

# Transmitting Traditional Lanna Music in the Modern-Day City of Chiang Mai<sup>1</sup>

Joel Akins<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Traditional Lanna music is enjoying a renewal, centered on the city of Chiang Mai. How has this come about and how is it being sustained? What does all this activity mean for the music itself?

This article addresses the first question by providing a detailed record of the different ways traditional Lanna music is (and has been) passed on in the city of Chiang Mai. This is based primarily on interviews and observations with teachers, students, artists and other professionals involved with Lanna music transmission through formal education, informal instruction and technological developments.

Addressing the second question above means analyzing the relationship between ways of transmission and changing styles of traditional music in Chiang Mai. This article presents a critical analysis of both historical and present musical activities, as well as a comparison of perspectives on musical

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<sup>2</sup> Joel Akins graduated from the MA Program in Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University.

change in the North in order to show how the expansion of musical transmission in Chiang Mai has worked in tandem with the increase in variety of Lanna musical styles in recent times.

### **Transmitting Traditional Lanna Music in the Modern-Day City of Chiang Mai**

By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the once grand city of Chiang Mai was nearly reduced to a ghost town by roughly two centuries of Burmese occupation, warring and a shortage of resources. The Thai Yuan, led by Chao Kawila, finally regained control and set about reintroducing population and cultural life into the beleaguered city. The Chiang Mai Chronicle emphasizes reestablishing music and performance traditions, along with reconstruction and population resettlement.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 200 years later, the onslaught was not war or famine, but cultural imperialism from beyond and feelings of cultural inferiority from within. This time the city was still full of people, and several key figures worked to adapt the old traditions for survival in the currently shifting social climate. Toward the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, various external and internal influences aligned, and both historical and adapted forms of traditional Lanna music became more commonplace. To understand how different ways and spaces of musical transmission have been part of this ongoing resurgence, we can consider some key questions: How did a modern city return to its musical roots, and how is it continuing to do so? What does this increased activity mean for the music itself?

### **The Rebuilding of Traditional Lanna Music Culture in Chiang Mai**

About a century after Kawila oversaw the physical and cultural renewal of Chiang Mai, King Intrawichinontra (popularly called

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<sup>3</sup> Wyatt, *The Chiang Mai Chronicle*, 179.

“Inthanon”) gave his daughter, Dararasmi, in marriage to King Chulalongkorn.<sup>4</sup> She was especially fond of music and dance, and she enhanced this passion with further musical training while she lived in the royal court at Bangkok. Following King Chulalongkorn’s death, Princess Dararasmi successfully petitioned for permission to return home and brought with her this formal training in Thai classical music and dance. She took in area musicians and introduced profound changes that greatly formalized Lanna music and dance. Under her tutelage, choreography became more defined and coordinated within groups of dancers. She also oversaw improvements to the construction of musical instruments, notably making the *salo* more durable. However, Princess Dararasmi’s innovations were confined to courtly circles in Chiang Mai. In 1927, they were presented in public view to welcome King Rama VII’s visit to Chiang Mai when Princess Dararasmi was placed in charge of the welcoming festivities. The presentation she organized served to legitimize Northern customs as well as equate them with the fine classical traditions of Siam.

Princess Dararasmi’s efforts were extraordinarily well timed. Five years after “going public” with these new incarnations of Lanna performance art, the support system for music in Chiang Mai crumbled with Siam’s abrupt shift to constitutional monarchy. The many post-1932 governments – dominated by Field Marshall Plaek Phibunsongkhram – were not neglectful in supporting arts and culture in Thailand; rather, they focused on creating a single national identity out of the country’s patchwork of cultures, and Lanna performance traditions suffered accordingly. Folk instruments eschewed as too crude and musical forms deemed no longer appropriate faded from daily life. New or reworked styles like the *ramwong* (circle dance) were strongly promoted through cultural centers. Government workers even paused each Wednesday afternoon to practice the *ramwong*.<sup>5</sup>

With no court to sustain professional musicians and dancers, the dedication of musicians such as those taken in by Princess Dararasmi was key in conserving and passing on Lanna music traditions in Chiang

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<sup>4</sup> This occurred in 1885. *Permanent Exhibit*, Chiang Mai Municipality.

<sup>5</sup> Usanee, “Field Marshal P. Pibulsongkram”.

Mai. Khruakaew Na Chiangmai and Sunthorn Na Chiangmai (not siblings) both received training in *Chao* Dararasmi's palace, and over the following decades would become central figures in Chiang Mai, known as authorities on both traditional Lanna and Thai classical music.

Another notable figure in the 1950s and 1960s was Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda, a prominent Chiang Mai businessman with a keen interest in traditional Northern culture. Not only did he provide financial support for traditional Lanna music, but also made significant contributions to the available body of knowledge on Lanna culture; for instance, he wrote about cultural reconstruction in the region after Burmese occupation and recorded traditional musicians in the North. One of his most influential contributions was his development of *khantok*, a dinner show that combines customary Lanna dishes with a survey of Lanna performance traditions. After beginning as a send-off to Thai and foreign politicians, *khantok* was adopted by the tourism industry and has served as a major economic motivator for the rebirth of traditional Lanna music and dance.

Kraisri's actions worked with other events of the day to keep cultural expressions of Northern Thailand from disappearing. Although these influences were small and inconsistent, they would prove to lay foundations for more significant developments in the future. One of these instances was when Phibunsongkhram ordered the Fine Arts Department to develop a 'Thai' dance that served the same social function as the increasingly widespread Western ballroom dance around the time of World War II. This 'new' dance (really a reformulation of a central Thai dance), called *ramwong*, was accompanied by lively music, and several *ramwong* bands formed in Chiang Mai. Once they were firmly established, they began composing their own tunes and lyrics using the Northern dialect instead of the standard Central Thai language.<sup>6</sup> This unintentional assertion of Lanna identity would have great impact 20 years later through the folk singer Jaran Manopetch.

An important first for the region was when the Chiang Mai College of Dramatic Arts (CMCDA; in Thai *Withayalai Natasin*) opened in 1971. Although its focus was (and still is) on Central Thai

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<sup>6</sup> Pornpilai, "*Phleng Kham Mueang*, 14 (in Thai).

music, this was the beginning of the formal academic world in Chiang Mai taking the lead in conserving and passing on traditional Central Thai and Lanna music. In the past, figures such as Sunthorn Na Chiangmai and experts outside of the city transmitted their knowledge of Lanna music in their own areas; now this could take place in a structured, academic setting as well. The expressions of Lanna cultural identity in this time period are also partly due to the central government beginning to promote Chiang Mai actively as a tourist destination.<sup>7</sup> This was the first time Lanna culture could be clearly seen as economically beneficial.

On Children's Day (2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of January) 1976, a young man named Jaran Manopetch went to the government office where he worked and handed out treats to the crowds of visiting children. But that afternoon, he got on a local bus and did not return, eventually ending up in Mae Sariang;<sup>8</sup> 1976 was a year of intense political turmoil and unrest in Thailand, and Jaran was disillusioned with the society he saw around him. In fact, the massacres of October 6, 1976 shook the assumptions of many in the region – especially students. Many felt they could no longer trust the wishes of the central Thai state – including the idea that one 'Thai' identity was more suitable than local culture.

