Interpersonal Relationships of Thai Classical Music Teaching and Learning in University Settings[1]

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Abstract

Thai classical music has always been an essential part of Thai life. However, since the reign of King Mongkut—King Rama IV—Thai classical music has suffered from a decline in interest because of changes of ruling powers and foreign influence, which also brought changes to Thai society. After a century of blending and struggling between keeping Thai traditions and accepting Western influence, a movement unfolded in the 1970s to aid in the revival of Thai classical music. One of the achievements of the movement was the institutionalization of Thai classical music by establishing Thai music departments in research-based universities in Thailand in the 1980s. The purpose of this project is to investigate the relationships between the personnel who are involved in the teaching and learning of Thai classical music in Thai higher education. This research focuses specifically on the traditional master-apprentice learning method of Thai classical music, the relationship between teachers and students, and among students, under institutionalization. Research data was collected through observing interactions between teacher and students, both inside and outside the classroom, and conducting interviews with masters/educators and students at Chulalongkorn University, with a pilot study at the Thai Music Ensemble at Kent State University, Ohio, the United States.

Keywords: Thai classical music teaching, the traditional master-apprentice learning method, relationship between teachers and students, the institutionalization of Thai classical music teaching

Introduction

Thai classical music has a long history and has been an essential part of the life of Thai people, primarily Thais living outside of Bangkok because of historical reasons. Historical and social changes in contemporary Thai society have influenced the continuity of Thai classical music, particularly its development, education and status among Thais. For example, in the 1930s, rulers expelled Thai classical music from the Royal Court of Bangkok, which resulted in the disappearance of Thai classical music from Bangkok – the power center of Thailand. Unsurprisingly, this expulsion did not merely affect the music, but the relocation also affected its practitioners, such as masters and students: it is the interpersonal relationships between masters and students that are central to Thai classical music pedagogy due to its oral transmission tradition. The current situation following the establishment of Thai music departments in universities in the 1980s was studied. It should be noted that the Department of Royal Court Performance established the College of Dramatic Arts in 1934 to accommodate the second generation of court musicians, however, this is not included in the discussion of this study.

Following the establishment of Thai music departments at local universities in the 1980s as a result of the revival movement of the 1970s, as of today, there has been no updated documentation on Thai classical music teaching in higher education. This study aims to understand the current situation of Thai classical music education, particularly the teacher-student and student-student relationships in mediating the transmission of the music. It is argued that interpersonal relationships between teachers and students in Thai classical music education remain essential today because of historical and practical

reasons for the transmission of the music. In addition, the educational backgrounds of teachers and the different modes of Thai classical music training that students have received do affect teaching practices. These differences lead to the answer of the main research question: How do these interpersonal relationships assist the transmission of Thai classical music and (re-)construction of Thai culture?

Background

The foundation of this research is the historical background and social changes in Thai society that have influenced Thai classical music. Thai classical music to Thais has long been more than just music or entertainment. The history of Thai classical music can be traced back to the Sukhothai era[4] in connection to life-cycle-related events (Roongruang 34-37). Thai music scholar Panya Roongruang states: "in the context of these [life-cycle-related] ritual events, both then and now, Thai classical music serves to create a traditional Thai environment" (109). Ritual ceremonies or events were even considered incomplete without music (Roongruang 109). Anthropologist Pamela Myers-Moro shares a similar view in that Thai classical music was linked to the social lives of Thais: "Apart from any inherent psychological and phenomenological meaning, Thai music connotes identity prestige, and values central to being Thai" (Myers-Moro, *Thai Music* 226). Therefore, Thai classical music has a strong connection to Thai people and Thai society because of its role and long existence in Thai society.

Western influence on Thai music can be traced to the 19th century during the reign of King Mongkut—King Rama IV—when King Mongkut allowed the establishment of Western and European-style brass bands in the military. Westernization in Thailand was not only applied to music, but also to other aspects of social life, such as language and technology, and was seen by the authorities as a way of civilizing Thai society (Roongruang 133-138). In general, Thais positively associated Westernization with civilization because of the attitude of the reigning authority, from King Mongkut to the recent rule of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Wongratanapitak, "Thai

Music" 187-197),[5] resulting in the status of Thai traditions having to face increasing challenges. Apart from foreign influence, the change of rulers and political power in Thailand was the local force that affected the status and circulation of Thai classical music. After the absolute monarchy collapsed in 1932, a military regime took power, which further suppressed Thai classical music. The regime considered Thai classical music to be outdated and inferior, and resulted in the government prohibiting public performances of the music in the mid-1930s, unless the music was played with Western instruments (Morton, *The Traditional Music* 16). This suppression declined in the 1950s, but did not end until the 1960s (Morton, "Thai Traditional Music" 32; Miller and Williams 62). Consequently, Thai classical music disappeared from the public scene for about 30 years until a revival movement by Thai classical musicians and educators in the 1970s.

Revival of Thai Classical Music and the Institutionalization of Its Teaching

Thai classical musicians, afraid of the potential loss of their music, transcribed and recorded about 475 pieces of music, partly or wholly, by 1941 (Miller and Williams 62). Unfortunately, most of these transcriptions were destroyed in a fire at the National Theatre in Bangkok in 1960, but some were microfilmed beforehand by David Morton (Miller and Williams 62).[6] This microfilm is now stored in the Ethnomusicology Archive at the University of California, Los Angeles, with some of the surviving transcriptions having been published by the Fine Arts Department of Thailand for educational purposes.

