An elaboration of Thai vocal instructors in Thai university classes

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Abstract – This paper documents a qualitative investigation on the study of instructive methods of Thai traditional singing instructors in higher education in Thailand. The information was collected in the form of document analysis and interviews with Thai traditional music instructors from several universities across Thailand. The results of the analysis of Thai traditional singing instruction methods in higher education in Thailand revealed that there are 11 universities that offer Thai traditional singing instruction. The instruction is a part of curricula under four different governing bodies and four classifications of curriculum. The sets of practicum repertoires in every university were found to be almost identical. It was found that the instructors used several techniques. Some techniques were similar while some were different. All the techniques were transmitted orally. In order to successfully produce graduates of the desired standard, singing must be correctly taught from the basics, whether theory, pronunciation or rhyming. At the same time, creativity should also be encouraged.

Keywords - Classical music, higher education, instruction, traditional Thai singing

INTRODUCTION

The development of Thai traditional music instruction in earlier periods was perceived to be nonacademic. An owner of a Thai musical ensemble trained their family and relatives in the household, transmitting knowledge how to play accompaniment for traditional performances, such as Khon, theatrical plays, puppet shows and *Li-ge*. In this way they ensured continuation of their livelihood [1]. Additionally, Buddhist monasteries also played a supporting role in Thai traditional music education, while formal, systematic ensembles could be found within the palaces of royal families or in a noble's residence. These places were where musical art flourished, not only due to the presence of highly skilled musicians but also because of earnest patronage and participation from the royal family and officers, some of whom were established Thai musicians and traditional composers. Their performances and compositions have contributed greatly to the field. This was the situation until the Siamese coup d'état of 1932 when the status of Thai traditional music was affected by changes and political upheaval.

Today, there are well-documented instructions and learning criteria regarding Thai traditional music

education at higher education levels. In terms of curricula, there is balanced consideration and management between subject content and academic knowledge [2]. The teaching of Thai traditional music in higher education emphasizes academic, as well as professional objectives to address the philosophy and aims of each curriculum. The practical aspects are carried out according to classification of musical instruments, ensemble formations and learner aptitude. There are instrument-based subjects such as percussion practicum, plucked string practicum and vocal practicum, and also ensemble-based subjects such as *pipat* practicum, *khrueang sai* practicum and Thai vocal practicum.

Thai traditional singing is a unique art form due to its ornately complex techniques and requires a fine sense of memory and strenuous training. There are several techniques that a singer applies to render melodious lyrics and melismata to audiences. These techniques can be transmitted from instructors to learners. Due to a decreasing number of Thai traditional singing students and an aging population of renowned vocal masters, the number of skilled learners is decreasing. The study of instructive methods of Thai traditional singing in higher education reflects the current nation-wide situation of Thai traditional singing instruction and also reveals

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the techniques and instructions of the masters in higher education level. The results will serve as evidence that provides contextual information regarding instruction methods of Thai traditional singing, which will consequently lead to a body of basic information for improving vocal instruction as well as Thai traditional music education for years to come.

Knowledge of Thai traditional Music Instruction in Higher Education

In 2477 B.E. (AD 1934) Luang Wichit Watakaan, the then-director of the Fine Arts Department of Thailand, took ideas from the French school of music and drama and initiated the construction of a school of music and dramatic arts that offered the education of drama and music. The school was Thailand's first formal educational institute to offered specialized music courses. Situated in the grounds of Bavorn Palace, also known as Wang Nha, the school has been operating since 17th May 1934. However, its name has been changed several times. It has used its current name, College of Dramatic Arts, since 2515 B.E. (AD 1972) [3].

