Lakhon Phanthang: Thai Traditional Theatre in the Modern World

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Declaration of Authorship

I, Phakamas Jirajarupat, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Date: 22 Dec 2014
Abstract

This thesis concerns the historical development of lakhon phanthang, a dance-drama form that emerged originally in Thailand as a commercial theatre under the patronage of royalty in the nineteenth century, was formulated as a traditional dance genre in the 1940s by the Fine Arts Department, modernised in the 1980s and is today taught in dance academies. Lakhon phanthang’s primary raison d’être is the representation of non-Thai ethnic groups, including Chinese, Burmese, Mons and Khake (Muslims) and it draws eclectically on the costumes, movement styles and ethnic stereotypes of these Others. This thesis examines transpositions and aesthetic shifts in the form over time with a focus on the modernisation, formalisation and traditionalisation, revival, survival and adaptation of lakhon phanthang, looking particularly at Krom Siilapakorn’s theatre productions, the process of learning and teaching in higher education and theatre in rites of passage. The thesis analyses both aesthetic practices and various socio-cultural contexts, based on research on texts and documents, interviews and the author’s first-hand experiences as an audience member, dancer and instructor of lakhon phanthang. Analysis of lakhon phanthang in the modern world demonstrates that lakhon phanthang is a gateway for Thai theatre to develop traditional in modern society. The continuing survival of Thai traditional theatre requires not only the preservation of art forms as museum pieces but also making these art forms come alive for present-day audiences and engaging theatrical forms with contemporary society.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and support I received from several individuals who have generously contributed their valuable knowledge and experience, allowing me to complete the research I undertook for this doctorate. My postgraduate studies at Royal Holloway, University of London were supported by scholarships from Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok Thailand. Without this financial support, my PhD research in the UK would not have been possible.

First and foremost among many, I would like to express my greatest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Matthew Isaac Cohen, whose deep knowledge and crystal clear guidance have been precious and valuable to my work. His unfailing support and understanding have sustained me, academically and psychologically, throughout my period of studies at Royal Holloway. Dr. Cohen, you have always been there whenever I needed you. I could not have finished this piece of work and entered the international academic arena without your valuable guidance and encouragement.

My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Sarinthorn Vidhayasirinun, who not only has patiently and calmly guided me through the difficult and challenging process of PhD research, but has also shaped my intellectual thinking. You have always been with me since I took my first steps as a PhD student, until the very end. Your valuable comments, suggestions for this thesis and the dhamma lessons you have imparted me for life have helped me triumph over all the obstacles and difficulties strewn on my academic research path. I cannot imagine how I would have done without your support.
I would like to thank my academic adviser, Dr. Dick McCaw for his advice and committed encouragement. My deep and sincere gratitude also goes to Dr. Catherine Diamond for her worthy advice and her comments to improve the accuracy of my thesis. I would also like to express my greatest gratitude to Professor Emeritus Dr. Surapone Virulrak, my first teacher, who introduced me to the world of Thai traditional dance research and also inspired me to conduct research in Thai traditional theatre and present it to the world.

In the process of writing-up, I am indebted to several friends, who have provided me with their generous utmost support. I would like to say a warm thank you to Dorawan Somthong and David Easey, Sumanus and Chris Lawson, Arifani Moyo, Dr. Brahm Prakash, Dr. Meera Sarma, Dr. Michelle Chan, Dr. Yajai Bunnag, and Dr. Alessandra Bruni Lopez y Royo who all have guided me through the vagaries of the English language and helped to correct my grammatical mistakes. Thanks are also due to Dr. Tamara Aberle, Jiwan Yang, Assistant Pawinee Boonserm, Krailas Jitkul, and Assistant Dr. Sukanya Sompiboon, who shared their knowledge of Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian Studies with me. I know you are the best, thank you all!

I would like to express my big thanks to my British family, Dr. Ann Hutchinson and her husband Ivor Guest, who have always made me feel at home. Your laugh and love made my time in London bright and warm even on my bluest day. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Wassana Hafenrichter and family, Harry and Sangvane Parson, Molnapa Punboon, Sirisouk Wang, Sunisa Bhokanandh and her family, Srana Watananusak for all their love, support and friendship that have helped me get through my moments of despair and loneliness during this difficult period of my life. I would also like to thank Poranee Johnson and the Thai
Dance Academy team, as their love of Thai dance and culture nurtured my passion for Thai dancing even when I was in a foreign country.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to Pramate Boonyachai, Dr. Surat Jongda, Dr. Pairot Thongkhamsuk, Dr. Supachai Chansuwan, Wantanee Muangboon, Anucha Sumaman, Pimrat Navasiri, and all Krom Silapakorn artists, all of whom gave me valuable interviews and shared their dance talents, and also provided me with insights into different perspectives on Thai traditional theatre. Big thanks are also due to my friends, Piyawan Uka姆thorn, Urairat Chinglek, the Thai team at Bangkok Pattana International School and St. Andrew International School in Bangkok, Thailand for their support and their blessings.

I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to my colleagues, staff and students at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, especially Professor Dr. Chommanard Kijkhun, Assoc. Prof. Supawadee Pothiwetchakul, Asst. Prof. Somsak Buarod, Sakul Muangsakorn, Manissa Vasinarom, Thareeporn Sangkahamanthorn, Asst. Prof. Dr. Chutima Maneewattana, Dr. Nattaporn Rattanachaiwong, Dr. Kusuma Thepparak, Wutichai Khathawee and Naradhip Markanta who have always generously shared with me their knowledge, love, friendship and given me their blessings for my studying abroad. My deepest gratitude also goes to Komsorn Thanathammetee, my beloved friend: though you are no longer in this world you are in my heart forever.

Last but not least, I owe my gratitude to my ‘hybrid’ family (Sae Chong and Jirajarupat) especially my super mom, whose love, care and support have made me strong. Finally, my special heartfelt thank you goes to Cheerawat Wanta, my beloved husband and sunshine of my heart and life. Thank you for always being there for me through my toughest and happiest moments in life.
This thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to Chao Phraya Mahinharasakdithamrong, Boosara Mahin, Prince Narathip Phraphanpong and Seri Wangnaitham, whose lives and artistic creativity have contributed to the past, present and future of lakhon phanthang and Thai traditional theatre.
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Introduction

I was born in Bangkok and was raised in a conservative Thai-Chinese family that still observes Chinese traditions. We worship and pray to Chinese gods alongside the Buddha. The Chinese New Year is more important to us than the Thai New Year and my grandparents prefer chopsticks over spoon and fork, even when they eat spicy Thai food. My uncles and aunts still use Chinese names as their nicknames, though they have Thai names as their official names. I belong to the third generation of my family growing up in modern day Thai society and I am expected to inherit all these family customs. However, many things have changed. I was taught by my grandmother and my mother to cook Chinese food using Thai ingredients. I was taught to prepare a Chinese altar and oblations for worshipping at both Thai and Chinese festivals. My cousins and I do not use Chinese names even though our grandparents call us by the Chinese names they have given us. My grandparents spoke Chinese dialect with us and we frequently answered them in Thai. My family background is mixed and I have experienced a mixed culture and tradition since childhood.

I began to learn traditional Thai dance when I was ten years old. My mother took me for lessons at the temple near my house because she wanted me to be able to perform on stage and wear a beautiful Thai costume as she had seen on her favourite Thai television drama programme, Lakhon Cak Cak Wong Wong. It was my chance to know something different from my family background and culture. I subsequently began to study Thai dance intensively at high-school level at the Dramatic Arts College in Bangkok. I was assigned to the group of lakhon (dance-drama) students practising the moves for female characters. The first two years of my
studies were devoted to preliminary training in physical and dance skills. When I was in my second year of studies, I was selected to perform Indian dance at the National Theatre. The dance had been choreographed by a khon dance master of the college, who had been to India to study kathakali Indian dance-drama. I wore a sari and wore thick make up on my eyes to make them look sharp and big like the eyes of Khake, as South Asians are known in Thailand.