In addition to making transcriptions, Thai music educators have taken numerous measures to revive Thai classical music in society since the 1970s. This includes re-writing lyrics with contemporary content, providing professional training and granting new education credentials for musicians (Myers-Moro, *Thai Music* 253-258). In the late-1970s, the Office of the Prime Minister initiated the spread of traditional performance education in the country by publishing the monthly magazine *Thai Identity* (Iwasawa 11). Around the same time, teaching Thai dance and music was also included in primary and

middle schools (Iwasawa 11). In addition to the Teacher's College of Thai Dance and Music, the 12-campus National College for Dramatic Arts began offering Thai traditional arts classes and even a comprehensive ten-year middle school to bachelor's degree curriculum (Iwasawa 11-12).[7] Since the 1980s in universities across the country, Thai music departments were established to provide systematic and professional training to young musicians in the hope of reviving and revitalizing Thai music.

Why do Interpersonal Relationships in Thai Classical Music Matter?

Compared to learning systematically in school, the traditional way of teaching and learning Thai classical music is very different, especially with regard to the relationship between masters and students. Ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong writes that "one cannot understand the Thai performing arts without understanding the centrality of teachers," and both Wong and ethnomusicologist Dusadee Swangviboonpong acknowledge the special teacher-student relationship in Thai tradition (62-63; 139-145). As Wong also states, the bond between the master and the student could be "one of the most important [bonds] in [the student's] life" (63), and that the relationship should be more than master-disciple. Swangviboonpong explains that *khru* (teacher) or *ajarn* (professor) are considered to be the "second father/mother" to students and that some students might even live with their teacher, while the students of the same teacher might establish a sibling-like bond with their fellow classmates (140-141). Wong notes that it was common for a master to have students live together in the same house until about the mid-20th century, and that "most musicians agreed that such close proximity [living and practicing with the teacher under the same roof] is the best way to absorb a teacher's knowledge" (64).

While there are fewer and fewer masters continuing this traditional practice of teaching and learning music in their homes, there are some who still have students living with them. There are only two cases documented in English by Deborah Wong in which two

Thai classical music masters tried to maintain the traditional practices following the establishment of Thai music departments. One of them was Khru Sakol, whose students helped with housework and practiced music with him while living together in the same house (64). This occurred around 1989. Another special case was Nikorn Chanthasorn, who asked a teacher in his school to be his sole master in order to learn more outside of the school curriculum (Wong 66). The latter situation might be labeled "semi-traditional" as it is a combination of the living-and-learning tradition and contemporary institutionalized education.

A few other masters still carry on the traditional way of teaching Thai classical music by offering that their students live with them; however, there is no documentation. Master Siwasit Nilsuwan (hereafter Ajarn Siwasit), who lived in Singburi Province (about 150 kilometers north of Bangkok), allowed his students to stay at his house to learn music and make musical instruments whenever time permitted (Wongratanapitak, Personal Interview). While Ajarn Siwasit did not ask for payment, his students helped with housework or performed for him without charge; it should be noted that many of his students were from poor or parentless families (Wongratanapitak, Personal Interview). In addition, it was witnessed that Ajarn Siwasit's students helped take care of his bedridden mother and that the female students slept in the same bedroom with her (the male students slept in the instrument room). Unfortunately, Ajarn Siwasit passed away on October 13, 2016. His death was a great loss to the Thai music community, particularly to his students who considered him as their second father who improved their lives. On the other hand, *piphat* master Samran Kerdpon, who was honored as the National Artist by the Office of the National Culture Commission of Thailand in 2005 (Pongkerdlap), also cultivates his students in the traditional way. Others who are still practicing the traditional education method include Wichian Kerdphon, the leader of Ban Mai Band; Pitak Chanyanattaya, the leader of Ban Chanyanattaya Band; and Sahawat Pluempreecha, the leader of Ban Pluempreecha Band (Pongkerdlap).

Teachers are the center and foundation of Thai classical music teaching. However, the traditional way of learning and living with the master under the same roof assists in the relationship building between

the master and students, and between students. This is because the oral transmission tradition relies strongly on this teacher-centered learning method and the interpersonal relationships. Ethnomusicologist and music education scholar Patricia Shehan notes that students learn Thai classical music mainly through listening and imitating what the teacher does, while written notations are only provided for a few songs (10-11).

Even with the efforts to preserve music through notations, personal styles cannot be conveyed. This oral transmission practice indicates the high value and appreciation for personal style as personal styles cannot be replicated even if notations are available.[8] Individual styles are prized and each master has their own style, which is revealed in their playing with variations in composed melodies or improvisations based on the same song structure.[9] Myers-Moro states that some Thai classical pieces are lost because the master could not find a "suitable" student to inherit the piece (*Thai Music: An Ethnography* 233). Therefore, interpersonal relationships are important in Thai classical music teaching and preservation.