A few months after these terrible events, Jaran was one of many musicians invited to play his guitar and sing at a birthday party in Chiang Mai.

In January of 1977, I went to a friend's birthday party. There were lots of people there – both professional musicians and non-professionals, and each of us got to play one song. When it was my turn (I was the last one), there wasn't anything left to play, because the others had already played all the songs I knew. So I dug out an old *phleng kham mueang* [song in the Northern dialect], Noi Chaiya. Once I started to sing, my friend (whose birthday it was) and my friend's mother got up and started dancing. Everyone was able to sing along with at least some sections or lines, but for the

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<sup>7</sup> McGraw, "The Pia's Subtle Sustain", 132.

<sup>8</sup> Si Re, *A Prize for Dreams*, 113-114 (in Thai).

most part, they just hummed along with the melody. I realized that songs like this one lived in the very core of every Northerner...<sup>9</sup>

The audience's powerful reaction – and later the response of the general public – showed how deeply these traditional local melodies stirred emotions and memories. Sanan Thammati of CMU's Center for the Promotion of Arts and Culture explains that Jaran innovated by using traditional musical material in a new way. Previously, very few expressed an interest in traditional Lanna music, and those who did were viewed as outdated. By fusing traditional Lanna songs like *Noi Chaiya* with the acoustic folk style popular in the United States in the 1960s, Jaran made it 'modern' again, and thus acceptable, accessible and relevant to modern listeners.

Jaran went on to release over 20 albums, and became famous throughout Thailand for his singing and acting. He gave several live concerts, and performed at his own restaurant in Chiang Mai. Jaran died unexpectedly in September 2001, but his life and work continue to gain fans and command the reverence of appreciative Lanna citizens. *Folk song kham mueang* is widely enjoyed by listeners in the region and beyond, and it is now performed on stages and in restaurants throughout the city.

Meanwhile, the academic world in Chiang Mai was working to preserve and renew Lanna's near-dormant traditional music. In 1981, Mongkol Boonwong took over as president of CMCDA. One of his objectives was to help renew traditional Lanna music, so he first worked with Sunthorn Na Chiangmai and other teachers to expand the available repertoire. Sunthorn then organized a succession of performances – including a special concert for a royal audience at the Kawila military camp in Chiang Mai. Widespread revival of traditional Lanna music and culture was still years away, but momentum was clearly established. In the late 1980s, Sunthorn (a skilled maker of Lanna and central Thai instruments) told Mongkol he did not have to worry about traditional Lanna music sinking back down into obscurity as he could

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<sup>9</sup> Si Re, *A Prize for Dreams*, 116-117 (in Thai).



no longer keep up with orders for Lanna instruments pouring in from schools around the North.<sup>10</sup>

At roughly the same time, students and faculty across town at CMU were making important explorations into traditional Lanna folkways. In 1981, Sanan Thammati enrolled in CMU and joined the Thai Music and Fine Arts Club. However, he and some classmates wanted to focus more exclusively on Lanna music, art and culture. Therefore, Sanan, Suchat Kanchai and Suthep Saenmongkol joined fellow student Suphoj Boonmee to start the Lanna Folk Club in 1984, and set about the task of learning everything related to the traditional culture of the North.<sup>11</sup> Since expertise was limited in Chiang Mai, they made frequent trips around the Lanna region to interview elderly villagers, make recordings and take notes. Newer members soon joined them in their efforts and carried on the practice once they left. Eventually the club also made recordings under the name *Ueang Lanna*. These early activities of CMU's Lanna Folk Club were crucial in two regards – they began to rebuild significantly the body of knowledge on traditional Lanna culture in Chiang Mai; and made this information available to the growing community of young Lanna culture enthusiasts in Chiang Mai.

More and more university students and young adults were acting on their interest in traditional Lanna culture. By the early 1990s, a core of young musicians emerged in this drive for renewed traditional Lanna music culture in Chiang Mai. One of these people was a gifted musician named Panutat Apichanatong, at that time a student at CMCDA. Panutat (today widely known as “Khru Add”) was fascinated by traditional Lanna music from a young age, but did not really begin playing it until he borrowed a friend's *khloi*. Because of his years of careful watching and listening, Panutat quickly learned many Lanna folk instruments; the wider Chiang Mai community was especially

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<sup>10</sup> Mongkol, Dedication letter, *Thai Music in Lanna* (in Thai).

<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint the original student(s) behind forming the club. Founding advisor Direkchai Mahatdhanasin pointed to Suphoj in an interview with Thitinadda Maneewan, although both Sanan Thammati and Ruthairat Kanjana (Suchat's younger sister) have mentioned the other names. This could just point to the collaborative, close-knit nature of the club in its early days.

surprised to see a young *pi* player, something many had not seen for a generation.

One of Panutat's favorite activities at that time was to enter traditional music competitions, often with friends from the Lanna Folk Club. The young ensemble drew lots of attention among a field that consisted almost entirely of elderly players. They also won virtually every time, probably because of their youthful dexterity, energy and long hours of practice (Panutat speaks fondly of spending nearly all his free time – even eating and sleeping – with the club).

Before long, Panutat and a few of his friends formed an ensemble named Nakatan. In the words of Prasong Saeng-ngam (Khru Bird), one of several notable traditional music teachers in present-day Chiang Mai, Nakatan had three “tigers”: Panutat, Somboon Kawichai (Khru Boy)<sup>12</sup> and Udomli Trakul (Khru Kiat). These three eventually parted ways, but went on to be significant figures for traditional Lanna music in Chiang Mai (as Prasong put it, “Each of these three has enormous talent and expertise; in fact, so much that they can't all stay in the same ensemble.”). Another key member of the group was Lipikorn Makaew, who helped found the Lanna Folk Arts Club at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL). Members of this club and the students from the nearby Lanna Folk Club at CMU collaborated very closely throughout that decade.

One of Nakatan's efforts was a set of recordings released in 1996 to mark the 700th anniversary of Chiang Mai. In fact, this anniversary – a celebration of regional history and local pride – provided an impetus and highly visible opportunities for young traditional musicians to perform. For Boonying Kanthawong (another music teacher in Chiang Mai), an especially significant performance was at Chiang Mai's newly built 700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sports Complex, where the 1995 Southeast Asian Games were held. Boonying remembers the opening ceremony, which featured a large number of *klong sabadchai* playing together, making an impression on many in the city.

Besides the buildup of musical expertise and the increase of prestige afforded traditional music by events, such as the 700<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Name recently changed to Wisanthat Ratanamongkhonkasem.



anniversary celebrations, disillusionment with Thailand's fervent push towards development and modernization also played a sizeable role in the renewal of traditional Lanna music and culture in Chiang Mai. While this disaffection was clear from the time Jaran Manopetch first performed *folk song kham mueang*, the dissatisfaction with the relentless economic focus continued to inspire many more to pause and reexamine their cultural roots.