I continued my studies at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Chulalongkorn University and my experience of non-Thai dance grew further, through practising lakhon phanthang intensively. As a dance student, I was taught that lakhon phanthang is a Thai traditional dance theatre style. But in performance Thai traditional dance movement, singing, music and costume are blended with non-Thai traditional dance styles in accordance with the nationality or ethnic origin of the characters that appear in plays. The staged stories are based on the foreign chronicles and literature of Thailand’s neighbours such as Laos, Burma and China. The most popular lakhon phanthang repertoire items are Phra Lor, a tragic love story about King Lor and two princesses of Muang Srong, and Rachathirat, about the war between Burmese and Mons, based on Mons chronicles. In a Thai dance history class I was provided with general information about the pioneering practitioners of lakhon phanthang, why this theatre form emerged and what this theatre form represented. I and my friends were fed this information devoid of any contextual analysis of cultural diversity and related issues. We did not know why and how this theatre form from the nineteenth century had become a traditional form presented by Krom Silapakorn and taught in the performing arts departments of universities (Virulrak, Wiwattanakarn 182).
In the second year of studies, I learned *lakhon phanthang* plays from the *Rachathirat* repertoire. At the end of term my friends and I had to present a final project based on *lakhon phanthang*. I was selected for the role of Mei Manik, a major Mons female character in the episode *Phraya Noi Chom Talard* (*Phraya Noi* visits the market). I was not inspired by this dance. I felt uncomfortable with its movements and was careless in executing the dance choreographic patterns that had been devised to portray the differences among people of varied nationalities within the play. I always thought that as I was learning Thai dance my expertise in portraying female characters ought to be in authentic Thai dances such as *khon*, *lakhon nai* and *lakhon nok*. I was not the only one who had this attitude. Many friends of mine thought the same. Therefore, when the time came for my solo dance exam, the most important final dance exam for all the senior dance students, I selected a short dance piece from *khon*, dancing the role of Nang Benyaguy, a beautiful niece of Tossakan (the Thai name for Ravana).

My attitude about *lakhon phanthang* changed when I became a Thai dance lecturer in the Performing Arts Department, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. I was assigned by the department to teach theoretical and practical Thai dance and theatre subjects and *lakhon phanthang* was included. I had to revise my dance knowledge and brush up my skills in *lakhon phanthang* in order to teach my students. Thus, I spent a lot of time to recall the dance movements of the *lakhon phanthang* story of *Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat*. I had to find a way to make myself comfortable with the off balance stance of the body, the shoulder swaying and the use of hand gestures in the *lakhon phanthang* style in order to teach the students. I made an effort to embody the mixed dance forms, based on a hybrid mix of Thai theatre dance and other styles such as Chinese, Mons, Burmese and Laotian dances,
which I call *phanthangness*. I define *phanthangness* as the qualities or characteristics of a hybrid dance. *Phanthangness* emerges when Thai dance forms meet the Other’s dances or theatre elements. A new form of dance or theatre is created which is composed of Thai and non-Thai dancing. Eight years into my dance academic career, I not only taught but also performed *lakhon phanthang* and danced in *phanthang* style. I was selected to perform in *phanthang* dance style and to perform *lakhon phanthang* dance–drama on many occasions. These experiences made me feel more and more comfortable with the *lakhon phanthang* dance movement style and taught me that *phanthangness* is not about the presentation of other national dance movements but about the presentation of Thai dance through the Other’s dance-movement style.

My family background and dance experiences drove me to know more about hybridity in cultural life and in dance. I was compelled to find out the way to live and learn through hybridisation. I started to question critically Thai performing arts in the context of modernity with my research paper about the Thai puppet theatre, *The Survival and Adaptation of Traditional Thai Puppet Theatre (Joe Louis Theatre)*, which I presented at the World Dance Alliance Global Summit in Brisbane, Australia (see Jirajarupat 2008). This research inspired me to investigate how Thai traditional dance and theatre survive and adapt themselves to modern Thai society. As I am a Thai dance lecturer, I realised that the current way of teaching Thai traditional dance and theatre do not encourage learners to think out of a traditional frame. This can be seen from the theses of postgraduate students majoring in performing arts and dance, which are mostly devoted to the study of dance characteristics, the study of dance history and the notation of dance movements (see Makpa 2006). Furthermore, I have witnessed that dance students are taught to replicate the tradition in the name of
preserving national heritage. However, in contemporary Thai society, pervaded by
the influence of other Asian nations such as Korea and influences from the West,
Thai dance students, artists and scholars seem to preserve their tradition without any
awareness of the changes in Thai society and the rest of the globe. This awareness of
change has become the inspiration for my research concerning *lakhon phanthang* and
the contemporary world.

I realise that *lakhon phanthang*, in both its form and content, is a fair
demonstration of how Thai traditional theatre meets Otherness and embodies
Burmese, Laotian and Chinese arts. It demonstrates how Thai theatre adapts itself
and thus survives in the modern world while influenced by factors such as
urbanisation, westernisation, and globalisation. Through *lakhon phanthang*, I see a
picture of interpretation of Otherness via a Thai artistic perspective and in return the
influence of Otherness over Thai traditional arts. This study goes beyond the
investigation of the factors that have changed Thai traditional theatre in
contemporary times. The analysis of *lakhon phanthang* in the modern world shows
the role of the Other within Thai society, Thailand’s relation to Asia and the
changing concept of Thai identity. Furthermore, *lakhon phanthang* exemplifies the
traditionalisation of Thai theatre as affected through the agency of artists, audiences,
monarchical system, national art organisations, national policies and educational
institutions.

**Statement of Research Aims**

The survival and adaptation of *lakhon phanthang* in contemporary Thai
society are analysed in this thesis in relation to the different contexts at play such as
the patronisation of dance-drama and theatre by the royal court, the political value,
education and economic development and the ideology of Thai national identity. I principally examine the historical background and transposition and shifts in theatrical aesthetics, as well as the revival and survival of lakhon phanthang within Thai higher education. The research questions of this thesis can be grouped into four sets, each one carrying subsidiary questions:

1. What are the significant factors of change in Thai popular theatre and the key issues influencing their development, from popular theatre to traditional dance genre in the context of Thai modern and contemporary society? This main question can be broken up as follows:
   - Why did dance and theatre in phanthang style emerge in the nineteenth century?
   - Why has lakhon phanthang as a hybrid dance-drama and theatre form been categorised as traditional theatre?
   - What is the relationship between the hybridity lakhon phanthang and its traditionalisation?

2. What are the key issues involved in formulating lakhon phanthang as traditional theatre? An exploration of this question involves asking the following:
   - What are the characteristics of lakhon phanthang in the period of standardisation?
   - Are national policies and the notion of Thainess an influence on the standardisation of lakhon phanthang?
   - Has lakhon phantang in the post-World War II period changed the concept of Thainess?
• What does the lakhon phanthang of the post World War II period have in common with the phanthang dance and theatre of an earlier period?

3. Why does lakhon phanthang reach peak popularity on the National Theatre stage in the 1980s? This main question can be subdivided into:
   • Why do theatre practitioners choose the lakhon phanthang form to modernise traditional theatre and reinstate its popularity?
   • What are the characteristics of modernisation in lakhon phanthang?
   • What is the contribution of the modernisation of lakhon phanthang to the Thai traditional dance of the future?

4. How has lakhon phanthang been seen by the dance practitioners within higher education and within the community? This fourth question will deal with the following:
   • Does lakhon phanthang as a kind of traditional dance-drama position itself equally with other traditional dance-drama forms?
   • What are the key issues of differentiation between lakhon phanthang and other dance forms as traditional dance-drama?
   • How is lakhon phanthang viewed in the post-traditional society?

