

Phutai Music Culture in Kalasin Province

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the Phutai music culture in Kalasin province, Thailand, using qualitative research methodology. The field study was conducted in Kalasin province, and the data were collected from cultural officers, experts and musicians using interviews and questionnaires. The findings are as follows:

Phutai musical instruments in the present day consist of string instruments for plucking, string instruments for gliding, percussion instruments and wind instruments. Phutai music is categorized as Morlam music and performed nowadays at monthly traditional festivals and as musical accompaniment of other performances and activities. Kalasin has a provincial policy to hail Phutai culture as the province's unique identity and encourages the people to promote and preserve Phutai music culture.

Keywords : music culture, Phutai, Kalasin, Thailand

Introduction

In the old days, Phutai settlements scattered among those of other ethnic groups, namely the Chinese, Lao, Vietnamese and Yor peoples. Their different cultures and traditions, consequently, blended and the peoples themselves merged into another ethnic group known as Ai Lao. Therefore, a study of the history of Phutai people necessarily involves a study of Ai Lao people. Phutai people at present

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are peace-loving and treasure their ethnic heritage. Their unique identity can be seen in their traditions, art and culture, costumes, music, beliefs and dialect. When members of the group emigrated to other countries, they continued to observe their traditional customs. In the Northeast of Thailand, Phutai people is the second largest ethnic group after the Thai-Lao ethnic group. It is believed that the Phutai people in the Northeast of Thailand immigrated from Muang Wang, which is present-day Ban Pon, Ban Nong Chang, Kham Muang District, Bua Khao Subdistrict, Chaen Laen Subdistrict, Phu Laen Chang Subdistrict, Song Plueai Subdistrict, Khum Kao Subdistrict and various other subdistricts in Kuchinarai District, Kalasin province (Kalasin Provincial Cultural Office, n.d.).

Historical records indicate that Phutai people immigrated into Thailand in three waves. Those ushered into the country in the third wave were divided into 8 clusters, one of which came to Kalasin and settled in 63 villages in 5 districts, namely Khao Wong District, Kuchinarai District, Kham Muang District, Somdet District and Sahatsakhan District.

During the past several years Kalasin has been promoting Phutai culture as the province's unique identity which includes the costumes, culture, traditions, musical performances and performing arts of Phutai people (Kamonrat Simmakham, 2020, interview). This ethnic group has its own musical identity known as Phutai music featuring the drum as a percussion instrument, Phang Had (buttonless gong), Khaen and Phutai oboe. Moreover, the group features a unique and beautiful dance called Fon Phutai Kalasin.

The data above indicate that Phutai Kalasin is an ethnic group with a distinguishing musical identity. Research studies have been continuously conducted on the music and performances of Phutai people in Kalasin province. Studies by Chatphong Intharit (1998), Songdet Saengnin (1993), Pairot Phetsangharn (1988) and Rattanaporn Phatsadu (1992) on Phutai music, settlements and ways of living affirm that Phutai Kalasin people have a musical identity deemed worthy of academic studies and that the people have been consistently able to maintain their musical identity. These features

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attracted the researcher to study the means by which Phutai people in Kalasin province preserve their music culture. It is hoped that the results of the study could be used further as a guideline for the preservation of other cultural aspects.

Objective of the Study

To study Phutai music culture in Kalasin province.

Selection of the Study Area

The researcher purposively selected Kalasin province as the study area since the province had a systematic management of Phutai culture.

Research Methodology

Data Collection

The researcher conducted a preliminary study from various sources of information in order to glean as much information as possible about all aspects of Phutai Kalasin. Sample groups were then selected from the population based on the purposive sampling method. After that, a field study was conducted to collect data and to ensure that they were as truthful and as complete as possible. The collected data were categorized and used for the analysis according to the study's objective.

Selection of Informants

The researcher divided the informants into two groups. The first group comprised two cultural officers in Kalasin Provincial Cultural Office, namely Ms. Kamonrat Simmakham, Kalasin Provincial Cultural Director, and Ms. Somjit Ratsamee, Cultural Officer (Professional Level). The second group comprised 3 scholars and musicians, namely Dr. Chamroen Kaewphengkro, Dr. Pornsawan Porndonkor and Ms. Siriwan Chansawang.

Research Instrument Design

The questionnaire was designed based on the study's objective in order to ascertain that the questions could derive the desired data. The validity of the questionnaire was checked by three experts, namely Assistant Professor Dr. Charoenchai Chonphairot, Assistant Professor Dr. Sayam Juangprakhon and Associate Professor Phiphat Sonyai. The comments from the experts were used to improve the

questionnaire before its implementation in the data collection.

Presentation of Research Results

The researcher presented the results concerning the musical instruments and musical bands in the descriptive analysis format.

Research Results

The study indicates that many Phutai people live in three districts in Kalasin province, namely Kuchinarai District, Sahatsakhan District and Khao Wong District, and that they have their own distinguishing cultural identity in terms of costumes, dialect, music culture and performing arts.

1. Phutai Music in Kalasin Province

Phutai music culture can be categorized into the Morlam culture which is prevalent in 16 provinces in the Northeast of Thailand (not including Surin, Buriram, Srisaket and Nakhon Ratchasima). The musical instruments featured in this Morlam culture are those seen in Pong Lang bands of the present day. The musical instruments of the Phutai people in Kalasin province can be categorized as follows:

Percussion Instruments: The percussion instruments made of wood are Pong Lang and Kro. The instruments made of metal are Phang Had, Mong Gong and cymbals. The instruments made of leather are various types of drums such as Klong Yao and Klong Rammana.