In late 1996, Chatchawan Thongdeelert built a coalition of area artists, academics, local and national government representatives and professionals out of concern for the declining position of traditional Lanna heritage.<sup>13</sup> Their desire for a return to local roots, instead of trusting solely in the supremacy of economic development, was swiftly justified when Thai markets imploded during the financial meltdown of early 1997. Further discussions led to the establishment of an annual *Suepsan Lanna* festival, celebrating traditional local food, music, dance and other cultural expressions.

The first *Suepsan Lanna* festival was held in 1997 at CMU's Center for the Promotion of Arts and Culture and was widely attended by the general public. Performers mostly consisted of youths and young adults, with the audience made up of all ages. Thitinadda Chinachan (now Maneewan) wrote of being deeply impressed when she saw a young boy playing the *klong sabadchai*, and also when she overheard two boys wondering aloud where they too might learn to perform like this.<sup>14</sup>

## **Ways and Spaces for Transmitting Lanna Music in Modern-Day Chiang Mai**

### **Formal Education and Transmission**

A lot of traditional Lanna music transmission in Chiang Mai nowadays falls within the scope of formal education. Although it is often combined with more traditional informal study outside school, most children will have significant encounters with traditional Lanna music in the classroom. This instruction often focuses on acquainting

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<sup>13</sup> Sirinut Wongsakul, Personal interview, 21 January 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Thitinadda Chinachan, *Suepsan Lanna*, 58 (in Thai).

the young learner with the basics of Lanna music – the instruments, the melodies and probably some basic techniques for playing. Many schools also have a traditional Lanna music club, where students who are more interested can hone their talents further.

At Wattanothaipayap School, Kamol Tangtua teaches Thai and Lanna music to regular classes and an after-school club. Kamol studied at CMCDA from 1971 to 1979, and sees his role primarily as one of conservation and passing on Lanna music according to tradition. However, he is open to adapting his pedagogical style and tactics. In addition to customary demonstration, he normally uses handouts with basic information on each instrument and notation of common Lanna songs. He has also just overseen the renovation of his classroom to incorporate computer, audio and video technology. To take advantage of this, he has developed instructional videos as well.

At Thepbodint School, Ratakan Singkaew is the Lanna music teacher and advisor of the traditional Lanna music club. Ratakan first became interested in traditional Lanna music at the funeral of his grandfather, and subsequently learned to play from a variety of sources – mostly informal. Ratakan began teaching at Thepbodint in 1997 and started worked on building a club for students interested in traditional Lanna music. Ratakan says the administration has been completely supportive since the beginning, and in 2004, the club's ensemble won a prize from Princess Sirindhorn. Thepbodint has also had a connection with CMCDA – Witep Kantima, a recently deceased expert in traditional Lanna music at CMCDA, regularly made trips to Thepbodint to help advise.

To the northeast is Dara Academy, where Kittidet Onpha teaches Thai music, including the music of the North. A native of Phitsanulok, his focus is on the classical music of Central Thailand, which he says is somewhat neglected in Chiang Mai. In contrast to the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lanna music has become more popular than traditional Thai music in Chiang Mai. At Dara Academy, there are three ensembles, according to the skill of the players. Kittidet, who only began playing Thai music as a university student, oversees the basic training. For more advanced students, he enlists the help of Phiphatphong Masiri, a professor at Payap University. Dara Academy is

also a private school, so it does not receive government funding. Instead, all music programs at the school are given a single budget, and it must be divided between them. Kittidet focuses on teaching traditional Thai and Lanna styles, but says he is also open to adaptation.

Another private Christian school nearby is Prince Royal's College. Over the years, the school has gained a respected reputation for its teaching of traditional Lanna music through the efforts of teacher Dechawut Sittiyot. Dechawut still teaches at the school, but the Lanna music program all but ceased because of his advancing age and tighter schedule. PRC has recently hired Tomanon Hongthong, the son of a well-known *so* singer in Chiang Dao, and charged him with renewing the program. Tomanon majored in Thai Music at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, where he also studied traditional Lanna music with Boonying Kanthawong. He wants his students to see traditional Lanna music as a deep part of their shared cultural identity, and not just another subject.

The Chiang Mai College of Dramatic Arts has had a larger part than any other secondary school in transmitting traditional Lanna music. Central Thai music has been the focus since its opening in 1971, but the CMCDA has been a repository of regional performance traditions as well. The school can be regarded as a purveyor of the 'high' traditions of *Chao Dararasmi* because many of her former students went on to teach there.<sup>15</sup> Students of CMCDA are often active in the community, whether dancing or playing in *khantok* shows or collaborating with other area youth in performing traditional Lanna music. Traditional Lanna music is not offered as a 'major' (*wicha ek*), but music students still spend two hours per week learning local music, and there are opportunities for further study in clubs.

When questioned about conserving traditional forms versus teaching adaptations in Lanna music, Rakkiat Panyayot, a teacher of traditional Lanna music at CMCDA, explained that the school regards conservation as the foundation, or basis, for creativity. Rakkiat believes in fostering students' natural creativity. For example, a melody will be

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<sup>15</sup> Thitinadda Maneewan, *Folk Performing Arts of the Tai Yuan Ethnic Group*, Book 2, 10 (in Thai).

taught according to tradition, but if students “put themselves into the music” by changing some notes, rhythms or ornamentations, Rakkiat approves what he considers a natural musical development. On the other hand, if traditional dancers try to wear trendy costumes that do not reflect Lanna customs, they would be told to change. This kind of carefully regulated change is a hallmark of musical adaptation in CMCDA, and similar approaches are shared by several other musicians and teachers in Chiang Mai. However, their approach to traditional Lanna music is not universally admired outside the realm of formal education. CMCDA strictly applies methods for teaching Central Thai classical music, whereas the musical style of the North is much less structured.

There are also a few higher education options for the study of traditional Lanna music in Chiang Mai. Chiang Mai Rajabhat University is regarded highly for its instruction in Lanna and Central Thai music. Students cannot major in Lanna music – they must choose Thai music – but the university offers classes on the subject. Boonying Kanthawong graduated from Rajabhat and has gone on to teach there, other schools and also to groups and individuals outside of schools. At Rajabhat, he teaches both theory and performance classes. Theory includes history, background, beliefs, ensemble and instrumental characteristics and in-depth study of traditional Lanna repertoire. Students may also join the university’s Local Music Club.

Payap University is known best for Western music, but it also offers a Thai music program. All students are required to study at least some Thai music, and they can also choose to join a traditional Lanna ensemble. Phiphatphong Masiri teaches both Thai and Lanna music, and says that each semester, around five to seven students choose to study traditional Lanna music. Adaptations to traditional music are somewhat more prominent due to the music department’s strong Western music focus. Also, like the affiliated schools Prince Royal’s College and Dara Academy, Payap is a Christian university; therefore, certain ceremonies – such as the *wai khru* – have been adjusted to Christian beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Phiphatphong Masiri, personal interview, 16 Nov 2009.

The most significant musical activity at CMU is the aforementioned Lanna Folk Club. Nowadays, members do not go out to record information on Northern traditions very often, although they sometimes invite experts to come teach. Most of the teaching is from the older members (*run phi*) to the younger ones (*run nong*). Their performances include both university and outside activities, occasionally in neighboring countries.