Theoretical Framework

The concept of traditionalisation as formulated by Chicago sociologist Edward Shils (1981) is important to this research. Tradition according to Shils is the pattern of beliefs and actions that humans persist in using in society. The essential method of tradition is the pattern of human creation by human ideas and imagination,
essentially ‘anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to present’ (Shils 12). This transmission encourages the existing pattern of tradition. However, the transmission of tradition can be changed, upon realisation that old traditions are not good enough. Shils also argues that past traditions encourage the emergence of new traditions in society by reworking and adapting older ideas. Humans in society accept the new tradition, which derives from the old one via reinterpretation, and reconstruction of older traditions. Traditionalisation, however, opposes tradition. It denotes the intentional process of fixing the form of the work of art from the ancient time. I apply the terms tradition and traditionalisation as elaborated by Shils to Thai theatre, whereby lakhon phanthang at present is classified as a Thai traditional theatre form. The dance form and its choreographic pattern have been modified and reinterpreted because the old dance form does not match societal changes. The traditionalisation of lakhon phanthang is the result of the negotiation that has occurred between the old dance form and the concept of modern theatre. As a consequence, lakhon phanthang has become fixed and is labelled traditional theatre.

Shils’s theory also inspires me to think about the factors that lead to traditional change: what Shils describes as endogenous factors and exogenous factors. Endogenous factors are the changes of internal circumstances in society such as changes in human ideas and activities. For example, in the past Thai people believed that making a living by dancing was an unacceptable and shameful occupation for women in Thai society, whereas at present this belief has changed, and being a dancer is not only a popular job but also one that is thought to bestow a high income. There is also greater institutional support. Exogenous factors are those external aspects which impact tradition, such as foreign influences and macroeconomic changes.
Shils argues that an alien tradition might blend with the original tradition by modification (98). Recently, Thai traditional dances have been facing challenges brought by alien traditions. Alien traditions are the forms of external traditions which influence old Thai traditions. Thai traditional theatre has long been confronted by alien traditions and foreign influences as evidenced by the lakhon phanthang theatre form and the phanthang dance patterns. The monarchy, government, schools and universities are the specific institutions that support the stability of Thai tradition and moderate its changes.

The process of changing tradition in Thai theatre and dance does not mean that everything is completely renewed. Lakhon phanthang is a mixed form comprising Thai and non-Thai art, however, its performance form still remains within the spectrum of Thai traditional theatre. Thai dance artists of the young generations combine the different dance and theatre traditions with the aim of making something new which encourages diverse people to understand traditions comparatively. They renew the field of performance and make art that communicates effectively with audiences. In addition, they are also preserving the form as national heritage. The preservation of tradition in Thai theatre relates to what Shils calls ‘substantive traditionality’, which refers to ‘the appreciation of the accomplishments and wisdom of the past and of the institutions especially impregnated with tradition, as well as the desirability of regarding patterns inherited from the past as valid guides’ (21). Traditional Thai theatre today relates to this, although its form is modified and adapted to the modern social and cultural context. The ancient dance form of the past is still valued over that of the present, as in the case of the two traditional lakhon phanthang repertoires, Phra Lor and Rachathirat. These repertoires are being handed down from the past and have been regularly presented
on the National Theatre stage. In addition, these repertoires are taught in the universities as the classic model of Thai lakhon phanthang. Phuchanasibtid, as a modern lakhon phanthang repertoire, is not accorded the same prestige.

In my analysis of post-traditional aesthetics and society, I take my theoretical inspiration from Anthony Giddens, especially the essay ‘Living in a post traditional society’ which is published as the second chapter of the book Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order by Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash (1994). Giddens refers to the idea of ‘tradition in modernity’, which reflects the impact and influence of modernity upon tradition and vice versa. Giddens states that ‘modernity has rebuilt tradition as it has dissolved it’ (56). This brings me to examine the social and political contexts in search of how modernity in Siam/Thailand impacts on traditional theatre and how Thai traditional theatre is transformed in the post-traditional society.

Furthermore, Giddens also provides interesting insights into the ‘guardians’ and ‘experts’ in society, those who have the authority to preserve and modify tradition. These guardians and experts have different characteristics. The guardians have powerful status within the traditional order, whereas the experts use their skills and knowledge to deal with the direction of tradition in modern society (Giddens 65). In the case of Thai traditional theatre, the guardians and experts are located first and foremost in the royal court, at the top of the hierarchy in Thai society, and issue directives that come down to the common people who have the duty to perform. For example, Seri Wangnaitham, a former director of the Performing Arts Division of Krom Silapakorn, held roles as both guardian and as expert. His authority under the national art organisation was to protect and preserve traditional dance-drama and theatre as part of national heritage, which cast him in the role of guardian.
Meanwhile, he operated as expert, propagating knowledge and, with the ability to assess practice from a non-traditional stance, modernising and creating the new production *Phuchanasibtid*, which responded to social changes and to the needs of *lakhon phanthang* audiences in 1980s.

I regard *lakhon phanthang* as form of hybrid theatre to which one can apply the poststructuralist concept of hybridity (cf. Damrhung ‘From Phar Lor’ 111). The hybridity concept is a notion largely derived from post-colonial theory. It may sound inappropriate to apply a post-colonial concept to a country such as Thailand, which has never been colonised. However, the political and social contexts of Thailand demonstrate a condition of semi-colonialism, or in the words of Michael Herzfeld (2002) crypto-colonialism. Furthermore, post-colonial theories allow one to understand how Thai culture deals with Western hegemonic culture and its neighbouring cultures (Jackson 37).

A useful source on hybridity for our purposes is Robert J.C. Young’s *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995). Young notes that ‘hybridity makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference’ (27). Hybridity describes a new form that is created from mixing two or more different forms or things or species such as languages, plants, animals and cultures. Such new forms are ‘amalgamation rather than contestation’ (Young 21). I am inspired by the concept of hybridity as formulated in Young’s work and have found it helpful to understand hybridity in Thai performance. In Thai traditional theatre, the historical background and the theatrical elements of each performance express a relationship between the Thai indigenous performance form and other performance styles or narratives such as the adaptation of the *Panji* story from Indonesia which becomes the *Inao* story performed for the court. Many Thai traditional theatre forms have
characteristics of hybridity. However, such hybridity is subsumed under the umbrella of traditional theatre.

Also useful in the context of this discussion is the concept of cultural hybridity of Homi Bhabha as formulated in his essay ‘Cultures in Between’ (1996). Bhabha claims that cultural hybridity is a reflection of colonialism, and develops from a confrontation with an unequal cultural authority. The particular characteristics of cultural hybridity, according to Bhabha, are ambivalence and uncertainty (58). Bhabha’s work helps to understand why lakhon phanthang is difficult to define and why its boundaries are porous. Lakhon phanthang in the perception of Thai dance scholars is situated in between the old traditional dance forms such as lakhon nai and lakhon nok and the new theatrical inventions of the nineteenth century (cf. Yupho, Silapa Lakhon Ram 96). The forms and context of lakhon phanthang sometimes overlap with and are also differentiated from the old traditional theatre forms. I apply the concept of hybridity in my investigation of how cultural factors influence the development of the form and context of lakhon phanthang.

A further concept elaborated by Bhabha in The Location of Culture (2010) is that of ‘mimicry.’ This term helps me to describe the hybrid characteristics of Thai traditional theatre. Mimicry, as a term, refers to the colonial impact upon the indigenous culture. Its meaning is ‘almost the same but not quite’ (Bhabha 122). Mimicry troubles the power of colonial authority. Bhabha explains that representation through mimicry involves ‘partial presence’ and expresses an ambivalent identity which attacks colonial authority, in particular through culture and national history (Bhabha 123). The mimicry Bhaba is talking about is the imitation of colonisers by colonised. The concept allows me to think about the hybridity of Thai theatre from yet another viewpoint, enabling me to understand the
hybridisation of lakhon phanthang. The invention of lakhon phanthang shows how non-Thai dance and theatrical elements have been used as an ingredient in the overall performance. Therefore, although the hybridisation of lakhon phanthang is the process of making Thai theatre by mimicking some other theatrical elements, the other elements need to be refined in consonance with traditional Thai theatrical performance (Dumrhung interview).

Some Recent Studies on Lakhon Phanthang and Thai Traditional Theatre

There are very few studies focused on lakhon phanthang. The few that are available rehash descriptions provided by the earlier authors. The majority of publications, especially those in Thai language, are centred on dance notation and the historical background of dance and theatre forms in both the folk and court dance genres, and tend to be more descriptive than analytical. However, there are a few English language publications about Thai and Asian theatres, which are very important as sources for this thesis. In this section, I would like to discuss some recent studies of Thai theatre, which have been drawn upon in this thesis and which are related to my research questions.