In addition to the teacher's presence as a holder of legitimate knowledge and authority of Thai classical music education, the bond between the students in a musical ensemble is an important element in the traditional learning process. It is a tradition to have students of different skill levels and instruments learning and practicing in the same room, and for good reason. Ethnomusicologist Paphutsorn Wongratanapitak states that:

> *While they learn the music for their instruments, at the same time they will unintentionally catch up music of the other instruments. Once they get a chance to learn [the] other instruments, they will pick up very fast since they already see how those instruments are played and how the melodies of the instruments are improvised.* ("Teaching Music" 2)

This demonstrates the strong ties among members of a Thai classical music ensemble. The relationships are important not only for understanding the music, but also to help students improve their skills and synthesize into a group. This multi-level and multi-instrumental

pedagogy is believed to derive from the traditional practice when the master and his students lived under the same roof.

Research Questions

While the institutionalization of Thai classical music education in the 1980s has been a breakthrough for the traditional master-apprentice method, it has also been considered to be an inevitable move. Music education scholar Lucy Green states that in the 1990s there was "a growing concern by the government, educators, and pressure groups that traditional Thai music was breathing its last breath. (270)" The survival of Thai classical music might have gotten worse without such a move. Therefore, making Thai classical music education part of the school curriculum was believed to be a way to preserve the music, as well as the related culture. Today, students can learn Thai music in school, from a standardized score, and even online through YouTube. Many students only learn how to perform music in school with a teacher, not a master, and are no longer living with their teachers. Most of the current Thai classical music students have not experienced the traditional way of teaching and learning, and what they do know about the tradition is from school and their own imagination. As Thai classical music teaching becomes more institutionalized, the intimate master-apprentice or teacher-student relationship has been challenged for changes.

Since the institutionalization of Thai classical music education has been established for more than 30 years, what is the current situation and how are the aforementioned elements being affected? To have a thorough investigation of the issue, this study approached this research with three questions:

1. What factors affect teacher-student relationships?
2. How do teachers contribute to the relationship?
3. What do students think about the relationship?

Methodology

The First Author's Connection to Contemporary Thai Classical Music Education

Being a Hong Kongese, the first author was an absolute outsider to Thai classical music and culture. She first learned about Thai classical music during an exchange program at the National University of Singapore in 2008 by studying under Ajarn Paphutsorn Wongratanapitak (hereafter Ajarn Paphutsorn), an ethnomusicologist and Thai classical music practitioner. She joined the Thai Music Ensemble at the university directed by Ajarn Paphutsorn to learn more about Thai music during the limited duration of her exchange program. In addition to studying the knowledge and playing skills of Thai classical music, she learned about Thai culture and traditions, especially those applied to education, for example, Thai classical music teachers are expected to teach primarily at the university from which they graduated. In 2010, the first author was arranged to study Thai classical music at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, where Ajarn Paphutsorn completed her undergraduate studies. This "internal referral" practice is not only a tradition at Chulalongkorn University, but among Thai classical musicians at other local universities as well.[10] Deborah Wong states that "the closest disciples" are always chosen if positions are open in the music departments within local universities in order to maintain "the lines of transmission" (Wong).

During the first visit to the Department of Thai Music of Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts of Chulalongkorn University in 2010, the first author was introduced to the *Ajarns* there as the student of Ajarn Paphutsorn from Hong Kong. This relationship immediately provided her with two identities at the Faculty. First, among other *Ajarns*: as they were either *Ajarns* or schoolmates of Ajarn Paphutsorn, she was considered to be a student of all the *Ajarns*, and; second, among the students: as some of the students knew Ajarn Paphutsorn, she was treated as their classmates immediately because they learned "under the same teacher." She was well taken care of by the classmates and the seniors of the department—she was told to follow them for lunch

and practices so she would not get lost on campus, and shared meals prepared by the seniors before an important annual performance.

The first author reconnected to Thai classical music when she was introduced to Ajarn Priwan Nanongkham (hereafter Ajarn Priwan), who is the instructor of the Thai Music Ensemble of Kent State University ("Kent State"), Ohio, the United States. The Thai Music Ensemble of Kent State was the only active collegiate Thai music ensemble in America in 2015.[11] The first author did the pilot study for this project there, of which observations and analyses will be discussed later in this paper. As Ajarn Priwan was a graduate of Chulalongkorn University, he happened to mention that one of the *Ajarns* the first author met at Chulalongkorn University in 2010 was his classmate. Being a student of his classmate, the first author was inevitably and immediately accepted as one of his students. This definitely had its pros and cons—while it was difficult to establish herself as a researcher, she was quickly able to build rapport with Ajarn Priwan as her informant.

A similar situation happened when the first author returned to the Department of Thai Music for further research in 2016. Due to her previous connection, she was immediately included into the Department. More than once she was reminded by the faculty members that "you are not a guest, you are a host [a member of the Department]." The students in the Department, however, did not consider her to be their *Pi* (senior), and since she was definitely not their *Ajarn*, she was treated more like their classmate or friend. They called her by her English name or Thai nickname without adding the honorific "*Pi*." The students and she were in an exchange relationship: she spoke little Thai while they spoke little English, so they were each other's access to learn the language and culture. No researcher would like to be considered superior in the field, and this position made the students more willing to share their learning of and experience in Thai classical music, which is the main theme of this research.

