of knowledge into forms such as self-study, practice exercises, records and radio programs. This led to the independence of some groups of learners who were no longer required to learn strictly from musical schools and resulted in the change in the learning pattern of Thai string ensemble. At present, there are various systems of Thai musical notes that represent new forms of imparting the knowledge of Thai classical music, which have transcended the custom of teacher-centered instruction.*

**Keywords:** *Thai string ensemble, Transitions, Transformations;*

### 1. Introduction

This article is part of a research project titled “The Development and Principle of “Ketduriyakom” Thai String Ensemble Combined with Piano” funded by Mahidol University’s Project “Moving Towards a Research University: Talent Management”. The study employs the research methodology of historical analysis to present the transitions and transformations of the learning process of Thai string ensemble from the year 1898, after King Rama V’s first visit to Europe which brought about many social changes and advances based on the western models and, consequently, affected the music learning culture of the Thai society, especially the transformations of the learning process of Thai musicians that diversified from the customs of old. At the same time, these changes also created many amateur and professional musicians.

Thai string bands have played a role in entertaining people inside and outside the royal court for a long time and seen various stages of development, band adjustment and musical composition. This type of band performs for entertainment and in propitious ceremonies. The band has been combined with different instruments, creating different types of string ensemble such as string solo, string duo, and string ensemble combined with Java pipe. Later on when foreign musical influence started to have a role in creating new values and entertainment culture in the country, keyboard instruments were adopted to play with string instruments, thus giving birth to string ensemble such as string ensemble combined with organ, string ensemble combined with piano, etc. Since Thai string bands are not restricted by strict band combination as in other types of band such as Pi Part band, combining instruments from different cultures and constructing performing patterns that incorporate foreign instruments are not considered an issue. This shows the transition of the values and restrictions of band combination and performing patterns within the learning process and style adjustment of Thai musicians.

The learning process became more evident after the 1884 educational reform. Schools were established in temples and monks played the role of teachers, aiming to produce knowledgeable personnel to serve in government offices, to give knowledge to common people so that they could

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improve their situations, and to set a firm foundation for national development. In addition, it was hoped that children would be closer to Buddhism and would further help propagate the religion. In Thai society, education in the past focused on learning about the ways of life with the primary purpose to earn a living. Furthermore, in the past, only boys were given the opportunity of literacy, with monks acting as the ones imparting the knowledge. Girls learned about domestic management, cookery and handicraft at home. Specialized professional skills such as fine art, Khon, drama, and Thai music were traditionally instructed and passed on only among family members. Some skills required strict selection of suitable learners according to the instructors' judgment. Others were restricted by the issue of social classes which gave privileges to people from certain classes and not to the others.

The instruction of Thai music in the past aimed primarily to pass on the knowledge to family members. In order for an outsider to become an apprentice in a music school, he needed to be approved of his behavior, skills and learning development. The instruction was conducted based on the oral tradition from one generation to the next, without any written document. Memorizing, leaning by doing and observing were the main methods of learning. Creating a body of knowledge was, therefore, essential for a good learner. In order to be able to develop melody patterns within given song structures by themselves, the learners were required to scaffold, memorize and have true understanding of the knowledge. They also needed to hone their advanced practical skills to increase the accuracy and power of performance, tonal quality, and melodic prowess.

These expectations were realized through the strict instruction of Thai music, particularly in the practice of fundamental sequential skills, aiming, according to the traditional custom, to develop practical skills before progressing to songs at more advanced levels when the learners reached a suitable age. Since the learning system emphasized the learners, the instruction was essentially learner-based, consequently producing musicians of various musical types and with unique performing skills. The instructor considered the qualifications of a learner and imparted to him selected and suitable knowledge such as melody patterns, techniques and musical styles. This instructional system is a feature of traditional Thai music bands that indicates the teacher-student relationship in which the significant role of the teacher/instructor in the learning process cannot be replaced by any forms of media.

## **2. Thai String Ensemble and the Process of Knowledge Instruction and the Transition into Public Media**

The western ways of recreation and the system of fixed office hours resulted in big changes in the ways of life of city dwellers. An educational reform, in addition, added music in school curricula. Musical notes were used as an instructional medium in large classes to produce amateur musicians to play in the various functions of public schools. Moreover, string ensemble combined with foreign instruments became widely popular. The study of traditional Thai music based on the system of musical notes in the early period, therefore, broke away from the exclusive tradition of studying music at a music school. Thanks to the system of musical notes, learners could now learn to play songs by themselves as well as by observing techniques from popular media such as records of Thai songs which could be played over and over, proving unlimited opportunities for learning.

In addition, western technology helped drive the distribution of knowledge into the public arena through printing, which also unlocked the access to the music knowledge that had previously been confined to certain individuals and schools. Efforts were made to create systematic methods of instruction and learning. Towards the end of the reign of King Rama V, a textbook for the study of western music was written by Phra Apaiponrop (Ploy Penkun) which explained about musical notes using Thai letters based on the Tonic Sol-fa system of music education developed by John Curwen. This book became "Textbook of Musicology" in 1913. In 1914, at the beginning of the reign of King Rama VI, a textbook for the study of Thai music titled "Textbook for the Study of Ja Khe" was written by N.P.K. (Nop Penkun). These were considered phenomenal in the context of Thai music instruction since a textbook for Thai music had previously been completely non-existent. The instruction of Thai music was then shifted from the oral tradition to learning at one's leisure and the access to knowledge in exchange of money.