Ekkapong Kuntarak joined in 1999. He first heard of CMU's Lanna Folk Club at his grandfather's funeral when he examined the cover of an *Ueang Lanna* (then the ensemble of the Lanna Folk Club) tape that was playing over the loudspeakers. He decided that if he ever made it to CMU, he would be in this club. Although he only played *sueng* when he first joined, Ekkapong says the supportive and non-competitive camaraderie of the club helped him become skilled in a range of instruments. He also credits this dynamic for the club's longevity; although similar clubs are often organized in individual university faculties, they rarely last long because there is usually not such a strong emphasis on good relations between the members.

Apiwat Intapan, who joined in 2006, is also appreciative of the way club members help each other. In his estimation, the club is more about fostering positive experiences than building up each member's personal skills as a musician or dancer. Apiwat also notes that the Lanna Folk Club – unlike the Thai Music and Dance Club from which it came – is concerned with all folkways, from music and dance to language and beliefs.

CMU's Lanna Folk Club is and has been an important source of adaptations in traditional Lanna music and dance. The club is responsible for the creation of dances and music, such as *Fon Hariphunchai*, which has entered the standard repertoire, and is widely performed in Chiang Mai and throughout the region. One notable figure driving this adaptation was Direkchai Mahatdhanasin, the club's advisor until his death last year. When he started teaching at CMU in 1971, he took over as the advisor for the Thai Music and Dance Club. When some members split to found the Lanna Folk Club, Direkchai began advising them. He was responsible for the creation of several dances, and the process of developing these performances shows how he



encouraged the collaborative and all-encompassing nature of the Lanna Folk Club. Direkchai found inspiration nearly everywhere for his dances – a Tai Yai game, villagers picking tea leaves, and even temple architecture. Other club members would compose accompanying music; finally the members would rehearse and present the work in performance.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned earlier, members of the Lanna Folk Arts Club at RMUTL have also supported the traditional music culture of Chiang Mai. Although this club's focus is more specifically on art, dance and music, many activities are similar to the CMU's Lanna Folk Club – performances at university functions, temple fairs and ceremonies, and other outside engagements such as area festivals. Lipikorn Makaew, one of the original founders and once a member of Nakatan and Lai Muang, is now head of the university's Thai Art department and teaches music to the club members.

### **Informal Education and Transmission of Traditional Lanna Music**

Over the years, the RMUTL Lanna Folk Arts Club has shared a special relationship with Lai Muang, a well-known traditional Lanna music ensemble in Chiang Mai. Lai Muang was established in 1996 when Somboon Kawichai left Nakatan (the ensemble with Panutat Apichanatong and Udomli Trakul). Somboon, who invited a few area experts and professors to advise the fledgling group, was soon joined by Lipikorn and several other young musicians. Lai Muang's first performance was for the inaugural *Suepsan Lanna* festival held in 1997. The group gained renown, and in 2001, they even traveled to Canada for a performance in Vancouver. Today they give fewer performances, but are still highly regarded. Their repertoire consists of traditional melodies, original compositions and even improvisation. Lai Muang was the first group to incorporate *phin pia* into an ensemble. This traditionally solo instrument produces a soft, subtly undulating sound, but with the aid of amplification, can be heard alongside other instruments, like *salo* and *sueng*.<sup>18</sup> Lai Muang has also included

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<sup>17</sup> Thitinadda Maneewan, personal communication, 15 December 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Thitinadda Chinachan, *The Role of Lanna Youth in Lanna Performing Art's Maintenance*, 63 (in Thai).

instruments from other ethnic groups in the North, like the *sae mu*, a Lahu lute. Occasionally they have even invited vocalists to perform with them, most notably Suntaree Vechanont, the former duet partner of Jaran Manopetch.

One group that has shared the stage with Lai Muang is the Rak Lanna group, led by Prasong Saeng-ngam. Prasong started the group in 1999 as a university student, and – like the Lanna Folk Club at CMU – the group has sought a holistic understanding of traditional Lanna culture. Besides playing music, Rak Lanna goes on outings to learn about the area's natural resources, takes part in traditional ceremonies such as the *dam hua* during Songkran, and even develops their own traditions. One of these events is a bonfire celebration that features local musical activities like *klong sabadchai*. Other groups from around the region are invited to participate, and on occasion has been attended by national artist *Chao* Khruakaew Na Chiangmai. The musicians of Rak Lanna are generally secondary school students (plus Prasong), although some have already gone on to university. Recently, they have been studying *piphat mon* with Boonying Kanthawong. Since 2000, Rak Lanna has met at *Hong Hian Suepsan Phumipanaya Lanna* (English name: Lanna Wisdom School), where Prasong teaches music.

The Lanna Wisdom School grew out of the *Suepsan Lanna* festival organized by Chatchawan Thongdeelert. Although the festival was a success, organizers wanted to go further. In June of 2000, *Hong Hian Suepsan Phumipanya Lanna* opened to teach Lanna arts and traditional local wisdom to a total of about 80 students. In addition to music, instruction covers a range of traditional knowledge in Lanna culture. Each subject is further divided into basic instruction and advanced classes. While the advanced classes are mostly arranged between the students and teachers, the more structured basic classes are taught on Saturday and Sundays over an eight-week period. Before starting classes, students join in a Northern style *wai khru* ceremony to show respect for their teachers.

Each basic level course is taken by an average of 15 students, and the class will not be offered unless there are at least 10 students. About 30 percent of the total number entering classes at this level do not finish their chosen course. At the root of students' decisions to stop studying is

the feeling that it is not relevant enough to merit the use of their time. Indeed, 30 percent is a high dropout rate, but on the other hand, this also means that roughly seventy percent of students find this method relevant and workable.

The students range from around age six to mature adults. Since the school does not receive regular support from outside sources, students are charged a small tuition, which varies by subject. In 2007, most courses were 400 baht, with more material-intensive ones at 600 or 800 baht. The money goes to support the operation of the school, and to pay the teachers a small salary (currently around 3,500 baht for the whole 8 weeks of instruction), although most instructors have additional work elsewhere.

At present, there are about 60 to 70 teachers, although the number swells to over 80 when taking into account the number of professional *so* singers that sometimes come to teach. The teachers can be roughly classified into two main groups: “old generation” (*run kao*) and “new generation” (*run mai*). These do not refer to the ages of the teachers, but rather to when they began teaching. While the trend of transmitting traditional cultural knowledge is still generally from older to younger, this new model recognizes that this transmission is no longer necessarily a function of age.