*Theatre in Southeast Asia* (1974) and *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (1993) written and edited respectively by James R. Brandon provide a clear discussion of the interrelationship of theatre forms in Southeast Asia. Brandon uses four perspectives: historical background, theatre as art, theatre as an institution and theatre as communication, which lead the readers to an understanding of the background, functions, and aesthetic value of Southeast Asian theatre. His work reflects the interesting perspective of a Western researcher. In terms of cultural factors that influence Thai theatre, I apply his ideas about three different supporting
categories within Asian theatre, the court theatre, the folk theatre and urbanisation. Court theatre is regarded as ‘high art’ with sophisticated dance movement and plays, whereas folk theatre is viewed as serving the community with uncomplicated forms. Urbanisation encouraged the rise of commercial theatre forms - Asian theatres appear to share histories and characteristics with one another. New theatrical approaches are seen as coming from Western theatre and appeared in Asia as a result of the exchange of artists and through the educational system. Brandon’s works allows me to understand theatre in Southeast Asia as a chain of cultural diversity.

Another most valuable English-language publication, this one by a Thai scholar who writes on the development of Thai theatre, is Dance, Drama and Theatre in Thailand: The Process of Development and Modernisation by Mattani Rutnin (1996). This book offers important historical background to the modernisation of dance, dance-drama and theatre in Thailand. Rutnin leads her readers to the roots of dance-drama in Thailand, which relates to three main institutions of Thai society: ban (home, village), wat (temple) and wang (palace). She mines various sources such as the chronicles of Thailand, Sukhothai inscriptions, old Thai literature and interviews to support her arguments. The most interesting insight in Rutnin’s book is into the process of modernisation of dance, dance-drama and theatre in Thailand. She sees modernisation as originating with the king, who is in the position of leader in developing, enriching and patronising Thai performing arts. In the case of lakhon phanthang, this dance-drama form was developed through the royal court even though the emergence of this dance-drama form was a form of popular theatre serving the diverse society in the nineteenth century.

Among the Thai language publications, the most relevant for Thai dance and theatre students is Tamnan Lakhon Inao (The origin of Inao dance-drama),
contributed by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1965). Prince Damrong Rajanubhab is
one of the most influential Thai theatre court scholars also nicknamed ‘Father of
Thai History’. Most of his works are devoted to the study of Thai history in several
aspects, and are regarded as valuable reference. This particular publication provides
both the historical background of Thai dance and theatre as also an analysis of the
socio-cultural milieu of the creation of the theatre form. This book is divided into
three parts: the first part is about the history, styles and customs of *lakhon ram*. The
second part talks about the *lakhon Inao* (Inao dance-drama) and *Inao* chronicles in
Thai literature and dance-drama. The third part details the dance-drama chronicles
from the Ayuthaya period to the time of the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

This book compiles valuable information, handed down from the royal court
combined with Prince Damrong’s first-hand experience. He states that *lakhon ram*
acquired its style and methods from India. He argues that the theatre and dance-
drama of Siam and other neighbours such as Burma and Java were Indianised (221).
The last section of this book is very useful for my thesis. It provides me with the
socio-cultural context relating to Thai theatre in the past. *Lakhon Chao Phraya
Mahin*, which was the first private dance troupe before the emergence of *lakhon
phantang*, is mentioned in this section. Furthermore, this section shows why *Lakhon
Chao Phraya Mahin* gained popularity in the reigns of both King Rama IV (r. 1851-
68) and King Rama V (r. 1868-1910) (378-379). Moreover, Prince Damrong
Rajanubhab also analyses the factors that instigate changes in Thai traditional dance-
drama such as the political policies, the foreign community and the theatre and dance
patronage by the royal court. I have used data from this book and also considered the
Thai performing arts through this lens. In addition, I rethink what led to present
changes in comparison with the past. I found that in the post-traditional society, the
educational system, globalisation, urbanisation and capitalism are important factors to be considered with regard to the status of Thai dance-drama and theatre today.

Dhanit Yupho, the former Director-General of the Fine Arts Department in 1956-1968, wrote many important books about Thai dance-drama and theatre and Thai culture. Most of his publications were bilingual (Thai-English). His works *The Khon and Lakon (Masked Dance and Dance-Drama)* (1963), and *Sinlapa Lakhon Ram Rue Khumu Nattasin Thai (The Art of Thai Dance-drama, or A Handbook of Thai Dance)* (1988) give information about the characteristics of Thai dance and theatre in each genre, the training process, the scripts of the plays, the dance convention and the historical background of the establishment of the School of Music and Dance in Thailand. In *The Khon and Lakon* (1963), the author provides a collection of programmes of *khon* (masked dance) and *lakhon* (dance-drama) in Thailand, presented by Krom Silpakorn from 1945 to 1962. Furthermore, the author also gives history and details on each performance style. The programmes collected therein allow me to study the old dance styles, which were first presented after a period of major political change in Thailand. Through this book I learnt when the first *lakhon phanthang* production by Krom Silapakorn was presented and where. This book provides information for comparing between Thai traditional performance of today with that of the past. The other book, *Sinlapa Lakhon Ram Rue Khumu Nattasin Thai* (1988) gives the historical background of Thai dance as well with an interesting section about the daily life and training of Thai dancers in 1934. I have used this source to look at the dance training in the Thai revolutionary period, which brings me to think about the different process of Thai dance training in the past in the context of a private dance troupe and the dance training offered through the educational system today. I also reflect on how these two training systems engage
dance students and note the differences between them. This has encouraged me to develop my own ideas about lakhon phanthang training in the educational system today.

In the context of a literature review of Thai traditional theatre, it is impossible to avoid discussing the publications by Professor Emeritus Dr. Surapone Virulrak, a key scholar in Thai theatre and dance studies in Thailand. His Thai language book *Wiwattanakarn Nattasil Thai Nai Krung Rattanagosin* (Evolution of Thai Dance and Dance Drama during the Bangkok period 1782-1934) (2000) gives the whole picture of Thai theatre and dance from 1782 to 1934 discussing the interrelationship of Thai theatre and society in each period.

The author proposes that the specific social structure of Thailand and the Thai way of life have shaped Thai traditional performance and its development. Meanwhile, performances from neighbouring countries and multi-ethnic communities have also influenced the development of Thai theatre (Virulrak *Wiwattanakarn* 10). Virulrak provides solid information about Thai traditional performances since the Sukhothai period and in-depth critical information about each kingship of the Rattanagosin era from King Rama I (r. 1782-1809) to King Rama VII (r. 1925-1934)

Virulrak states that several societal factors have influenced the development of traditional dance and dance-drama in Thailand. Firstly, the royal court plays an important role in encouraging and modifying dance and dance-drama. Secondly, the social and hierarchical systems impact on the emergence of commercial theatres. Thirdly, the economic system is creating a new social structure in society so the entertainment in cities is developed to support new spectatorial needs. Fourthly, the gambling halls in the past were the place that encouraged the interaction between
performance and multi-ethnic communities. Fifthly, multi-ethnic communities and Westernisation brought new traditions and cultures which became a source for inventing newer, mixed performance styles. All these factors are helpful to understand the emergence of popular theatre in the mid nineteenth century.

Another helpful source by Virulrak is the article ‘Theatre in Thailand Today’ published in Asian Theatre Journal in 1999. This article gives the background of each Thai theatre form and performance style of the court and of the commoners. Virulrak also informs readers about a new theatre genre, the lakhon phut (spoken dance-drama), which emerged in Thailand in the early twentieth century inspired by Western theatre. In the early twentieth century, Thailand was going through a period of social revolution and transition into modernity. Not only were society and the ways of life changed, but dance-drama and theatre were also modernised. Virulrak evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of the theatre circumstances in Thailand by analysing the duration of live performance programmes, theatre sponsorship, theatre facilities, the identity of performers and composition of audiences, box office income and the role of electronic media such as radio and television for diffusion. Furthermore, he discusses theatre education, which is an essential part of the development of theatre in Thailand today.