Being recognized as "someone's student" in the different stages of her fieldwork made the first author a member of the Thai classical music community, and yet, her non-Thai identity put her at a rather neutral position to study the education aspect of the music. In Thai

(also, in general, Asian) tradition, teachers/masters should be treated with respect: Prof. Dr. Suchitra Chongstitvatana even used the word "sinful" to describe students' criticism of their teachers.[12] This idea could put a Thai classical music insider with Thai nationality into a difficult position when studying their teachers and the related issues in education. The first author's non-Thai identity and limitations in Thai language provided her advantages in this study: both *Ajarns* and students were not afraid to speak or to make mistakes in class, so they could be themselves and showed the natural condition of a class. The precise wordings used in class were not the focus of this study, rather it was their interactions that were most important. Still, she studied the issues with a humble attitude by asking follow-up questions after class observations and following one of the qualitative research principles of "letting the data speak"—she respected the informants for both their authority and knowledge in the discipline.

In addition to the first author's connections, the Department of Thai Music at Chulalongkorn University was selected for this project for two reasons: 1. It was the first Thai music department established in a university in the entire country, and; 2. the department attempts to model and recreate Thai classical music teaching traditions. The Department preserves traditions by offering courses such as *Piphat Dukdambam*, a style of ensemble created by Prince Naris, son of King Mongkut, where the combination of musical instruments and dance aims to mimic Western styles; principles for Royal Court Music Performance and; *Wong Krueng Sai Pi Chawa*, a string ensemble with Java oboes (Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts). Moreover, Year One students start their studies with the class "Music Skills 1" by learning the "morning overture" – a five-piece repertoire that serves as a gateway to enter Thai classical music that begins with *Sadhukan*, which serves as an etude for all students to start their learning journey and, literally from the title, to pay respect to their teachers. The "morning overture" is not only for ceremonial or tradition-construction purposes, but also for functional practices. This piece helps train the aural skills of students and all students are required to learn the *khong wong yai* melody. It also helps build memorization of traditional musical patterns, as it is Thai classical music tradition that players

learn the basic melodic structure of each piece before learning the melody for their specialized instrument.

Research Methods

A snowball sampling was applied to this qualitative research. This sampling method was applied to the search for informants in two different stages of this project: 1) the pilot study in the USA, and; 2) visits in Thailand. Two different research methods were utilized in this research, including teaching/rehearsals observation and interviews/informal group discussions with teachers and students. In the interviews with teachers, the oral history method was utilized to gain a better understanding of their background, such as family, education, and religion, which is believed to be reflected in their teaching and the type of teacher-student relationships they would like to establish. Interactions between teacher and students, and between students, both inside and outside of the classroom and other activities, if applicable, were observed. These two research techniques were used to complement one another and to obtain a better understanding of the teacher-student and student-student relationships in Thai classical music education – the two most important relationships in a student's life.

The Pilot Study at Kent State University

To further understand the situation of teaching and learning of Thai classical music after institutionalization, a pilot study was undertaken in the US in spring 2015 with the Thai Music Ensemble at Kent State. The Ensemble is an ordinary medium-size *piphat* ensemble, which includes *khong wong yai* and *khong wong lek* [bigger and smaller gongs arranged in a circle], *ranat ek* and *ranat thum* [wooden xylophones], different types of Thai flutes such as *pi* or *klui*, different drums such as *klong khaek* or *taphon*, and *ching* [small cymbals]. Ajarn Priwan has been the instructor of the Ensemble since 1999. An oral history method to interview Ajarn Priwan was used to gain a better understanding of his background and living experience in relation to his teachings at Kent State. Ajarn Priwan received

would might be call a "semi-traditional" training: he studied Thai classical music both with a master and in school. He first studied at a conservatory and eventually asked his teacher at the conservatory to be his master, who he then lived with, did housework for and learned out-of-curriculum repertories from, before he majored in music education at Chulalongkorn University. At the time of the fieldwork at Kent State, all students in the Ensemble were non-Thai, with only two of the seven members being music majors. The Ensemble only practices twice a week for two and a half hours; however, Ajarn Priwan does offer extra lessons to individuals who want to polish their skills.

The teacher-centered quality of Thai classical music, as well as the relationships between the teacher and students and among the members, were observed in the rehearsals. Ajarn Priwan led the rehearsals, taught the music through performing and singing without using notations and called for extra rehearsals outside the classroom, all of which reflected his legitimate authority. Interactions between the members also reflected their close ties. They practiced together, especially the *ranat ek* and *khong wong* players and the *klong khaek* players, who worked in pairs to help each other to fit into the melody. It was observed that players often make fun of each other during practices, for example, the *ranat thum* player slightly hit the *khong wong lek* player's stomach when he was laying on the ground. The students also set up and cleaned up together before and after rehearsals thus further demonstrating the friendship and partnership between members.