The school has identified two main challenges facing their continued success. The first is that printed materials are scarce because transmission of these subjects has traditionally been oral. The school is working to develop texts, but in the meantime, the shortage is most problematic with younger students, who expect books and handouts. School officials are also concerned that the knowledge students gain from *Hong Hian Suepsan Phumipanya Lanna* is not deep or lasting enough because of limited class time and conflicting social pressure on the students.<sup>19</sup>

One initiative that teaches only traditional Lanna music is at Wat Suan Dok. The main instructor is Panutat Apichanatong, who started this weekend instruction program at Wat Loi Kroh in 1999; he moved it to Wat Suan Dok around 2005. Panutat’s philosophy on teaching

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<sup>19</sup> Lanna Wisdom School, Untitled document, nd, obtained 21 Jan 2009 (in Thai).

traditional Lanna music is that it has to be fun. He believes that musical instruments are tools in creating a fun atmosphere, not valid ends in themselves. Panutat's goal is to help the group of learners cooperate and have fun together – not shape them into professional musicians – so he encourages pupils to relax and enjoy what they are doing. This contrasts with his experience on the receiving end of tiresome rote instruction solely focused on teaching the notes. When Panutat started teaching at Wat Loi Kroh, about 30 pupils showed up. By the second year, the number reached about 200. Instruction has always been free of charge and completely open – meaning students can attend whenever they choose. Every Saturday and Sunday, they gather around Panutat (now Panutat is increasingly busy with outside obligations, so former pupils sometimes teach instead) and play together from books of traditional Lanna songs Panutat has notated. Although he does not get any financial compensation, Panutat says he enjoys the familiarity and respect this teaching has given him in the community.

Another temple offering free instruction in traditional Lanna music is Wat Lam Chang, inside the walled portion of the city. Boonying Kanthawong often teaches here on Saturdays, although others teach there during weekdays after school and on Sundays as well. The temple owns the instruments, and allows anyone to come and practice. Boonying sometimes takes musicians to perform in other temples or engagements in Chiang Mai.

A group that grew out of this temple instruction is Phet Lanna; the first members of this group were students of Panutat at Wat Loi Kroh. One of them – a nine-year-old boy (Chinachot Phumwiset, now 19) – asked his mother to help his friends and him start an ensemble. In 2000, they began rehearsing at Wat Lok Moli, just across from the north wall of the city, and closely affiliated with Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. They built their musical prowess and soon began playing for free (sometimes they were offered a free meal) on a variety of occasions. They started to earn money from playing when then began entering competitions. The members divided any prize money among themselves. Nowadays, Phet Lanna still performs around Chiang Mai, but gets paid. They no longer have regular rehearsals, only getting together to prepare for an upcoming performance. If some are unable to make it, or the

performance is especially large, they enlist the help of students from CMCDA.

The last main type of informal transmission of traditional Lanna music in Chiang Mai is the most traditional: instruction at a teacher's home. However, even this is quite different from the past, when pupils would live with the teacher and help around the house in exchange for the knowledge and skills learned. Nowadays, a common setup is that a group of neighborhood youths gathers at the home of a local expert. The group often has some kind of semi-official recognition, and may even receive modest financial or material support from government or private organizations to offset costs.

One such expert in Chiang Mai is Manop Yarana. Born in 1931, Manop was named a national artist in 2005, and teaches pupils at his home not far from the Chiang Mai train station. Manop is especially skilled at playing various Lanna drums and martial arts-style dancing such as *fon choeng* and *fon dap*. In addition to teaching at home, he has taught special classes at CMCDA as well. Despite his advanced age, he still spends spare time operating a *samlo* (bicycle taxi) around town.

Another teacher is Suthas Sinthopthong, a native of Mae Hong Son with a Tai Yai ethnic background. Besides being knowledgeable and skilled at Tai Yai performance, Khru Suthas also joins other teachers in his neighborhood in San Pi Suea to teach area children after school or on weekends. Altogether, there are six teachers and about 20 students who are able to study traditional Lanna music and Tai Yai music. Approximately 70 percent of the group's performances are local, although they have gone to Mae Hong Son, Phayao and even Bangkok. The teachers have a goal of helping each student achieve a solid understanding and ability to perform traditional Lanna music. Neighbors are supportive and sometimes even come to watch and listen.

A unique meeting point between formal and informal music education in Northern Thailand is the *withayakon* system, which helps foster cohesion and variety in teaching about traditional Lanna music. *Withayakon* means expert or special lecturer on a given topic; in this case, Lanna music. Because official government curricula support it, schools in Chiang Mai are often able to invite these experts from around the community to come teach on different topics. *Withayakon* can be



from any background – from experienced musicians in the Chiang Mai area, to teachers at other educational institutions – as long as they have expertise to share.

Nearly all musicians mentioned in this article have been *withayakon* (and many have also invited *withayakon* to teach their students). One prominent example is again Panutat Apichanatong, because of his background and desire to make Lanna music approachable and fun for learners. Panutat is frequently invited to give talks at area schools and universities, and he also helps teach on culturally-informed tour guide work for the government's *Ton Kla Achip* program for unemployed Thais. Manop Yarana, the national artist, has been a notable *withayakon* at CMCDA. Ensembles are also part of this system; Lai Muang has gone to Prince Royal's College to teach Lanna music.

### **Other Spaces for Musical Transmission**

A major outlet for traditional Lanna music transmission is funerals and other temple ceremonies. These events are a common place for everyday Chiang Mai residents to encounter traditional Lanna music, either through live performance or through recordings. It is also a significant source of performance opportunities for traditional Lanna musicians. Virtually every ensemble is eager to play at temple ceremonies or festivities, from Boonying Kanthawong's group at Wat Lam Chang to Panutat's group Nakatan, which recently performed at the cremation of Wat Phra Singh's former abbot.

Another popular venue for traditional Lanna musicians in modern society has been competitions. As opposed to temples, music competitions are not a traditional venue for Lanna music, but they have motivated youth to perform Lanna folk music. Competitions also give musicians a chance to mix with each other, share ideas and show their creativity and expertise. In the recent past, competitions were more prevalent and took place in a wide variety of settings, but now they are mostly limited to large-scale competitions put on by the Cultural Council of Chiang Mai or the Ministry of Culture. There are typically three age levels: students (in primary school), youth (any contestants under 18), and competitions for adults. There are often multiple rounds,

and the winners of prestigious regional competitions get prizes from Princess Sirindhorn or other royals.<sup>20</sup>

Tourism has become a big industry in Chiang Mai and the region, and one reason foreign and Thai tourists flock to the North is to experience Lanna culture. Performances and recordings geared toward the tourist market are therefore big moneymakers for many Chiang Mai musicians. They understandably tailor performances to please their patrons, and end up changing the musical traditions they transmit.

The classic example of this is *khantok*. After Kraisi Nimmanhaeminda's aforementioned development of the *khantok* dinner show in 1953, his younger sister opened the Old Chiang Mai Cultural Center in 1971 to present these shows to tourists.<sup>21</sup> Many question the ease with which *khantok* shows adapt, mix, dilute and even invent "authentic" Lanna performance arts. The time allotted to each performance is strictly managed, so musicians and dancers have had to find ways to shorten each presentation.<sup>22</sup> Some establishments also mix repertoire, removing it even further from its "proper" context; for example, audiences might witness a scene from central Thai *khon* and a Tai Yai dance formerly reserved for *ok phansa* interspersed with dances from *Chao Dararasmi's* palace. Despite these criticisms, it has been an immense force in supporting traditional music and musicians in Chiang Mai. *Khantok* has also been a kind of a stepping-stone as students seek to advance their musical skills and careers. For example, Panutat practiced both his musical skills and ability to be an entertaining emcee through his work at a *khantok* restaurant, and Kittidet Onpha currently spends some evenings playing for *khantok* shows after teaching. Many other musicians and dancers in *khantok* are students at CMCD. However, CMU's Thitinadda Maneewan wrote of one *khantok* performer whose skills "neither regressed nor progressed" over the term

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<sup>20</sup> Kiatisak Phosiri, personal interview, 3 January 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Shahriari, "Lanna Music and Dance", 85.