Through this article, Virulrak explains the decline of Thai theatre in modern society by considering the economic, political and social changes and the impact of modern technologies. Virulrak uses the term ‘second hand performance’, in connection with the phenomenon of watching and listening to performances via live media programme (Virulrak ‘Theatre’ 104). People can watch broadcast performances wherever and whenever they need, without restrictions of time. Virulrak seems to focus on the positive effects of modern media on traditional
theatre neglecting the aesthetics of the art. In actuality, television programme have its own regular programme style. They tend to be modern entertainment and melodrama, which gained popularity and which attract more viewer than traditional dance-drama. The article has made me question the role of modern media in ensuring the survival of *lakhon panthang* in modern society, something that will be addressed in chapter five and chapter six of this thesis.

Altogether research into Thai traditional theatre appears primarily in the form of unpublished theses and journal articles. There are a few master degree dissertations which relate to *lakhon panthang*. However, none of these dissertations provides a comprehensive study of the socio-cultural factors that have shaped *lakhon panthang*; they tend to discuss the historical background of the dance form and provide a notation of dance movements. The master degree dissertation from which I have drawn most is a study by Sompit Sukvipat titled *Puchanasiptit: Lakon Panthang Khong Arjarn Seri Vangnaitham (The Conqueror of Tenth Directions : Lakon Panthang by Seri Vangnaitham)* (1976). Sompit examines *lakhon panthang* through the *Phuchanasibtid* production by Seri Wangnaitham. Her study provides a descriptive overview of the history of the *lakhon panthang* genre, analysing and notating its dance technique and theatrical elements, as used in this production. This dissertation gives important data based on interviews with the director and the first cast of the production. However, Sompit does not provide an adequate critical analysis of the development of the production in relation to the historical background and socio-cultural context. Nevertheless, this work has been a primary source for my own research which reconsiders the relationship between the traditional production in 1980 and the social changes of this period, points that Sompit does not elaborate upon.
Lakkarn Pen Burengnong Nai Lakhon phanthang Phuchanasibhit (The Principles of Burengnong in Lakhon phanthang Phuchanasibhit) (2007) by Rattthasat Chanchareon is another master degree dissertation, which focuses on *lakhon phanthang*. The dissertation studies the performance principles of a major character, that of Burengnong, in Phuchanasibtid’s production of Krom Silapakorn. Chanchareon’s work provides the narrow overview of Phuchanasibtid’s production’s history, including the adaption of Phuchanasibtid in a literary form for the performance. However, the main focus of this dissertation is the dance principles and dance techniques for Burengong’s role. Chanchareon analyses the remarkable dance techniques of the Phuchnasibtid production looking at adherence to the rules and Thai dance customs while the dancers perform accompanied by the singing; the use of naturalistic acting while speaking and the use of random movement gestures while singing and speaking alternately. Chanchareon’s study has provided me with an idea of how *lakhon phanthang* has been modernised and modified by modern theatre techniques. Through her work I can see the awareness of Thai artists of the influence of social changes on Thai traditional performance.

Vasinarom’s study Nattaya Pradit Kong Chao Chom Manda Khien (Choreography of Chao Chom Manda Khie) (2006) is a master degree dissertation that focuses on the life and work of Chao Chom Manda Khien, who was Prince Narathip’s mother and King Rama IV’s consort. Vasinarom’s work analyses the choreographic style of Chao Chom Manda Khien through the most famous production *Phra Lor* of Prince Narathip dance troupe, which was handed down to Krom Silapakorn. Vasinarom proposes that *lakhon phanthang* by Chao Chom Manda Khien was created basing it on her dance experience in *lakhon nai* and then the dance movements were further stylised through borrowing from other dance styles.
such as Laotian dance. She also points out that Chao Chom Manda Khien was a traditional dance guru who dared to break the rules of the tradition by allowing her performance to have a death scene on stage.

**Other Related Southeast Asian Theatre Studies**

Apart from the above mentioned studies, there are several publications that focus on Asian tradition in modernity which have been useful for my analysis of Thai traditional theatre in the modern world. Among them I count *Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera* (1993) by Tan Sooi Beng. Tan’s work provides an excellent documentation of *bangsawan*, a popular Malay opera in the Malay Peninsula from 1880 until 1980. The historical background of the forms and the problematic multi-ethnic appropriation of Malaysian national culture have been included in this publication as well. Tan opines that *bangsawan* is not a traditional theatre form -- it is a form of popular theatre, however the Malaysian government has classified *bangsawan* as *teater traditional*. Her study analyses social-economic changes, urbanised entertainment, government intervention and policies, all related to the process of turning *bangsawan* into traditional theatre. Tan argues that tradition and modernity are neither completely opposite ideas nor something that involves transformation without retaining the original characteristics, and this seems to be the case for *bangsawan*. Tan’s work is very useful for my thesis as Thailand and Malaysia are close neighbours and thus share some culture and traditions so *bangsawan*’s modernisation provides a useful model. I apply some of Tan’s ideas on what constitute the influencing factors for the changes from traditional theatre into *bangsawan* in my investigation of *lakhon phanthang*. 
Matthew Isaac Cohen’s *The Komedie Stamboel: Popular Theatre in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-1903* (2006) is the another major study of Southeast Asian theatre that has been useful for my thesis. Cohen’s work provides a picture of the Indonesian popular theatre *komedie stamboel* in urban Indonesia at the turn of the twentieth century. Cohen also presents the cultural dynamics, which influence popular theatre. Additionally, Auguste Mahieu, the key figure in shaping the *stamboel* is discussed and Surabaya and the social conditions of nineteenth century Indonesia have been investigated as having had a major influence on the emergence of this theatre form. This publication also provides me with a model for my investigation of Thai popular theatre in the nineteenth century before popular theatre was transformed into traditional theatre in present times. Another substantial work also by Matthew Isaac Cohen is ‘Contemporary Wayang in Global Contexts’ published in the *Asian Theatre Journal* (2007). Reading this has inspired me to investigate *lakhon phanthang* anew. In this journal article, Cohen discusses how *wayang* (puppet theatre) interacts with the world and how Western artists such as Edward Gordon Craig and Richard Teschner adapt traditional *wayang* into their art making. I learnt from this article about looking at points of cultural intersections between the East and the West, which create the complex hybridity of art forms.

*In Search of Korean Traditional Opera: Discourses of Ch’anggûk* by Andrew Killick (2010) has also been useful, providing me with important conceptual tools when looking at *lakhon phanthang* in modern Thai society although Thai and Korean traditional theatre remain contextually different. This book talks about a Korean traditional opera called *ch’anggûk*, which derives from *p’ansori*, the old narrative Korean singing. Killick describes the history of the performance forms from a Korean and an outsider’s perspectives. He also comments critically on Korean
traditional opera comparing it with the other performance forms such as the Beijing Opera in China and *kabuki* of Japan, Korea’s neighbouring countries. But the adaptation of traditional performances to the modern world is one aspect of his research. He also searches for the traditional by making national, gender, aesthetic and cross-cultural comparisons and looking at the post-colonial condition. The author analyses the changes in performance patronage from people to society, which affect performance styles, contents and manner of performance. The interesting point for me is the analysis of traditional performance using hybrid popular theatre theory. Hybrid popular theatre is a performance form, which emerges when the indigenous art forms adapt into other performance styles and are stimulated to change by local audience demands.

**Some Sources for an Analysis of National Identity, Thainess and Political Factors**

A major concern in this thesis is the socio-cultural context of Thai society. I found other sources that can be related to political and social contexts in Thai theatre. *Wattanatham Banthung Nai Chart: Karn Plean Paleng Khong Wattanatham Kwam Banthung Nai Sangkom Krungthep* (*Culture of entertainment in country: The changing of culture of entertainments in Bangkok society*) by Pattravadee Phuchadabhirom (2006) offers the reader the picture of Thai theatre and music development from 1948 to 1957. This is the period after the change from absolute monarchy to the democracy. Phuchadabhirom’s work discusses the paradigm shift of entertainment in Thai society, as shaped by political and cultural policies. The author suggests that 1947 was the beginning of the period of introduction of Western culture into Thai society. The Thai government supported Westernisation and Western
cultural entertainment in society. Therefore, the entertainment of that period was modified following Western performance styles. Entertainment was patronised by the middle classes rather than benefitting from royal patronage as in the past.