In the context of Kent State, the cultural background was definitely different from the Thai context, hence it was impossible and inappropriate to replicate the exact Thai traditional teaching model. Yet, Ajarn Priwan adapted certain Thai practices in his teaching that were embedded from his own experience unintentionally. The members of the Ensemble informed the researcher that Ajarn Priwan took them out for meals and picnics and had extra practices at his home. This showed Ajarn Priwan's efforts in building up the bond between himself and his students, and among the students, which is the foundation for Thai classical music education. A member who has been in the Ensemble for three consecutive semesters revealed in an

informal discussion:

> *[Ajarn Priwan] does more than just teach us music, like he… will go to socialize with us as well. He is not like a friend, cuz he's still our teacher, but it's like…I don't think there is a good phrase in English that really describes this. It's like…still a teacher, but kind of like…keep a really good relationship with. Like… [another member mentioned the word 'mentor'] yeah, like a mentor. There's not a good phrase in English that really describes that.*[13]

Another member also agreed with this description by saying "closer to that [mentor] than a teacher."[14] Ajarn Priwan Nanongkham was quite shocked in hearing his students describe him as their mentor when the first author told him in the follow-up interview. He said that there is no such term in Thai, "I don't understand what mentor means…how is it different from teacher?" After the explanation, he responded:

> *Maybe that is [an] American thing. Because in Thai thinking, we don't have that; because [Thai] teacher [is] always like that, always close to the students. It is more like…more like a parent, more like a big brother, a big uncle, something like that. It is more like a family thing. So, that's why we don't have that term [mentor] in Thai. Teacher, for us, means everything. That's why I don't understand what that means…. In the tradition, it [the role of a teacher] already includes that [the role of a mentor], nothing special. […] I didn't know, I thought it is quite normal…I mean, my teacher d[id] that at home [in Thailand], I didn't know to them [the members] [what I did] is special.*

The unique relationship between a master and students in Thai classical music teaching was reflected in this ensemble at Kent State, which had multinational members and was led by a Thai teacher who received semi-traditional training. The practice room at Kent State was, metaphorically, a temporary home for Ajarn Priwan and his students to gather, to learn, to play music and to build a bond in the limited practice time. Establishing a relationship may exceed the original goal of having ethnomusicological ensembles in the American

college setting: ensembles may only serve as a life experience of another culture.[15] This led to a further investigation at Chulalongkorn University, where all the students were Thai and majoring in Thai music and had a much longer class and practice time dedicated to the music. It can be assumed that, compared to Kent State, students at the Department of Thai Music in Thailand would have more opportunities and time to interact with their teachers who have received semi-traditional and traditional training in Thai classical music.

The Situation at Chulalongkorn University

The Curriculum

The four-year, 135-credit undergraduate Thai music program at Chulalongkorn University is structured and intense. As this research focuses on the performance of Thai music, only the courses related to performance skills are discussed. In the 75 core departmental credits of the program, about 39 credits are dedicated to performance skills, excluding courses of music theory and history (FFAA). These courses include Thai Music Skills 1-7, *Piphat Dukdambam*, *Pleng Tub* [music of playing a set of songs continuously] and Percussion Skills (FFAA). The Department aims to prepare the students to be professional Thai musicians by providing them adequate training, in which many graduates become either university lecturers or Thai music teachers in primary and secondary schools across the country. For the courses offered in spring 2016, observation was made of Thai Music Skills 2, 4, and 6, an elective course of *Pleng Rabam* [music for dance] and additional practices and/or rehearsals of performances when available.

In the classroom

The main observations were done in the classes Music Skills 2, 4 and 6, which are for year one, two and three students, respectively. In Music Skills, students in each year are separated into groups depending on their major instrument for the sections of *piphat* [percussion], *krueng sai* [string] and *krueng pao* [woodwind]. Each section is instructed by different *ajarns*. Occasionally, two or all of

these sections would be combined because: 1) the other *ajarns* were doing a performance or rehearsal with other students and; 2) it was necessary for the different sections to practice together in order to understand other parts of the repertoire. In addition, on these special occasions, observation was mostly in the *piphat* section to obtain information to compare with the situations at Kent State.

The three *ajarns* responsible for Music Skills 2, 4 and 6 classes are lecturer Dr. Krisnaphong Tasanabanchong (hereafter Ajarn Krisnaphong), Assistant Professor Dr. Pattara Komkam (hereafter Ajarn Pattara), and Professor Dr. Bussakorn Binson (hereafter Ajarn Bussakorn), respectively. Ajarn Krisnaphong and Ajarn Pattara were Chulalongkorn graduates from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, while Ajarn Bussakorn graduated from the Faculty of Education. In addition to learning Thai classical music in school, Ajarn Bussakorn studied with two masters: she stayed at the house of one of the masters only occasionally, but lived with the other one for a longer duration. In addition, only Ajarn Bussakorn had furthered her graduate studies overseas in the United Kingdom. Ajarn Pattara has working experience in the Department of Fine Arts and the Royal Palace as a musician, as well as teaching in Southern Thailand for years that equipped him with the knowledge of playing Southern Thai folk musical instruments. Ajarn Krisnaphong is comparatively the youngest *ajarn* who started as a teaching assistant at the Faculty following his graduation.

The setting of the classes is standardized even though the classes are conducted by different *ajarns*. The *piphat* classes are relatively small in size, with only four, five or nine students. The classes take place in two different classrooms, one is a small practice room, while the other one is known as *hong yai* [literally, the big room].[16] Students usually sit in a semi-circle or in straight rows, with *ranat ek(s)* and *ranat thum(s)* at the front row, *khong wong yai(s)* and *khong wong lek(s)* at the back, and *klui(s)* or *pi(s)*, if any, at the side, and the *ajarn* at the front facing the students.