Wind Instruments: The wind instruments consist of Phutai oboe and Khaen.

String Instruments for Plucking: The string instruments for plucking are Soong and Heun (Jong Nong).

String Instrument for Gliding: The string instrument for gliding is Phutai fiddle.

2. Musical Band

The traditional band of Phutai music is a grouping of available musical instruments performed for entertainment or accompaniment of various activities and rituals such as Yao ceremony (a healing Phutai ritual). Khaen is used singlehandedly as a leading instrument. In Kalasin province, the type of musical band found in present-day

Phutai communities is Pong Lang. This type of band adjusts the traditional Phutai music and blends it suitably with the Morlam culture. It has become part of the communities and their ways of living and has had a role in traditional events, rituals, festivals and a dance that is unique to the Phutai identity called Fon Phutai.

3. Phutai Music in Kalasin Society

Today Phutai music combines traditional music passed on from Phutai ancestors with the music of the Thai-Lao ethnic group, resulting in further development, commingling and dissemination from community to community. Consequently, different musical instruments are brought in to play with the band in various social functions, which can be categorized as follows:

1) Music in the monthly festival called Heet Sib Song (Heet 12), which is a Phutai traditional function scheduled to take place every month as is the practice of other local peoples in Northeastern Thailand.

Heet Sib Song (Heet 12) is the traditional merit making held in every month of the year. This provides occasions for the local people to meet and join one another monthly in making merit. These functions are regarded as a social custom, and those who do not observe it are seen as violating the Heet.

During the merit making in the twelve months of Heet 12, music is an integral part and adds fun to social activities such as parades from the housing cluster to the temple. For example, in a social function called Boon Deun Si, or Boon Phawet, a parade is organized to carry “Kan Lorn” to the temple, accompanied by Klong Yao, Khaen, Phin and percussion instruments to enhance the sense of enjoyment. In the parade for Boon Bang Fai, music accompanies dances and helps increase the merriment of the occasion. In an ancestor worship ceremony or Yao Ceremony, music is performed to enhance a sense of sacredness of the occasion.

2) Music as an accompaniment of a performance

A dance unique to Phutai culture is Fon Phutai. Fon Phutai of Kalasin, particularly, was once invited to feature as a welcoming performance for Her Majesty Queen Sirikit the Queen Mother. The

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performance has since become legendary and recognized as a unique identity of the Phutai dance in Kalasin province. Today Fon Phutai Kalasin is characteristic of the province, and Kalasin College of Dramatic Arts has collected data concerning Fon Phutai and created new Fon patterns, lyrics and music to develop a unique performance for Fon Phutai Kalasin. This performance is officially Kalasin's brand of performing arts, and performers competing in the annual Kalasin Red Cross festival, usually held in late February, are required to perform it as part of their contest for the royal cups. The new lyrics composed for this performance tells, among other things, of the beauty of Kalasin province and its cultural identity including Phutai dances, songs and costumes. This helps promote Phutai culture in a sustainable and concrete way. Those who listen to the song and music and see the beautiful dance performed in Phutai costumes tend to have a good impression of this culture and to tell others about it.

As a result, this activity promotes both Phutai music and Phutai dance as a unique identity of Phutai people in Kalasin province.

3) Music as an accompaniment in a festival

In merit-making occasions and other social festivals held by the local people in Kalasin province, folk music is performed as an accompaniment to the activities. In important annual festivals such as the End of Buddhist Lent Festival, the District Winter Festival and the Kalasin Annual Red Cross Festival, especially, music plays an important part in providing entertainment and enjoyment to the people. Nowadays, the music is amplified using technological tools, and the use of western musical instruments such as the guitar, bass guitar, keyboard and drums is integrated into the performance, thus adding both variety and fun to the traditional performance. Engaging the audience in this way offers another method for the preservation of Phutai music.

Discussion and Conclusion

Phutai music today features string instruments for plucking, string instruments for gliding, percussion instruments and wind instruments and can be classified as part of the Mor Lam culture.

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Phutai music is performed in traditional monthly festivals. Although it may not feature as prominently as before in certain festivals, Phutai music is still very much alive. It is also performed as a musical staple to accompany Fon Phutai, the popularity of which helps keep Phutai music in the public mind. Moreover, Phutai music is played, sometimes along with other types of music, in merry or merit-making festivals and social functions.

Kalasin province promotes the preservation Phutai culture and recognizes it as the province's unique identity. The provincial policy requires the government personnel to wear Phutai-style clothing every Friday and encourages the general public to do the same. The implementation of this policy is reflected in the field data of this study. In addition, Phutai culture, and Phutai music in particular, is promoted in national contests. The provincial government allocates budget to its districts and work units to systematically preserve and promote Phutai music, as seen in the annual operation plans that integrate Phutai music as part of various festivals. The documentary studies and interviews conducted for this study suggest that the means by which Kalasin province employs to preserve Phutai music culture in the province can be classified as follows: organizing festivals, organizing traditional merit-making events, holding contests, enforcing provincial policies, allocating budget for related projects, campaigning for Phutai-style clothing, and supporting educational institutes and Kalasin College of Dramatic Arts in the promotion and preservation of Phutai music and performance.

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