In the context of a study of class and social status, the article by Palita Chalermpow, ‘Thai Middle-Class Practice and Consumption of Traditional Dance : ‘Thai-ness’ and High Art,’ in *Local Cultures and the ‘New Asia’* (2002) should be mentioned. In this article, Chalermpow analyses the status of Thai traditional dance in Thai society, seeing it through Thai middle class daily life focusing on the relationship between high art and the elevation in status of the Thai middle class following industrialisation. The author also suggests that the Thai middle class has the potential to support Thai dance and theatre, not only by spending money to attend cultural performances, but by also becoming guardians of the arts. The Thai middle class accepts Thai dance as traditional wisdom, without being critical of the construction of this tradition. Chalermpow states that, since 1980 political policies and economic development have significantly contributed to the phenomenon of new wealth in Thailand (217). The new wealth or ‘new middle class’ are a group of people whose consumption behaviour is focused on modern high technology and spending a lot of money on expensive goods. The major point made by the author is that the Thai middle class adopts traditional dance as a recreational activity and as a tool for enhancing social status. In addition, Thai society has opened up a space for classical dance education to support its consumption by the Thai middle class. The highly competitive private dance schools have increased rapidly in Thailand, because Thai dance has become a fashionable commodity. All the dance schools have to create new things, which attract Thai middle class consumers. Chalermpow also suggests that nowadays Thai middle class creates and manages its own life style to
include the high arts. The directions of Thai art might change in the future, for better or worse.

The development of Thai traditional theatre is not only related to political factors and social status but also to the discourse of Thainess and national identity, which have a great impact on the direction of Thai traditional theatre. The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand (2010) edited by Rachel Harrison and Peter A. Jackson, is a compilation of essays focusing on the interaction between Siam/Thailand and the West and how Siam/Thailand confronts with the Other/foreign countries as a country which has never been colonised. This publication provides a wide range of essays dealing with history, film studies and cultural studies. The book also suggests that Thai identity is the result of the complex hybrid character of Thai society. National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand Today (1989) by Craig Reynolds focuses on Thai identity in various aspects. Furthermore, it discusses the relationship between Thai national identity and globalisation. Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation by Thongchai Winichakul (1994) looks at the issue of the transformation of Siam into the modern Thai nation and how Thainess was created and deconstructed on the basis of this change.

**Discourse of Lakhon Phanthang**

In this section, I would like to give a critical account of the definition of lakhon phanthang and the hybrid characteristics of this dance-drama form. My intention is to consider some of the current discourses on lakhon phanthang as the basis for this thesis.
The Terminology of Lakhon Phanthang

As a traditional dance student, I was taught by my teachers that *lakhon phanthang* is a traditional theatre, whose performance is not fixed. *Lakhon phanthang* presents foreign stories with mixed costumes and music tunes. The dance movements are a mix between Thai and other dance styles. Furthermore, my teachers introduced me to the literary works used for this theatre form. This is what I learned and knew about *lakhon phanthang* when I was a student. When I began working on this thesis, I also began to ask questions revising everything I knew. I found that the definition of *lakhon phanthang* that I was taught is very ambiguous, and limited. Thus, I would like to start by discussing *lakhon phanthang* as it is generally understood.

The term *lakhon* means dance-drama in various styles, not only the traditional forms but the modern forms as well (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 10) while the term *phanthang* can be interpreted in various ways. *Phanthang* in the Thai etymological sense can be divided into two words, *phan* meaning thousand, and *thang* meanings ways, so in this sense *phanthang* means ‘a thousand ways’ (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 118). In contrast, the other meaning of *phanthang* is ‘crossbred chickens and/or animals that have parents of different species’ or a ‘set of objects or things such as porcelain that are incompatible in style with others’ (Royal Institute 997). Not only are animals, plants or things called *phanthang*, but humans of mixed race parentage are also described by this term.

Thai theatre scholars give the meaning of *lakhon phanthang* as follows: Udomplon states that *lakhon phanthang* is the mixing of performance genres, a mix of *lakhon ram* (dance-drama) and realistic acting. The stories are foreign modified with Thai dance movements. There are songs and dialogues by the characters to
present the narrative. The stories enacted derive from various multi-ethnic groups such as Burmese, Mons, Laotian and Chinese (141). Theapayasuwan says that lakhon phanthang refers to dramatic performances with Thai dance movements which are not as strict with Thai dance traditions and customs as other forms. Dialogues and songs are the means for telling fast-paced stories. This dance form is easy to practise because the performance may show either elegant dance movements or unsophisticated dance styles (150). Yupho states further that phanthang is used to differentiate the genre from other Thai traditional dance-drama styles. He mentions that lakhon phanthang differs from Thai traditional performances in its acting style and recitation, and its use of dance movements to accompany the latter (Yupho Silapa 193-194). Sukvipat explains that lakhon phanthang is an inauthentic form. This performance does not necessarily include elaborate dance-drama movements but simpler dance movements in the Thai style (9). These definitions of lakhon phanthang demonstrate that the concern is to establish that lakhon phanthang is a mixed dance form. The term phanthang in the sense of ‘dance-drama in a thousand ways’ is not directly put across through all these explanations.

Furthermore, Professor Emeritus Poonpit Amadtayakul, a famous Thai theatre and music scholar and ethnomusicologist, stated in the course of an academic seminar about Rachathirat, held at Banditpattanasilp Institute in Bangkok Thailand in 2012, that the term Phanthang refers to a dog (a mongrel) and was a derogatory word used by a court dance guru with reference to Lakhon Chao Phraya Mahin at the Chao Phraya Mahin theatre in the reign of King Rama V, which displayed mixed dance performance styles (Boonyachai interview). However, the term phanthang at present is more positive. In the arts, it connotes a thousand ways rather than a crossbred chicken or a mongrel. The new forms of Thai traditional lakhon
created by Krom Silapakorn, or those which cannot be fitted in Thai theatre genre classifications, are mostly described as *lakhon phanthang* or sometimes as dance in *phanthang* style.

During my fieldwork in 2012, I interviewed many Thai dance scholars and artists on the question of ‘what is *lakhon phanthang*’. I tried to probe the limits of the genre by asking whether *Mong Kut Dok Som* could be classified as *lakhon phanthang*. I pursued this line of argument with my interviewees because this story is about a Chinese family in Thailand. The singing and soundtrack of this television production are in mixed Thai and Chinese style. The costume of each character is designed on the basis of the nationality of each character - the third wife of this family is a former Chinese Opera star so her regular costume is *cheongsam*. The characters use their own dialect when they speak. I described *Mong Kut Dok Som* on the basis of the definition of *lakhon phanthang*, which I learned when I was a student. In response to my question, most of the interviewees said that *Mong Kut Dok Som* cannot be called *lakhon phanthang* because it has not been presented in *lakhon Ram*, the traditional dance-drama form. These responses point to the existence of alternative ways of defining *lakhon phanthang*. The characteristics of *lakhon phanthang* have been described and taught widely in Thai dance institutions, but there is still little consensus on what constitutes *lakhon phanthang*.

**Hybridity in Lakhon Phanthang**

*Lakhon phanthang* in the perception of modern Thai theatre scholars such as Pornrat Damrhung and Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn is a form of hybrid theatre. However, Jungwiwattanaporn states that *lakhon phanthang* contains an element of hybridity but not in the sense of Western hybridity (Jungwiwattanaporn interview).
Thai hybridity is constructed under the frame of Thainess and the cultural statements and the authority of art organisations.