<sup>22</sup> Thitinadda Maneewan, *Folk Performing Arts of the Tai Yuan Ethnic Group*, Book 2, 113 (in Thai).

of employment there, and the performer's enthusiasm for playing was sapped by the constant repetition.<sup>23</sup>

Although *khantok* dinners are also popular among Northern Thais and can be held at homes and schools, a more widespread effect of tourism on traditional Lanna music transmission for the average Chiang Mai citizen is from large performances for festivals and other occasions. Although most attendees are probably from Chiang Mai and the surrounding area, the city welcomes a huge number of tourists to these celebrations each year. During Loi Krathong (or "Yee Peng" as it is called in Chiang Mai), the local government goes all out in sponsoring events throughout the city. Area musicians gather to perform in a long parade, and they also give performances on stages throughout the city. Performers represent a variety of styles, from traditional music and dance to *phleng kham mueang* and combined styles. On many other occasions, stages are set up at the Thapae gate or the courtyard around the Three Kings Monument, and both tourists and residents are welcome to watch the shows. This is one of the clearest examples of what some scholars point to as one of the main differences between traditional performance contexts and modern ones. Long ago, Lanna music and dance was much more participatory. Performers and audiences were not so clearly split into a creator-spectator dichotomy, although now this is customary.<sup>24</sup>

Many musicians and academics point to the Sunday Walking Street as the most authentic and spontaneous context for traditional Lanna folk music in modern-day Chiang Mai. Every Sunday evening, hundreds of area vendors line the road in the middle of Chiang Mai. They are joined by enterprising traditional Lanna music ensembles selling CDs and instruments, or simply performing for donations.

### **Technology and Transmission**

Recording on wax cylinder first came to Siam between 1894 and 1897. At first, this was only a hobby of wealthy Siamese, but some ventured out of Bangkok and recorded folk songs in the surrounding

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<sup>23</sup> Thitinadda Maneewan, *Folk Performing Arts of the Tai Yuan Ethnic Group*, Book 2, 114 (in Thai).

<sup>24</sup> Thitinadda Maneewan, personal communication, 27 Oct 2009.

area.<sup>25</sup> The lac bug (the source of shellac) is an insect native to Thailand, but the discs were pressed abroad – often in Belgium.<sup>26</sup> The first recording of Lanna music may have been a disc produced by the T. Ngek Chuan Store’s “Rabbit Brand” record label in 1937, featuring *so* music and traditional Lanna songs.<sup>27</sup> Most early recording artists in the North were *so* singers like Talai Kanthachan (performing under the name “Kaew Talai”), who recorded in Chiang Mai and Bangkok.<sup>28</sup>

Kaew Talai and area musicians also made recordings for Chiang Mai’s first radio station, *Withayu Pracham Thin 2* (WPT2; widely referred to as “*wo po to song*”) which officially opened in 1956. The Central Thai government established WPT2 to increase their communication with rural residents in the North. About 40 percent of each broadcast day consisted of music, and nearly one third of that was local music. The station had its own recording facilities, and area musicians would respond to periodic invitations to come record. Today, musicians no longer need WPT2’s studio as technological advances have made recording equipment common, but they distribute recordings to the station, and the broadcasting schedule still includes regional music.<sup>29</sup> In fact, one of the biggest differences is that they are no longer the only communication outlet in the region, but are joined by numerous other stations, television and internet.

Radio was prevalent in Chiang Mai for about 20 years before Jaran Manopetch, Chiang Mai’s most well-known recording artist, began recording. He first released a tape that sold well in Marnit Atchawong’s (his eventual manager) shop. Initially, it provoked the ire of some staunch traditionalists, but Jaran gained support as folk song *kham mueang* greatly increased in popularity.<sup>30</sup> His early albums featured newly composed songs alongside songs that blended traditional Lanna folk music with modern musical tastes. Jaran’s fame and popularity spread as he released approximately 20 albums and acted in

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<sup>25</sup> Phunphit, “The Initial Era of Folk Music Records, Part 2” (in Thai).

<sup>26</sup> Phunphit, “The Initial Era of Folk Music Records, Part 1” (in Thai).

<sup>27</sup> Yangson, “I Hear Music and Think of T. Ngek Chuan”, 46 (in Thai).

<sup>28</sup> *Profile: funmuang* (in Thai).

<sup>29</sup> Wanlop Manvongprom, personal interview, 8 Dec 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Si Re, *A Prize for Dreams*, 49 (in Thai).

many movies, television shows and stage plays.<sup>31</sup> In early September 2001, Jaran died of a heart attack at his home in Lamphun. He was only 50 years old, but over his 24-year career as an entertainer, he not only pioneered a genre, but also helped firmly establish it as the next step in the evolution of Lanna's popular folk music.

Besides making his compositions widely available through recordings, Jaran directly affected transmission by opening his studio free of charge to area students in need of recording technology. The indirect influence is far greater and difficult to measure. Besides having been instrumental in encouraging Northern Thais to renew their connection to their own cultural heritage, Jaran's recordings have inspired many other musicians. Pannarawee Pojanasun, a 27 year-old singer with several years of formal musical training from the Chiang Mai Dramatics Arts College and the Buditpatanasilpa Institute in Bangkok, performs under the name Nam Min Chiang Dao. On a recent album, she sings with a male schoolteacher from Chiang Mai in performing arrangements of songs composed by Jaran, including a *kham mueang* reworking of a song composed by Paul McCartney and recorded on the Beatles "White Album." On the CD, Nam Min also performs a newly composed song by Northern singer/songwriter Patinya Tangtrakul.<sup>32</sup> The "establishment" also seems to be behind Pannarawee: Marnit Atchawong, Jaran's manager, has provided her with advice and support and helped produce a CD for her.

Patinya, in whose apartment-turned-studio Nam Min recorded her album, is another figure currently active in *kham mueang* music. He has worked in radio and with the Thai recording giant GMM Grammy, but is currently an independent songwriter and musician in Chiang Mai. Another *folk song kham mueang* group is Mai Muang, which performs at a restaurant of the same name in Chiang Mai. They compose new *folk song kham mueang*, perform in their restaurant and elsewhere, and have released several CDs.

As described earlier, recordings of traditional Lanna music have been much more frequent since the time of *Ueang Lanna* (of the CMU

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<sup>31</sup> Sources disagree on the number of Jaran's albums because some were released only locally or in a limited capacity.

<sup>32</sup> Marnit Atchawong, telephone Communication, 9 Sep 2008.