Similar to Ajarn Priwan, the teachings of these three *ajarns* at Chulalongkorn University is conducted orally and through imitation. A lesson usually starts with a *wai*, a sign of respect where one puts his palms together in a prayer-like fashion and bows slightly, to the *ajarn*.

Then the *ajarn* begins playing a song phrase by phrase and the students follow by imitating through both listening to the pitches and watching at the *ajarn's* playing. When students fail to imitate the playing, all *ajarns* will sing the melody aloud, sometimes with solfege or with different sounds as if imitating the sound quality of the instruments. This situation occurs even if it only one student can not follow the instructions. If the lesson is a revision of an already-taught piece, or after learning a portion of the song, the *ajarn* and students play together repeatedly to consolidate the memorization of the melody of the piece. In addition, *ajarns* give instructions to and led discussions with students on the playing technique and Thai classical music theory in each lesson. A lesson ends with a student leading fellow classmates to *wai* to pay respect and courtesy to the *ajarn*.

In addition to the common practices found between the three *ajarns*, the differences in their teaching reflects differences in their relationships with students. Among the three *ajarns*, Ajarn Bussakorn has the toughest and most serious image in front of the current students. She emphasizes the importance of body position in producing valuable sounds when playing – this was later confirmed by Suwicha Pongkerdlap, a graduate student in the Department that "Ajarn Bussakorn would walk over and pull my mallets away if I did not hold the mallets tight when playing!"[17] In addition, in an interview with Ajarn Bussakorn, she revealed that she "does not play or go out" with the students. Yet, she does go to dinner with students who have already graduated.

Her high expectations for the playing skills of her students is demonstrated in her classes. As she taught Music Skills 6 with students who were in their third year of study, she trusts their abilities in memorizing new and advanced pieces in class. In addition to the melody, she always claps to provide a rhythm – this was not about the melody, but to understand how a phrase should be constructed in the piece. She also makes the playing of the song into a "game": she terms the first eight phrases of a piece from number one to eight, and she points to one of the four students with a number, who then needed to play that phrase immediately with correct pitch and rhythm. When a student fails to do so, Ajarn Bussakorn will sit and wait while other

students hint to the struggling student how to play the phrase through. The game only continues when the failed phrase is played correctly.

Although Ajarn Bussakorn showed her dissatisfaction in class, she indicated outside the classroom that the piece was very difficult and advanced. She stated that these third-year students were in preparations to learn high-level solo pieces, which were meticulously selected for the forthcoming-last year of undergraduate studies. Occasionally, Ajarn Bussakorn will not enter the classroom until the students practice and play the song well. This happened once as Ajarn Bussakorn said: "They play too bad; they will message me when they are ready," and a student showed up later in the office to invite Ajarn Bussakorn to the classroom. In addition to the *ajarns*, a master student is sometimes sent to the classroom to train the students until they can play the song and students show respect for their senior and work hard with him to improve their skills. This shows both Ajarn Bussakorn's understanding and expectations of her students who would graduate in a year to become either professional musicians or music teachers.

On the other hand, interactions between Ajarn Pattara and Ajarn Krisnaphong and their students were found to be different. Graduated from the Faculty, both Ajarn Pattara and Ajarn Krisnaphong are more like senior classmates to the current students, and this is especially true for the younger Ajarn Krisnaphong. However, this did not mean that the students will pay any less respect to them in class. Similar to Ajarn Bussakorn's students, students of Ajarn Pattara and Ajarn Krisnaphong arrive early, prepare and practice in the classroom, and wait for them to come, even if they are in an ad-hoc meeting without notifying the students. During an observation in Ajarn Pattara's class, because of his presence, students asked for his permission to talk to the researcher during a break of the class. This is one of the acts that demonstrate respect for teachers. In addition to their "*ajarn*" identity, Ajarn Pattara and Ajarn Krisnaphong were graduates from the program, and, accordingly, their students are more willing to voice their difficulties and seek help in class. This was demonstrated in three situations: 1) students of Ajarn Pattara and Ajarn Krisnaphong are more willing to answer questions in class even when they are not sure about the answer; 2) students will take out their mobile phone for recording

purposes in class,[18] while students of Ajarn Bussakorn would never do that and; 3) students shout out immediately in Ajarn Krisnaphong's class when they could not get through the piece, even by addressing Ajarn Krisnaphong by the nickname "*Pi* Top" under such an urgency. In addition, Ajarn Pattara and Ajarn Krisnaphong play music together with their students for a much higher proportion of time in comparison to Ajarn Bussakorn's practice. However, this may be explained by the lower level of classes they were teaching.