Hybridity describes a new form created from mixing two or more forms, things or species, such as languages, plants, and animals – this includes cultures. However, new forms that are called hybrid are an amalgamation rather than contestation (Young 21). Young’s explanation of hybridity fits the hybridity of lakhon phanthang in Thai traditional theatre. The hybrid characteristics of lakhon phanthang not only refer to the mix between Thai theatre forms and Western theatrical forms as in other hybrid performances such as bangsawan of Malaysia and the komedi stambul of Indonesia. It also includes a mix of Thai traditional dance and Thai folk dance forms, or a mix between Thai and other Southeast Asian regional dance forms. Additionally, the Thai theatre hybrid characters include a collage of two or more different sources to create the new form.

The hybridity of lakhon phanthang does not aim to imitate other theatre forms in an ‘almost the same but not quite’ manner to quote Bhabha (122). The hybridisation of lakhon phanthang uses appropriation, pastiche, and adaptation of different theatrical elements into a Thai dance style for the purpose of making something new. This process relates to the term mimicry described by Bhabha, which refers to a repetition and reformation through a discursive process. The mimicry representation is ‘partial presence’ expressing ambivalent identity (Bhabha 123). However, traditions, cultures and performances, developed or shaped into a hybrid form also retain characteristics of their original form (Um 6).
**Characteristics of Lakhon Phanthang**

*Lakhon phanthang* has to have elements of the Thai traditional dance form. Wantanee Muangboon, one of the directors of Krom Silapakorn, states in an interview that *ram* or dance movements are a requirement for creating *lakhon phanthang*. However, this does not require use of a sophisticated dance as in *lakhon nai* (court dance). Pothiwetchakul also suggests that if a production presents foreign stories without any Thai dance movement it cannot be called *lakhon phanthang* (interview).

The dance movements in *lakhon phanthang* can be both Thai traditional dance and a mix of Thai and non-Thai dance movements. The traditional hand gestures, body balance, leg positions are used in *lakhon phanthang*. However, the dance movements are mainly based on Thai traditional dance gestures and some dance gestures' symbolism is created to denote the foreign characteristics. For example, the symbolic dance movements for acting as a Chinese character are represented by hand gestures. Thai dancers use their index and middle fingers to point out and other three fingers held together to denote a Chinese character, whereas Laotian and Mon characteristics are shown by swaying the shoulders following the music tunes. Thai traditional hand gestures such as *jeeb* (the end of the thumb and index fingers touching, the other three fingers extended) and *wong* (straight arms with hands curved) are also used to denote Laotian and Mon nations.

The literary works used for *lakhon phanthang* are foreign stories. They might derive from Thai literature such as *Phra Lor* (King Lor) and *Phya Phanong* (King Phanong), *Phuchanasibtid* (Conqueror of the ten directions) and new plays adapted from Thai famous novels (Chanchareon 11), or might come from foreign literatures, chronicles and tales such as *Rachathirat* (the War between the Burmese and Mons,
based on the Mon chronicle) (Yupho, *Khon* 221), *Samkok* (Romance of the three kingdoms, a story from Chinese literature) (Rutnin, *Dance Drama* 118). In addition, *lakhon phanthang* can also present a Thai story but some characters in the play need to be of other ethnicities. For example, *Khun Chang Khun Phane* is an old Thai literary work, in which the story takes place in the Supanburi province (the middle part of Thailand). In this story, the two wives of Khun Phane, Sroy-Fa and Sri-Mala are ladies from the northern part of Thailand. Another example is *Phra Abai Mani* (King Phra Abai Mani), in which Nang Laweng, one of major character, is a European and *Kria-thong*, which narrates the story of the Pichit province in the northern part of Thailand: they have been used for *lakhon phanthang* (Yupho, *Khon* 185-251). However, the plays of *lakhon phanthang* today are mostly about other nationalities. *Khun Chang Khun Phane, Phra Abai Mani* and *Kria-thong* are now used for other Thai dance-drama theatre genres. The language in the play is both poetic prose and colloquial dialogue and sometimes it includes foreign words (Damrhung 372).

The music and songs of *lakhon phanthang* are presented by a Thai classical orchestra called *wong pi pat* (Sukvipat 50). This band consists of six musical instruments: *ranad ek* (bamboo xylophone), *khong wong* (gong), *thapon* (drum), *klong thad* (a pair of big drums), *pi* (Thai flute) and *ching* (cymbals). This is an ordinary musical ensemble for Thai dance and theatre. However, the most remarkable musical style of *lakhon phanthang* is the so-called *phleng ok phasa*, which refers to music and singing in different accents and tunes to represent foreign characters. Pamela Myers-Moro in *Thai Music and Musicians in Contemporary Bangkok* (1993) explains *phleng ok phasa* using the term *samning*, which refers to musical style presenting a foreign place and people such as *phleng laaw* or Lao
songs, *phleng pama* or Burmese song, and *phleng jeen* or Chinese songs that ‘the musical features associated with each tone either derive from and/or are imitations of the distinctive music of the nation, though all have been molded to suit the Thai music style. They are representation of foreign musics, springing from the impressions of the composer’ (Myers-Moro 73-74).

The costume of *lakhon phanthang* is also in mixed style. Rutnin suggests that the costume for *lakhon phanthang* has been modified to present more realistic costumes following the national culture indicated in the plays (*Dance, Drama* 118). However, it is difficult to explain how costumes in *lakhon phanthang* are mixed as it has no fixed rules or a colour dress code as other Thai traditional dance theatre forms (Muangboon interview). In one *lakhon phanthang* production, the costume of each character is designed in relation to the background of character. A Chinese character wears the Chinese opera costume including Chinese opera make-up style whereas a Lao king wears a Thai traditional dance costume but the headdress is changed to differentiate from a regular Thai traditional dance costume. Some costumes’ cloth might be based on *khon* but the jewellery and headdress may be derived from *lakhon nai* (court dance-drama).

**Discourse of Lakhon Phanthang and Lakhon Nai: Equal but Unequal**

*Lakhon phanthang* is classified as a traditional theatre genre and categorised in the group of *lakhon ram*, same as *lakhon nai*, *lakhon nok* and *lakhon chatri* (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 10-12). Therefore, the status of all these dance-drama should be equal as a group of traditional theatre genres. However, *lakhon phanthang*, a traditional dance theatre in hybrid form, is perceived as an inauthentic traditional dance form and less sophisticated than other high art forms such as *lakhon nai*.
(Sompit 15, Muangboon interview). This notwithstanding, *lakhon phanthang* and *lakhon nai* share theatrical elements with each other. *Lakhon nai* or royal court dance-drama can be based on only four stories such as *Inao* (*Panji* tale), *Rammakien* (*Ramayana* story in the Thai version), *Unarut* (the grandson of Krishna’s story) and *Dalang* (*Panji* tale in different poetic language) (Damrongrachanubhap 334). The stories *Inao* and *Dalang* originated from Javanese tales, and *Rammakien* was taken from an Indian epic so the stories originate in foreign literature. This is one of the characteristics of *lakhon phanthang*, that of presenting a foreign story. However, *lakhon nai* is the king and royal family’s entertainment. So, the language in the plays is beautiful and highly formal. The language in *lakhon nai* plays uses elegant poetic prose. The aesthetics in *lakhon nai* plays relies on more elegant language and on dramatic imagination. In contrast, *lakhon phanthang* might be composed using poetic prose language but it emphasises the use of colloquial dialogues for telling stories and to add a comic emotion.

*Phleng ok phasa* is used in *lakhon phanthang* and traditional dance-drama form as an expression of another national culture. In the *Inao* story of *lakhon nai*, *phleng ok phasa* is used in this theatre form to present Javanese / Indonesian musical flavour and set the ambient of the performance. The significantly different theatrical element is the costume. *Lakhon phanthang* presents a mixed costume, that can be changed and adapted, *lakhon nai*, in contrast, must be presented using the Thai traditional costume *yun khrung*, richly embroidered with a beautiful headdress similar to that of *khon* but without the mask  (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 118). In addition, dancers of *lakhon nai* are mainly female dancers, whereas for *lakhon phanthang* there is a mixed cast.
All these characteristics are evidence of a difference in sophistication between *lakhon phanthang* and *lakhon nai*. It is the reason for the low status of *lakhon phanthang* in the perception of Thai dance artists and students, which I will discuss in chapter five. This is not about the popularity of the dance form in society but about the creation of an artistic hierarchy within traditional dance and theatre.