In 2505 B.E. (AD 1962), with a rising number of students, the Thai government initiated expansion of existing educational institutes and established new ones. The campaign saw the emergence of several public universities, such as Chiang Mai University, Khon Kaen University, Prince of Songkhla University and Ramkhamhaeng University. Many of these new institutions also established their own colleges of education. The Fine Arts Department also established regional schools of music and dance offering Certificates of Higher Education in order to inject fresh and more capable academic personnel into the national education system. The courses were later applied to other colleges of education, both in urban and rural areas. In 2517 B.E. (AD 1974) Payap University was the first institute to open musicology courses covering Thai traditional music as well as Western music under the degree "Bachelor of Arts (Music)".

Knowledge about Thai Traditional Singing

That traditional singing is considered a unique performing art because of its complex, sophisticated techniques and these techniques are applied differently across different institutes and also by different masters [4]. That traditional singing today is regarded by some as incomprehensible, as though the lyrics are indistinguishable. Superficially, the statement is partly true. In fact, Thai traditional singing is a practice of simplicity and, at the same time, expertise. While many advanced technologies have helped many branches of performing arts, in singing, the musical instruments cannot be manipulated by outside force. The most important tools for singing are inside the singer. Thus, singing is an art of invisible delicacy which can be perceived only by sound. To become a fine vocalist, apart from possessing natural talent, one must go through the right set of basic training.

The following are fundamental principles that should be made clear to aid reader comprehension in later parts of this article.: 1) Main melody: Its length must be precisely complete. The main melody of a musical piece consists of melody, composition, proportion, rhythm, phrase and correct rhyming scheme. The main melody can always be referred to by melodic and vocal variations; 2) Melody: This is an arrangement of high and low pitches. A good musician should know how to decorate a melodic line, whether ascending and descending, while keeping the original lyrics and melismata intact; 3) Sound: This is the result of a vibration or an interaction between internal organs of human throat or vocal cord, i.e. the throat, stomach pit, oral palate, teeth, gum, tongue, lips and chin. These vibrations can be perceived by the human auditory system. The lower the frequency, the lower the pitch. The higher the frequency, the higher the pitch. It is compulsory for a Thai traditional singer that the vocal sound must blend with the instrumental melody, which is why it is required to maintain the consistency of vocal sound at any given pitch; 4) Wording and pronunciation: A singer must pronounce correctly each and every word as written in a composition and must know the phrasing of different types of poems. A singer must follow correct intonation by controlling their chin, mouth, tongue and throat. These organs will facilitate the singing process. As to the amount of emphasis of these techniques, it is up to the singer to decide; 5) Rhythm: This is a constant beat throughout a musical piece. There are two types of rhythm. A regular rhythm is a base for playing musical instruments and singing. Ching rhythm is designated by the sound of the ching to indicate strong and weak beats. Nah Tab rhythm, is designated by different kinds of drums and also used as a unit to measure the length of a composition. A melody is said to be one rhythm long when it completes one cycle of *Nah Tab* [5].

Theoretical Concepts Applied in the Research

Theoretical concepts about education philosophy are inter-related. Philosophy focuses on life and universe, and more particularly on humanity, the environment and discovery of the ultimate truth. Education, on the other hand, deals with human behavior and how to develop people as decent, successful citizens in both life and work. Philosophy and education have interesting objectives: to evaluate and define the meaning of human life. Therefore philosophy and education are linked by two bonds which are: 1) Philosophy helps determine the goals and objectives of education in order to obtain ideal educational methods for any society at any time; 2) Philosophy is responsible for logical analysis, synthesis and interpretation of educational concepts for thorough comprehension, which will, in turn, enhance the confidence of a pragmatic educator. These theoretical concepts about educational philosophy will lead to the course outlines of Thai traditional singing education in higher education.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The qualitative research entitled "An elaboration of Thai vocal instructors in Thai university classes" had three research aims: 1) To study the current situation of Thai traditional singing instruction in higher education in Thailand; 2) To study Thai traditional singing techniques of masters in higher education; 3) To study instructive methods of Thai traditional singing instruction in higher education in Thailand.