Interpersonal Relationships between *Ajarn* and Students

To understand the centrality of teacher-student relationship in Thai classical music teaching in modern times, examination was made of the perspective both teachers and the students. From what Ajarn Bussakorn mentioned, she would go for a meal with her former students after they graduated. In other words, students will return to visit their *ajarn* and continue to keep a relationship with them. This teacher-student relationship is considered a lifelong care and bond. *Ajarns* also know the families of their students well, and vice versa. About two months after fieldwork was completed, a group of students from the Department was invited to play music at a funeral for an *ajarn* of the *ajarns*. In this case, the students were considered to be a part of the *ajarn's* family. It is this tradition of passing knowledge down from one *ajarn* to another that extends the family-like connection to *ajarns* and their students. *Ajarns* are present during the different stages of the lives of their students and witness their growth as if they were their second parents. For example, Thai males who practice Buddhism usually become a temporary monk at a certain age before marriage. *Ajarns* would attend the ordination ceremony and make merit by donating money to the temple at the ceremony. This is an important part of a Thai male's secular life, especially for Thai musicians, and only after fulfilling this role would they be allowed to learn higher-level sacred repertoire.

From the perspective of the students, they believe the teacher-student relationships are serious, although they are reluctant to say *ajarns* are their friends. During the observation, both Ajarn Pattara

and Ajarn Krisnaphong offered extra practice sessions to their students and dined out casually with them. When the students were asked: "Do you think *ajarn* is your teacher or friend?" they reacted immediately with a firm, "Not friend!" Ajarn Krisnaphong's students were further questioned: "But I saw you all joke with *ajarn* in class!" They shook their heads and made crosses with their hands to show their determination that *ajarns* would never be considered their friends. One of them revealed in a follow-up interview that, *ajarns* could be good or bad, but the student claimed to respect all of them because they were *ajarns*.[19] Even though Ajarn Pattara's and Ajarn Krisnaphong's students seemed to have a closer relationship with them as reflected in their interactions inside and outside of the classroom, these two groups of student respect their *ajarns* and acknowledge their authority, which is comparable to that between Ajarn Bussakorn and her students.

The different attitude towards the teacher-student relationship between students at Kent State and Chulalongkorn University can be explained with two reasons: 1) the understanding by the students of the roles of master and student in the traditional teaching of Thai classical music, and; 2) the determination and goals of students studying Thai music.

To understand the ideas of students regarding traditional Thai classical music education, several students in the Department were interviewed with the following two questions: 1) Do you know that Thai music students used to study with a master and live with them in the old days?; 2) Do you think you would want to go back to the old days and study with a master in a house? All of the students knew the history of traditional teaching and learning Thai classical music, and that some, even if only a few, *ajarns* still practice the traditional way. Some students even revealed that they had learned from a master outside of school, but only one of them mentioned his short and temporary experience to staying with and learning from a master under the same roof. That student claimed:

> *Staying with an ajarn at his house is good for learning Thai music. Your skill will be developed and improved all the time as you learn directly from the ajarn [as the ajarn teaches you directly] and indirectly from observations. Nowadays, the*

> *society [has] changed, and there are more options to learn Thai music. So, in my opinion, learning Thai music in university, learn by oneself, or learn with a good master [not staying with them], all of these are good options. One has the freedom [to choose]. It is more suitable in the modern society.*[20]

In addition to the student who had a comparable experience of learning Thai classical music in the traditional way for a short time, other answers to the second question were based on their imagination rather than their real-life experience of learning Thai music. One of them explained: "I want to go back to the teaching style of the past. I want to learn the knowledge the old generations got. I want to get familiarized with my *ajarns*, and take care of them more."[21]

> However, another student suggested the opposite idea:
> *Personally, I don't. I want to learn in school, not in the house. No commitment [to the ajarn]. I can learn more [on other subjects], not only music. […] If I study at the house, one only focuses on Thai music, which is good for [those who want to be] musicians, but not for me. [...] If I have a choice, I would like to learn in school.*[22]

No matter if they agree or not to learn Thai classical music in the traditional way through staying with a master, students show their understandings of the authority of the teacher and their obligation in the relationships, even if they learn music in an institutional setting.

The second reason was the determination of students to study Thai music and their loyalty to their own culture and country in general. Their answers to the following two questions – 1) why would you like to study Thai music in university? 2) what is your plan after you get your degree? – reflect their willingness in carrying and passing on their music and tradition. Students show their passion for Thai music and their obligation to preserve and spread the music, as one student said: "I realize the values of Thai music, so I decided to major in Thai music." All of them were experienced Thai music practitioners before they started their undergraduate studies at the Department and all revealed one of the following desires on what to do with their knowledge of Thai music: to pursue a higher degree in Thai music,

to work at the government's Fine Arts Department, or to be a Thai music teacher or even a volunteer teacher to teach Thai music in Thai temples overseas. It is no doubt that seriousness in the teacher-student relationship is important because it helps prepare these passionate youths for the preservation and continuity of Thai classical music and Thai culture as a whole.

Conclusion

The teacher-centered tradition and the teacher-student relationship are important in Thai classical music education, even with the current institutionalized situation, regardless of geographical locations, as reflected in the fieldwork of this study in both Thailand and the United States. The oral tradition of Thai classical music is still applied in instruction. In addition, the teaching relies heavily on the teachers, from selecting the repertoire to play creatively with one's own style. The major responsibility of the students is to follow, study and practice hard until the "valuable sounds" are produced. The standard and quality of the "valuable sounds", as well as the expectations of their students, are also set by individual teachers. These requirements or standards vary based on the educational background of the teachers and the different modes of training in Thai classical music they received. In the above observations, teachers who received "semi-traditional" training, a combination of the tradition of learning from a master and the contemporary institutionalized education, show a higher-authority and mentor-like image in front of their students. While the younger teachers, who studied at the same Department as their students, seem to build a closer relationship with students and conduct their classes in a friendlier atmosphere. However, the findings show that Thai classical music students genuinely respect their teachers, regardless of the background of the teachers and students never consider their teachers as friends. Students show their respect in different ways other than in the playing and learning music. Consequently, this becomes an advantage of the institutionalization of Thai classical music teaching, and in today's class setting, teachers cannot selectively teach certain pieces to only certain students. Once a

teacher selects a piece, one needs to teach the piece to the whole class, even if the abilities of the students vary.