Musical notes contributed to the change from oral to written tradition in the culture of music. Sounds and rhythms could now be recorded in the form of musical notes which were widely used as a medium to learn, practice and memorize music and were conveniently available as ready-made media on the market. A direct instruction from a teacher was no longer a constant requirement. The public access of musical notes through the development of the printing press reflected the transition of the concept of ways of life and values of the metropolitan population, affecting the learning methods of those in the

Thai music circle and creating a new learning process independent of the dominance of schools of music. People could come together in their free time after work or at weekends to play music as a recreational activity.

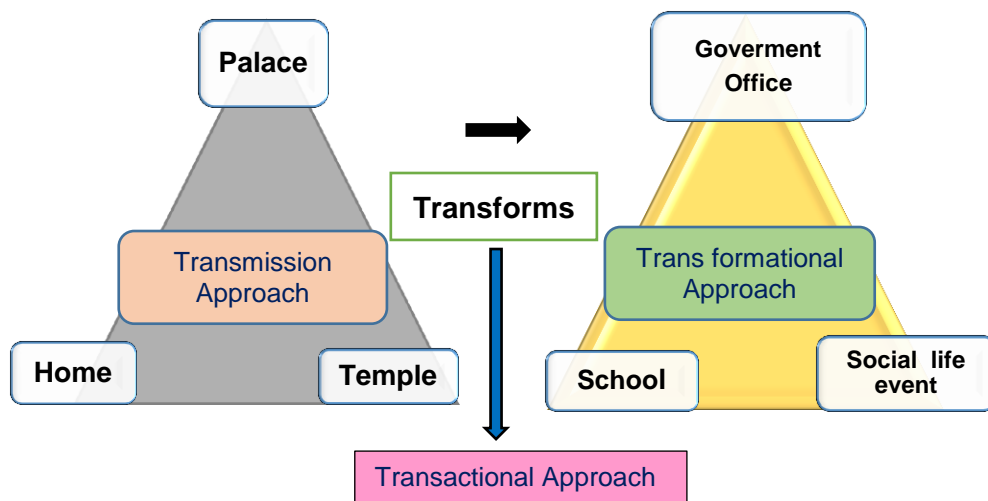


Entertainment media for learning by Thai String ensemble

### 3. The Patronage System and the Transition of Knowledge in Thai String Bands

Home – Temple – Palace (Poonpit Amatyakul, 2018) constituted the main structure and pillar of the patronage system of traditional Thai music. When Thai society faced a restructure in the reign of King Rama V, Thai music, consequently, also faced a transition into a new form of patronage system under the supervision of the government. As a result of this, the study of Thai music was transformed into a formal pattern of study. This new pattern however, was restricted by bureaucracy and focused mainly on the context of offices and organizations. The production of Thai musicians after the 1932 revolution was dependent upon the national education system which dictated the instruction of each school of music which is unique in its process of learning songs, melodies and concepts. It could, then, be said that the transition of knowledge of the music schools under the changing patronage system retained the old format of learning but featured a more variety of media as learning sources influenced by western technology. Later on, this was transformed into knowledge instruction under the exchange system, making it a product of informal education aimed as a form of recreation and hobby in Thai society.

#### Transformation structure on Thai music Transmission





#### 4. Conclusion

In the East, the study of music involved aspects other than memorization, practice, knowledge and skills. The patronage system was dominant in Southeast Asian societies and proved beneficial to the people in the region. Traditional Thai music has served the Thai society on all occasions from the beginning to the end of one's life. The tradition of Thai music instruction in the old days also followed the practice of the patronage system in that fees were not collected from learners in a monetary form since the instructors themselves had not acquired their knowledge through the exchange of money. However, with the changes in the educational system, education became a product and money became a key instrument to pave the way for learning. Moreover, the learning process in Thai string bands was transformed from the one-on-one instruction to the instruction of musical notes, which became widely popular because it helped facilitate the leaning and understanding to a certain level of practice, be used as a teaching tool in large classes, and enable the development of music skills without the limitations of time and setting.

At present, Thai musical notes are important evidence of Thai music performances of the past. The first music sheets and textbook for Thai string bands were written 105 years ago, and an extensive body of musical notes for different types of instruments in Thai string bands has been produced since. If the arrangement of the songs for Thai string bands is analyzed by comparing the different parts of different instruments played at the same time, a pattern of harmonies and melodies will be revealed, showing an interesting musical style of Thai string bands in the context of Thai music history, especially in terms of the "tone color" and "Thai string instrument preferences" in the previous century. Learning music based on the musical notes has changed the structure of the learning process of Thai string instruments, and the musical notes are an increasingly important tool for today's Thai music instructors to pass on the knowledge and create new songs. Many traditional Thai musicians start learning to play music and develop their skills by learning from the musical notes. Many of them even start with advanced-level songs. This is contrary to the old custom of learning Thai music. When the basic performing skills are passed over in preference to a quicker access to more complicated musical pieces, the process of memorizing, thinking and creating cannot be fully developed, and learners' quality cannot be sustainably enhanced. Therefore, in order to achieve ample benefits, the use of musical notes for self-study must follow the learning process of Thai music custom and pattern. If done correctly, the transformation of traditional Thai musicians in the future will enjoy both the quality and skills of performing, thinking and creating that once were the trademark of traditional Thai musicians.

#### References

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