METHODOLOGY

The study of instructive methods of Thai traditional singing instructors in higher education in Thailand was carried out in public universities that offer Thai traditional music as a major subject at Bachelor level with at least one student majoring in Thai traditional singing. The information was collected from Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart Khon Kaen University, University, Thaksin University, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Naresuan University, Mahasarakham University, Mahidol University, Ban Sondei Chaopraya Rajabhat University, Srinakharinwirot University and Bundit Pattana Silpa Institute.

Keeping the title in mind, the researchers purposively selected a sample group for data collection. The key informants are Thai traditional singing instructors in higher education who possess the following requirements: 1) Being a full-time Thai traditional singing instructor in a higher education institute; 2) Having over five years of work experience

From the above criteria, the researchers collected information from 12 key informants, sorted by university. After the process of data collection, the researchers then arranged the information obtained from literature reviews, related research and interviews according to content relevance and then sorted the information according to the aims of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current situation of traditional singing instruction in Thai higher education

The study revealed that Thai classical singing courses in higher education are run by different governing bodies, specifically the College of Music, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and Faculty of Education. There are four groups of degrees, Bachelor of Music, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education. The repertoires used in Thai traditional singing instruction in higher education in Thailand are chosen in such a way that the first year students only learn the basic repertoires such as Tab Ton Pleng Ching, Rabam See Bot, Saen Sanoh, Thon Samoh and other easy Thai repertoires. The second year students learn Sam Chan repertoires and certain Tab repertoires, such as Tab Nagbat, Tab Lom Pad Chai Khao. The third year students learn the Sepa Ta-yoi repertoires repertoires, and theatrical repertoires. The fourth year students learn the solo repertoires.

Biography and the works of Thai traditional singing instructors in higher education level in Thailand

The instructors learned and perfected Thai traditional singing from different institutes and schools. Late Master Sudjit Duriyapraneet, a national artist, first learned from her family, beginning with

her mother. Master Siri Witchawej, a national artist, learned from the house of the Duriyapraneets. Master Tassanee Khuntong, a national artist, learned from the College of Dramatic Arts. Dr. Pannee Promsombut learned from the College of Dramatic Arts. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kanchana Intarasunanont started learning from Baan Somdej Chaophraya Rajabhat Institute. Assist. Prof. Chetcharin Chirasantitham learned from college. Master Butri Sukpan learned Chulalongkorn University. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Suphannee Lueaboonchoo learned from Srinakharinwirot University Prasanmitr. Master Panupak Mokasak learned from Kasetsart University. Assit. Prof. Dr. Chatuporn Srimuang learned from Chulalongkorn University. Master Sattha Chandamaneechot learned from Chulalongkorn University and Master Duangdeuan Lhongswat learned from Chulalongkorn University.

The relationships between the masters of Thai traditional singing in higher education in Thailand in terms of knowledge transmission are as follows. Master Butri Sukpan learned from late master Sudjit Durivapraneet. Prof. Suphannee Assoc. Dr. Prof. Dr. Lueaboonchoo learned from Assoc. Kanchana Intarasunanont. Master Panupak Mokasak learned from Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kanchana Intarasunanont and Master Siri Witchawej. Assit. Prof. Dr. Chatuporn Srimuang, Master Sattha Chandamaneechot and Master Duangdeuan Lhongswat all learned from Master Charoenchai Soontornwatin. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kanchana Intarasunanont and Master Tassanee Khuntong learned from Master Siri Witchawej. Assist. Prof. Chetcharin Chirasantitham learned from Master Tassanee Khuntong.