Lanna Folk Club) and Nakatan. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Chiang Mai record store Tippanetr Enterprise helped enable emerging traditional musicians create and market recordings. Another important step came in the late 1990s, not long after Bringkop Wora-Urai returned to Chiang Mai after studying abroad. Bringkop Wora-Urai met Panutat Apichanatong by chance, and in the course of their conversation, Bringkop asked Panutat if he was interested in doing a recording – Bringkop as producer and Panutat as performer.

The resulting CD was recorded in a single, uninterrupted 48-hour session. Panutat played each instrument on a separate track, and Bringkop layered them together to create an ensemble sound. The finished CD was released in 2000 under the title “Traditional Music of Lanna: Khantoke.” In 2001, this was followed with another release, titled “Traditional Music of Lanna: Instrumental Music.” Whereas previous recordings of traditional Lanna music were mostly intended for a specialized, local audience, these two recordings focused on educating people in Bangkok and foreign countries about the music of Northern Thailand. Album notes were in English, and the musical selections were chosen to help people understand the nature of Lanna music.

Although the outward focus meant that the recordings have only sold a small amount for local use, the albums set a new standard in producing recordings of traditional Lanna music. When Panutat, Bringkop and a friend of his began distributing the first CD, other musicians in the area were able to hear the quality (fully-digital production as opposed to the conventional method of recording to reel-to-reel tape), and they certainly noticed the brisk sales of the albums. These CDs were a new force in transmitting Lanna music in Chiang Mai – not necessarily by teaching new musical techniques or styles, but by spreading an awareness of available possibilities.

Panutat has gone on to play on many other recordings, and he has even gained a notable following as a *luk thung* recording artist. He has made a number of CDs with producers outside Thailand as well. Bringkop has produced more albums for others, and has even released recordings of his own. In addition, he has given lots of advice to other musicians who want to make CDs. While the technology of the day has

made it relatively simple for any musician to record, they are sometimes unfamiliar with the process of creating and releasing a recording, so they ask Bringkop for advice on production and distribution.

One musician Bringkop has worked with is Somboon Kawichai, the founder of Lai Muang. Bringkop penned the liner notes for the ensemble's most recent release (2008), "Spirit of Lanna," is another CD of traditional Lanna music aimed primarily at listeners outside of Thailand. The album is part of a regional music project by AMI Records in Bangkok and they recruited the services of Thomas van Nes, a Dutch recording engineer who has lived just outside of Chiang Mai for many years. Van Nes identified one of the common reasons given by visitors to Thailand who find it difficult to listen to traditional Lanna music: the ensemble sound can seem monolithic, and the lack of variety in timbres and textures can be monotonous to Western ears accustomed to a diverse aural spectrum.

During the recording, van Nes worked to isolate the sounds of the instruments by putting each player in a separate room instead of recording the entire ensemble in a single space. This yielded multiple tracks for each song (one track for each instrument). In the mixing process, van Nes decided to try what he terms a "bluegrass" or "jazz" approach – letting individual instruments take the lead for different sections of each song. Somboon advised on aspects of the music, such as when the music reached a point of repetition fitting for a change in timbre or texture, and van Nes would choose to highlight one or two instruments while softening the other instruments. Somboon is careful to note that the result of this mixing style is technically not in accordance with traditional ideals, but he also says that it adds feeling to the music and makes the melodies more approachable for some listeners. Since recording, Lai Muang has even begun showcasing this style in their live performances, especially with audiences of mostly non-Thais.

The recordings by Panutat and Lai Muang are just two examples of widespread traditional Lanna music recordings. Bringkop feels distribution is currently more of a problem for these recordings, as wide access to recording technology has produced a surplus of recorded tracks waiting to find outlets. These recordings function as means of

direct transmission and of inspiration (or “indirect transmission”) for area musicians.

Today there are university and community radio stations in Chiang Mai that broadcast Lanna folk music – from traditional instrumental pieces such as *salo so sueng* to more recent adapted forms like *folk song kham mueang*. The website of stations CM77 has a searchable database of primarily *kham mueang* genres (*folk song kham mueang*, *luk thung kham mueang*, *hip hop kham mueang*, etc.). The Northern Thai Information Service of Chiang Mai University maintains a website with detailed background information on folk music types in Northern Thailand, as well as an archive of over 500 tracks recorded by artist from Chiang Mai and elsewhere in Lanna.

As Kamol Tangtua’s efforts at Wattanothaipayap School show, modern technology can aid in the classroom. At Payap University, Bringkop uses YouTube and other online media in his ethnomusicology classes. Many other teachers of traditional Lanna music play expert recordings as models for their students to emulate. Another technique is to record the student and then play it back so the student can hear exactly what was performed well or needs improvement. The recording can also be compared to a recording of an accomplished musician, thereby highlighting which points in the student’s rendition need special attention. Prasong Saeng-ngam also uses recording technology in these ways at the Lanna Wisdom School. Prasong said students sometimes call from the CD shop and ask him for advice and recommendations. Pannarawee Pojanasun (Nam Min Chiang Dao) recalls one singing teacher at the Chiang Mai Dramatic Arts College who passed out homemade CDs at the beginning of the semester. Students had to sing these songs throughout the term, and if any part was not satisfactory, the teacher could then refer to the recording. Most teachers also recall using tapes when they were students when opportunities to study traditional music were not as common. Prasong remembers the sense of accomplishment he felt when he and his friends (or sometimes he alone) brought home recordings and practiced until they could play along, and Panutat also speaks fondly of spending time trying to reproduce the melodies on tapes from his teachers. The same type of self-instruction has happened with *so* music. *Lakhon so* has been recorded to VCD, and

students have supplemented their learning by using the discs to practice on their own.<sup>33</sup>

A frequent complaint against recordings of folk music – not only from Thailand – is that they remove the music from its context. However, as CMU professor and musician Thitipol Kanteewong has described, traditional Lanna music in Chiang Mai is in a process of “re-contextualization,” that is, practitioners are determining how to once again make it relevant to Chiang Mai’s modern urban society.<sup>34</sup> Recordings and related technological applications are a part of this search for a new context.

### **The Relationship between Transmission and Styles of Lanna Traditional Music**

The relationship between transmission and musical styles in Chiang Mai has been one of parallel growth – as avenues of transmission have increased, so have the number of Lanna musical styles. It would be premature to claim that increased transmission has led to more diverse musical styles (or vice versa); such a pronouncement would require more detailed and sustained analysis. However, it would be fair to hypothesize that one could not exist without the other. New options for musical transmission in Chiang Mai support increased stylistic variation in traditional Lanna music, just as some stylistic developments support alternative ways of transmission.

However, this link is not a closed equation. In Chiang Mai, the renewal of traditional music culture has been shaped by many dedicated personalities. Virtually every Chiang Mai music teacher, musician or professional mentioned in this article has built and sustained this renewal through his or her own dedication, capitalizing on available materials and ideas to help transmit pieces of Lanna musical culture. The pieces naturally contain their own interpretations and creative developments. In practical terms, this means Panutat Apichanatong

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<sup>33</sup> Wiwan, “Aesthetics of Communication in Modern So Dramas of the Lanna People”, 202 (in Thai).