The tradition of living and learning in the same house among the "disciples" of the same master has now transformed to studying under the same roof of the academic department in universities. Since the establishment of Thai music departments at local universities in the 1980s, Thai classical music learners have rarely been found to live with their teachers. However, this does not mean that the learners will pay any less respect to their teachers, as mentioned above, or will loosen the bond between the teacher and students and among students. As seen in the observations, the support between students was high in teaching and learning situations. This can be explained by the fact that the group-learning and group-playing elements of Thai classical music are coordinated by and rely on the relationships built among the players – the students in this case. The strong bond was also observed in the respect students gave to their seniors, including the two teachers who were viewed as their seniors, as well as in group activities both inside and outside of the classroom. Although the physical living environment among Thai classical music learners has disappeared, practices of students, especially their respect towards the teachers, and the nature of their relationships with teachers and among students themselves remain unchanged in the era of Westernization and modernization.

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[4] The Sukhothai Kingdom existed from 1238 until 1438.

[5] King Bhumibol Adulyadej was the 9th monarch of Thailand from the Chakri dynasty commonly referred to as Rama IX. Details on westernization practices of each king can be referred to "Thai Music Culture in the 21st Century: Thai Music and Its Others (The Westernization, Modernization and Globalization of Thai Classical Music): Case Study of Thai Musical Instruments and Innovation," *Rian Thai*, vol 3, 2010, pp. 187-197.

[6] David Morton studied Thai classical music for his PhD dissertation and then became a music professor at University of California, Los Angeles, from 1962 to 1985.

[7] This ten-year curriculum describes the six-year secondary school education after primary/elementary education followed by a four-year tertiary/college education.

[8] At the ENITS presentation seminar at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, on 25 June 2015, participants agreed that global education was changing. This was especially pointed out with respect towards teachers. Teachers are being criticized on their teaching as students can easily find alternative resources on the Internet. However, the in the seminar, it was noted that this situation should be comparatively less obvious in the Thai classical music discipline as the personal style of masters is valued; one can even find different versions of the same piece of music on the Internet.

[9] Also known as the pattern of *khong wong yai*, an instrument with big gongs arranged in a circle

[10] Ms. Kosita Butratana mentioned the same practice was done by Thai classical musicians at Mahidol University at the ENITS presentation seminar at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, on June 25th, 2015.

[11] The SEM Niagara Chapter had its 2015 meeting at Carlow University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA, on March 21st, 2015. Emeritus Prof. Terry E. Miller stated in the meeting that some Thai classical music ensembles existed in American universities, such as the one at the University of Washington, Seattle, but none of them, except the one at Kent State, were active. University of California, Los Angeles, rebuilt its Thai music ensemble in about 2016.

[12] Prof. Dr. Suchitra Chongstitvatana commented on the implementation of teaching evaluation and students' criticism on teachers as a "sinful" act at the ENITS presentation seminar at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, on June 25th, 2015. The first author interprets this "sinful act" as a disrespectful challenge to teachers' knowledge and authority.

[13] Anonymous Student A. Personal Interview. 2015.

[14] Anonymous Student B. Personal Interview. 2015.

[15] According to J. Lawrence Witzleben, many ethnomusicology graduate programs require students to participate in ensembles, but "yet the rationale for these widespread practices is not easy to decipher from contemporary definitions or overviews of the field" (2010, p.135). Further discussion on the issue is linked to Mantle Hood's concept "bimusicality" in the article.

[16] The big room has an altar of Thai music *ajarns* statue and photo, the photos of King Rama IV, V and VI (who showed support to Thai classical music), and some Rama story-related statues placed at the top (recognized as "the God of the Kings"). Everyone pays respect to the altar when they go into and before they leave the room, even when they only walk past the room.

[17] A similar situation was documented by Jan Mrázek when he studied *ranat ek* with Ajarn Bussakorn; in addition to the way of holding the mallets, he mentioned Ajarn Bussakorn's teaching about

the importance of having a preferred sitting position and hitting angle when playing *ranat ek*. Refer to Jan Mrázek, "Xylophones in Thailand and Java: A Comparative Phenomenology of Musical Instruments." *Asian Music*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2008, pp. 61-65.

[18] After recording the pieces in class, students listened to the recordings during the after-class practices (it was a common scene in the practice rooms), and in addition to this, students made their own written transcriptions based on the recordings.

[19] Anonymous Student C. Personal Interview. 2016.

[20] Anonymous Student D. Personal Interview, 2016.

[21] Anonymous Student E. Personal Interview, 2016.

[22] Anonymous Student F. Personal Interview, 2016.

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