Vocal Techniques of Thai traditional Singing Instructors in Higher Education in Thailand

The techniques of 12 Thai traditional singing instructors in higher education were studied. The researchers found several common vocal techniques used by multiple masters. The most commonly used technique was *Krathob* (10 times). The second was *Krun* or *Ruamkun* (9 times). The third were *Kluen Siang* and *Prakhob* (4 times). The fourth were *Kakok Kor*, *Nen Siang*, *Prib*, *Proi*, *Long Suang*, *Hon Siang*, *Uean Sam Siang* (*Plin Siang*) and *Lak Hai* (3 times). The fifth were *Klom Siang*, *Beeb Siang*, *Pradit Kham*, *Pan Siang Pan Kham*, *Muang Siang Muan Kham*, *Sabud Siang*, *Siang Loi Changwa* and *Siang Nak Bao*

(2 times). The sixth were Yon Siang, Kyak Kyon, Kruan, Kuang Siang, Chueam Siang, Chon Siang, Dad Thod Siang, Thing Siang, Noom Hoo, Pan Kham, Pan Siang, Phon Siang, Ruab Siang, Ron Baimai Ruang, Lak Changwa, Yoi Changwa, Luean Lai, Samniang Pleng, Siang Kruan, Siang Khreua, Siang Baimai Ron, Siang Phan, Siang Phoen, Siang Plew, Siang Loi, Siang Leuan Lai, Siagn Aa Sai (Siang Pee), Hang Siang, Hern Siang, Hon Loi Kham and Om Siang, each found to be used only once. However, there are some techniques that are known by different terms but their executions are identical. For example, Lak Hai Chai and Aeb Hai Chai. Both terms imply a similar meaning. There are also two techniques that are known by the same term (Sabud Siang) but are executed differently.

Instructive methods of Thai traditional singing instructors in higher education in Thailand

1. Pre-Instruction

The instructors first choose students based on vocal and auditory quality such as timbre of the voice, perception, auditory rhythmic ability, pronunciation and sitting posture. The selected students are then trained with notation reading to improve memorization and facilitate the instruction process. Then comes the selection of repertoires for students. Students should learn the repertoires in ascending difficulty level starting from pronouncing all seven notes - Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti - along with Ranaad Ek. Next is reading and understanding the meaning of lyrics and then the student will learn the Sam Chan melisma. Students must practice the Sam Chan melisma before the beginning of each class. The next step is the breathing. Students must learn how to correctly inhale at the fall of a beat and how to retain and release their breath within their stomach cavity for the Prib and Krun techniques.

2. Instruction

From the study, it was found that the instruction of Thai traditional singing in higher education in Thailand uses the same categories of instructive methods, which are oral and demonstrative. Students will try to imitate the techniques demonstrated by instructors. The students must practice melismatic techniques, *Krun* and sitting posture. The correct sitting posture is known as the *Pab Piab* position, while keeping the spine stretched. Cross-legged sitting is not an accepted position. Students must learn correct pronunciation and avoid singing with teeth

grinded together. The voice must come directly from the singer's throat and must not pass the nasal cavity. The instructors also allow students to record singing techniques from the instructors so that they can practice those techniques outside the classroom.

There is a different instructive method known as "the 5am training" in which a singer rises up early in the morning and sings a series of selected repertoires at full volume. The technological advancement in multimedia has also aided the instruction and helped stimulate attention regarding theoretical concepts, terminologies and historical background. Pretests, post-tests and information technology are used for listening drills. The use of notation for Thai traditional singing instruction and also the concept of *Nah Tap* rhythmic pattern are also highlighted so that students know whether they are singing at the right pitch and in the correct rhythmic measure.

3. Post-Instruction

The student learning outcomes are assessed by a central committee. Tests are conducted after every class by observing the development of a student. The assessment areas are clear pronunciation and melismata. The instruction process has to be repeated three times. There are two types of assessment. The first is individual assessment in which an individual student sings any selected learned repertoire to test memory and vocal quality. There is no fixed period as to when the test will be called for. The other type is ensemble assessment in which a student sings along with accompaniment of a Pipat and Khreuang Sai ensemble. The test takes place two times, in the middle and at the end of the semester to evaluate the student's vocal ability in terms of pitch and rhythm and also to test the singer's wit and astuteness.