<sup>34</sup> Thitipol, “The Re-Contextualization of Lanna Traditional Music in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand”.

teaches with specific mannerisms and records in certain styles, while Prasong Saeng-ngam and Boonying Kanthawong teach in two more slightly different ways. Academics such as Sanan Thammati or Lipikorn Makaew might focus on more strict conservation of historical traditions, while artists like Patinya Tangtrakul experiment with Lanna music and welcome similarly diverse input to Lanna music culture. These figures all take advantage of the many possibilities for transmission described in the above pages, and thus pass on their take on traditional Lanna music culture to a diverse audience of learners and listeners. In many instances, transmission has not just depended on the notable efforts of one person, but on the significant output of collaboration, as illustrated by the CMU Lanna Folk Club and other academic clubs.

The other major variable is the availability and careful adoption of technological developments. Recording devices, broadcast technology and computers have transcended distinctions between formal education, informal instruction and community performances, and such technological developments are used prominently in each context. Technology also showcases the widest amount of stylistic variety as it allows people to create and disseminate highly varied styles and ideas. A single online forum can feature debating views on the appropriateness of Western musical influences on Lanna folk music; at Chiang Mai record store Tippanetr Enterprise, *kham mueang* records are sold alongside CD's of traditional *pat kong* and *salo so sueng* music.

### **Examples of Parallel Expansion in Transmission and Traditional Lanna Music Styles**

Informal instruction is the most traditional form of musical transmission in Chiang Mai, but even these possibilities have diversified. Some youth seek out neighborhood musicians like Manop Yarana, or the program of which Suthas Sinthopthong is a part. A different type of instruction happens at temples like Wat Suan Dok with Panutat Apichanatong or Wat Lam Chang with Boonying Kanthawong. Another distinctive program of teaching is at the Lanna Wisdom School, which has applied a more formal education model to traditional cultural subjects. Still others have gone from some of these programs to



start their own ensembles, like Chinachot Phumwiset with Phet Lanna. A similar case is 15 year-old Kiatisak Phosiri, a current CMCDA student who studied at Wat Loi Kroh and Wat Suan Dok with Panutat for several years before joining a traditional music ensemble called *Sen Siang Wiang Ping*.

The influx of musical styles in formal academia also reflects the parallel growth in ways of transmission. The Lanna Folk Club at CMU and the Lanna Folk Arts Club at RMUTL have been able to transmit their traditional recreations and new ideas through collaborations with other institutions and performances in the community. The knowledge collected in these settings has also found an outlet in the formation and continuation of groups like Somboon Kawichai's Lai Muang ensemble. The flow of ideas and exchange of information common in the academic world can be seen in Thitpol Kanteewong's creation of Changsaton while studying at CMU. Now a professor there, he continues to lead the group in its mixture of avant-garde and traditional, which is predominantly transmitted through performances, recordings and the Internet.

The possibilities presented by technological advances for transmission of traditional Lanna music culture are truly vast, and this article already pointed out some recent and present examples in Chiang Mai. Whether through recordings that reach other musicians, student recordings in the learning process, or internet conduits for organizing and disseminating information on traditional Lanna music culture, technology has a wide-ranging role in the simultaneous growth of both transmission and stylistic adaptations.

### **Views on the Expansion of Transmission and Lanna Musical Styles**

Opinions vary on what degree of change in traditional Lanna music is acceptable. CMCDA teacher Rakkiat Panyayot echoes a view held by many academics – some change is necessary and inevitable, but should be regulated in a natural, smooth process. For example, people with this mindset would support rhythmic and melodic changes, but might have reservations about unconventional instrument combinations or radical changes in content. For example, one academic in Chiang Mai has said that Thitpol Kanteewong's Changsaton ensemble, which

experiments widely in both composition and performance technique, is a group that is still searching for itself. It is worth noting that the traditional Lanna music “establishment” also had initial misgivings about the changes Jaran Manopetch ushered in with his music, although another professor in Chiang Mai, Sanan Thammati, has said Jaran’s clear aims and carefully thought-out ideas are what made his contributions so successful.

Teachers in general education schools tend to be even a little more conservative, at least in their teaching approach. These teachers focus most on giving their students an understanding of the basics of traditional Lanna music. Although they can go deeper with students who join after-school clubs, one class period per week only gives them time to teach the basics, in accordance with traditional styles.

At all levels, and even in instruction programs outside of schools, teachers debate the merits of using notation with their students. A number of musicians said that traditional Lanna music played from notation sounds “stiff” or “hard” (*khaeng*) compared to memorized pieces. However, many teachers acknowledge that notation is useful, especially in saving time and making sure students learn the melody correctly. Most instruction – in and out of the classroom – relies on a combination of notation and memory. Thitinadda Maneewan notes that this drive toward convenience now pervades a lot of traditional Lanna music instruction, and stems from musicians having different aims from the past. Whereas they once learned music for ceremonial purposes, to aid communication or build enjoyment, now the goal is to perform.<sup>35</sup> Teaching without notation is still done though. Recently Boonying Kanthawong has been teaching *piphat* to Rak Lanna members for Prasong Saeng-ngam, and in one session, he taught them a piece by singing small sections until they could reproduce the whole melody. Khru Suthas Sinthopthong explained that notation is still not used in teaching Tai Yai music.

Among musicians, there is a wider spectrum of opinions on the expansion of Lanna musical styles. Again, there is a strong desire to

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<sup>35</sup> Thitinadda Maneewan, *Folk Performing Arts of the Tai Yuan Ethnic Group, Book 1*, 252 (in Thai).

remain true to historical traditions, but at the same time, artists are taking advantage of the many creative possibilities now open to them. Patinya Tangtrakul speaks passionately in favor of remaining open to all kinds of developments in Lanna music culture. He believes that all cultural influences are valid, and local music that incorporates new influences should be embraced in an open, understanding environment. While he maintains that musicians and academics who study and conserve historical traditions are necessary and valuable, he also contends that Lanna culture is not something to be guarded and kept away from change, but should be open for the general public to experience and adapt as they desire. Patinya believes that if “non-traditional” elements are continuously culled, eventually there will be nothing left with relevance to the general populace.

## Conclusion

Understanding how traditional Lanna music has been passed on is essential to recognizing its ebb and flow in Lanna society. From its generally overlooked position in the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional Lanna music again became widespread in Chiang Mai through a confluence of events, circumstances and individual efforts. The many avenues for transmission have helped traditional folk music culture embark on a process of “re-contextualization” in Chiang Mai. Instruction through schools, institutions of higher education and informal education is passing on knowledge of traditional Lanna music to new generations. Some knowledge has been lost, and some customary practices have certainly been discarded or left by the wayside, but other expertise is being gained. Present-day Lanna musicians are figuring out how to harness the sizeable possibilities opened by technological developments in service of their own creativity and their shared musical heritage. They are also determining how to incorporate traditional Lanna culture into modern urban society, by doing things like taking advantage of the *withayakon* system and establishing unique ventures like the Lanna Wisdom School. Through these efforts, younger generations of Lanna musicians are learning traditional music, and continuing the cycle of conservation and creation for future learners and listeners.

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