4. Fine Tuning

This step involves revision and correction of any involuntary mistakes after completing a repertoire. For a single movement repertoire, a student is given a task to compose their own lyrics in the second repetition of the repertoire. Aside from this, the instructors also add more emotions, accentuation and vocal expression.

DISCUSSION

One of the objectives of this research was to study instructive methods of Thai traditional singing instructors in higher education in Thailand. The information was collected in the form of document analysis and interviews with Thai traditional music instructors from several universities across Thailand.

The results of the analysis of Thai traditional singing instruction methods in higher education in Thailand revealed that there are 11 universities that offer Thai traditional singing instruction. One is from the North (Naresuan University), two are from the Northeast Kaen University Mahasarakham (Khon and University), one is from the South (Thaksin University) and seven are from Central Thailand (Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Mahidol University, Ban Somdej Chaopraya Rajabhat University, Srinakharinwirot University Prasanmitr and Bundit Pattana Silpa Institute). The instruction is a part of curricula under four different governing bodies, the College of Music, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and Faculty of Education. Each body aims to equip their graduates with Thai traditional singing techniques in different professions, preferably the teaching profession which is more secure that being a musical artist. The findings do not conform to the results of Saentaweesuk, which concerned administrative strategies of music instruction in higher education institutes in Thailand and found that there are five different governing bodies: Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Humanity and Social Sciences, Faculty of Music, Colleges and Institutes [6].

The curriculum can be classified into 4 groups, Bachelor of Music, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education. Regarding the curriculum content, the degree of Bachelor of Education takes up one more year than any other courses as students must learn necessary subjects about the teaching profession while there is no distinct difference regarding the practicum subjects between courses. The number of the subjects ranges from six to eight subjects with the majority being seven. Students learn the Diew repertoire (Solo) as the last subject. This disagrees with the findings of Piyapan Saentaweesuk, which showed that there are five different higher education courses offered in music in Thailand, Bachelor of Education (Music Education), Bachelor of Fine Arts (Music), Bachelor of Education (Musicology), Bachelor of Arts (Musicology) and Bachelor of Arts (Music) [7].

The sets of practicum repertoires in every university were found to be almost identical. There were two ways of selecting the repertoires, choosing by self-consideration and using the Standard Criteria from the University Bureau, starting from the seventh

standard [8]. Practically, the repertoire which suits the students best is selected and its number depends on the students' skills. The weaker the skills, the fewer repertoires included. This process conforms to the Standard Criteria of the University Bureau, which aims to standardize Thai traditional music instruction, both theory and practice. Since Thai traditional singing is a part of Thai traditional music, its criteria was also included in which there are total of 11 standards for practical Thai traditional singing.

Among the Thai traditional singing instructors, three instructors are national artists (Master Siri Witchawej, Master Tassanee Khuntong and late Master Sudjit Duriyapraneet). Due to the concern over the masters' health, especially in the case of senior instructors, some classes take place in the masters' respective residences or workplaces rather than on university premises and students must travel there. Master Siri Witchawej teaches at his residence, Master Tassanee Khuntong at the Bundit Pattana Silpa Institute and Master Pattanee lives near her workplace. The instructors with over 20 years teaching experience are Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kanchana Intarasunanont. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Supannee Leuaboonchoo and Assist. Prof. Dr. Chetcharin Jirasantitham. The instructors with less than 20 years teaching experience are Master Duangdeuan Lhongswat, Assist. Prof. Dr. Chatuporn Srimuang, Master Panupak Mokasak, Master Butri Sukpan and Master Sattha Chandamaneechot. Master Duangdeuan Lhongswat, Assist. Prof. Dr. Chatuporn Srimuangand and Master Sattha Chandamaneechot all learned singing techniques from the same master (Master Charoenchai Suntornwatin) during their study at Chulalongkorn University. Master Panupak Mokasak learned singing techniques from Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kanchana Intarasunanont while taking a masters course in Srinakharinwirot University. Master Butri Sukpan learned knowledge from Master Sudjit Duriyapraneet. The institutes from which the instructors completed their Bachelor's degrees are Bundit Pattana Silpa Institute (Master Tassanee Khuntong, Master Pattanee Promsombut and Assist. Prof. Dr. Chetcharin Jirasantitham), Chulalongkorn University (Master Duangdeuan Lhongswat, Assist. Prof. Dr. Chatuporn Srimuang, Master Sattha Chandamaneechot and Master Butri Sukpan). Kasetsart University (Master Panupak Mokasak), Srinakharinwirot University Prasanmitr (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Supannee Leuaboonchoo) and Ban Somdei

Chaopraya Rajabhat Institute (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kanchana Intarasunanont). The institution from which the instructors completed their Masters degrees are Chulalongkorn University, Srinakharinwirot University Pransanmitr and Mahidol University. Regarding the singing techniques, it was found that every instructor learned singing techniques from more than one master as different masters specialized in different singing types. For instance, to study Sebha singing, one must learn from Master Siri Witchawej, as he is an expert in this specific field. This is different from Western music instruction when one student remains an apprentice of one master. These findings confirm the research of Pansak Wandee, who collected the biography and works of 99 musical artists in the Rattanakosin period [9]. The artists consisted of 47 male and 52 female artists. Four styles of singing were transmitted among these artists which were from Chao Chom Manda Silana Bang Chang of the King Rama II period, from Praya Sanoh Duriyang (Plaek Prasarnsab), from Praya Sanoh Duriyang (Cham Suntornwatin) and from Luang Praditpairoh (Sorn Sillapabanleng).

It was found that the instructors used several techniques. Some techniques were similar while some were different. All the techniques were transmitted orally. The nature of a repertoire used for instruction affects the selection of instructive methods. terminologies of the techniques reflect the fact that the same techniques can be executed differently from one master to another. For example, nine out of 13 instructors were found to use Krun techniques. Eight of these instructors knew the technique by the same term, whereas one master called the technique slightly differently as Kun but delivered it with similar execution. Also the Sabud Siang technique was found to be identically addressed but with a totally different execution. From the given examples, it is clear that the transmission of singing techniques can be interpreted in two ways. The first is clear and elaborated transmission. In this case, the instructor passes on the knowledge exactly as it was originally taught to the instructor. The other is obscure transmission in which an instructor passes on the knowledge without any explanation. In this case, instructor conceptualizes the idea of the technique and defines it to give a concrete example to the student. During the investigation Kanchana Intarasunanont (personal communication) stated that her list of terminologies of Thai traditional singing techniques was partly obtained from Thai

traditional singing masters such as Master Prachit Khamprasert, Master Siri Witchawej and Master Angun Bua-iam, and partly taken from Chawewan Woramontri, her mother and from Khunying Chin Silapabanleng, her first music teacher.

Today, the new students of Thai traditional singing do not possess pre-requisite basics. Most of them are more familiar with Luk Thung singing. Therefore, the instructors have to lay down correct Thai traditional singing basics to the students during freshmen year, including rhythm, melody and pronunciation to improve their skills. The instructors also have to find the instructive methods to improve the student's vocal ability. For this, musical instruments are preferable as external help as the students lack listening skills. In terms of assessment, there is a central committee for assessment in order to push the students to further improve themselves. This is in accordance with the recommendations of Panya Roongreuang, who said that singing must be correctly taught from the basics, whether theory, pronunciation or rhyming [10]. At the same time, creativity should also be encouraged.

SUGGESTIONS

From this investigation, the researchers have made three suggestions: 1) There should be further research on Thai traditional singing techniques of Thai traditional singing instructors in the Bundit Pattana Silpa Institute. 2) There should be further research on Pi and Sor playing techniques of Pi and Sor instructors in higher education in Thailand. 3) There should be further research on the transmission of knowledge and instruction methods of Thai traditional singing in Thailand.

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