The roles and duties, including the development of the dance forms, impact upon the admiration felt for traditional theatre. I would like to give an example to clarify this statement. Generally, the *Inao* story is used in *lakhon nai* performance, as mentioned. There is a play called *Inao Tang Java* (*Inao* in Javanese style) performed on the Thai National Theatre stage. Performances present the *Inao* story in its Javanese ambience. Javanese costumes and gamelan are used. The dance movements are a mix between Thai and Javanese dance styles. *Phleng ok phasa* is used and the singers sing in Thai dialect. In this case, it would seem that *Inao Tang Java* presents elements of hybridity just like *lakhon phanthang*. However, *Inao Tang Java* is not classified as *lakhon phanthang* but as *lakhon nai* because the *Inao* story is used for *lakhon nai* and is symbolic of the royal court dance, which is a high art form, the same as *khon* performance (Muangboon interview).

*Lakhon phanthang* emerged as a popular theatre form for the common people and was modified later by the court. *Lakhon nai*, on the other hand, was first developed by the court and for the court, which is at the peak of the Thai social structure. *Inao Tang Java* and *lakhon phanthang* are evidence of the cultural value of court art. The two genres are neatly separated from one another by their historical origins in different social strata.
Research Methodology

The research for this thesis has been conducted using both ethnographic and historical research methods, by which I became involved in lakhon phanthang in various ways. My research approaches are drawn from the fields of dance and theatre arts and cultural anthropology, allowing me to scrutinise the diversity of lakhon phanthang in Thai society. Alongside with the ethnographic and historical methods, I am involved with lakhon phanthang as a dancer, a lecturer and as a member of the audience. This thesis is based on documentary research, personal interviews and personal lakhon phanthang practice. Part of the documentary research was done at Royal Holloway, University of London and at the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London whereas the archival research and the interviews were mostly conducted in Bangkok, Thailand. Furthermore, online interviews were also done while I was based in London. Taking into consideration the analysis of data yielded by the ethnographic approach, Martyn and Atkinson explain further that:

The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories; qualification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most (3).

My ethnographic research is based upon one year of fieldwork conducted between July 2012 and July 2013 in Bangkok. During my fieldwork period, I
observed, performed, gave lectures and led discussion groups on *lakhon phanthang*. I also conducted interviews with Thai dance scholars and lecturers, Thai dance artists, professional cultural workers and audience members with the aim of helping me to understand more closely the particular dynamics of *lakhon phanthang* in Thai society.

**Organisation of the Thesis and Thematic**

The first chapter of this thesis offers an historical and socio-cultural overview of the diverse Siamese community in the nineteenth century. The chapter describes the context for the historical development of dance-drama in *phanthang* style. Additionally, the emergence of the popular urban culture in Siam is also analysed in this chapter, identifying it as what engenders the development of *lakhon phanthang* in dance-drama form by the court and subsequently by Krom Silapakorn. I focus on the question of how the social and cultural environment of Siam in the nineteenth century impact on the emergence of the popular theatre. *Lakhon phanthang* is interpreted as a means by which Thai people of the period responded to the diversity of Siamese society.

Chapter two concerns the process of formulation of the dance-drama form as *lakhon phanthang* in the period of the political revolution of the twentieth century. The revival, standardisation and assimilation of the popular theatre forms into traditional theatre are the main focus of this chapter by means of an account of how the old theatre forms were reinstated on the first National Theatre from the 1940s to the 1950s. I investigate why the term *lakhon phanthang* has been used and how the term’s meaning impacts on the understanding of form, content and context of this
performance. I analyse how popular theatre in the nineteenth century has been revived and systematised in this period of socio-political changes.

Chapter three focuses upon Seri Wangnaitham’s *Phuchanasibtid*, one of the most popular productions of Krom Silapakorn in the 1980s. In this chapter, I scrutinise *lakhon phanthang* in the context of modern society in Bangkok by analysing the cultural factors interacting with the representation of traditional performance. This chapter discusses the new phenomenon of Thai traditional theatre which emerges from the popularity of the older traditional theatre and is underpinned by modernity. I provide a full translation of one episode of *Phuchanasibtid* in chapter four to illustrate this influential *lakhon phanthang* production’s verbal texture.

Chapter five concerns itself with *lakhon phanthang* in the present through an analysis of *lakhon phanthang* in two different institutions, *lakhon phanthang* of Krom Silapakorn and *lakhon phanthang* within an academic context. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a picture of *lakhon phanthang* through these different lenses to understand *lakhon phanthang*’s existence as a form of traditional theatre in the modern world. In the first part of the chapter I position myself as audience and an outsider to *lakhon phanthang* as presented by Krom Silapakorn. This part of the chapter discusses the development of *lakhon phanthang* productions within the framework of ancient Thai dance-drama conventions, as aimed at a modern audience. Additionally, I discuss the younger generation of dance artists from Krom Silapakorn, a new wave within a conservative organisation, with influence over the form and presentation of *lakhon phanthang*. Because of them, *lakhon phanthang* productions of this period tend to be modern and new. However, *lakhon phanthang* productions are still presented frequently basing them on the traditional *lakhon phanthang* repertoires. I also talk about the hierarchical structure in Krom Silapakorn,
which is a powerful factor in shaping and/or hindering the creativity and the development of lakhon phanthang productions nationally.

In the chapter’s next part, my concern is with lakhon phanthang within the educational system. I discuss how lakhon phanthang is transmitted to the younger generations drawing on my personal teaching experience at the Performing Arts Department (PAD) of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. I show that the teaching of lakhon phanthang within higher education provides the link of cultural transmission from the dance of Krom Silapakorn to the dance practice in the curriculum. I give a critical account of the learning and teaching of lakhon phanthang within the educational system in which students are encouraged to learn the traditional dance forms and choreographic patterns based on Krom Silapakorn’s dancing styles to preserve national art and culture. In addition, students practise lakhon phanthang in class by repeating and following the dance movements imparted by their teachers. After class, social media and online services such as YouTube and Google act as the main mnemonic resources for the students.

Chapter six is focused on lakhon phanthang in the context of a rite of passage. I argue that lakhon phanthang presented at Krom Silapakorn and as taught in educational institutions is the traditional lakhon phanthang in terms of repertoire and dance choreographic patterns. But through a rite of passage such as a funeral lakhon phanthang communicates to the community. Not only is the theatrical lakhon phanthang further developed but the phanthang as a dance form is regularly presented as part of a ritual event and as such it continues to evolve. I reflect on this through my own experience, as I danced phanthang at the funeral of a mother’s friend in 2011 and at a close friend’s funeral in 2012. I also discuss why lakhon phanthang and dance in phanthang style are used at a funeral event as a ritual
performance. *Lakhon phanthang* and the *phanthang* dance style are adapted and presented at a sad event to bring people out of their sorrow and to express something about the character of the deceased. Furthermore, I investigate *lakhon phanthang* and the *phanthang* dance form as a process reflect on how both these performances speak to a community audience, beyond the form’s identity as a national theatrical genre.

**Notes**

1. This was a Sunday school arranged in the temple precincts. The purpose of the school was dissemination of the Buddhist doctrine or *dhamma* to children in the community. The students learn *dhamma* in the morning, taught by monks, and in the afternoon they practise Thai dance, Thai music and Thai singing, taught by volunteers from the community. However, the afternoon class is not compulsory; students attend depending on their interest.

2. *Lakhon Cak Cak Wong Wong* is the name of a spoken drama on television presented every morning at the weekend. The plays of this drama derive from Thai literature, folk tales and Buddhist Jataka tales.

3. Department of Fine and Applied Arts in Bangkok

4. Thai traditional dance-drama consists of three genres of performance, *lakhon chatri*, *lakhon nai* and *lakhon nok*.

5. *Mong Kut Dok Som* (The Orange Blossom Crown) is a Thai modern work of fiction written by Taitao Sujaritkul, which was adapted to television soap opera in 2010 and gained popularity among Thai common people. The story is about the leader of Chinese family, who has five wives of different ethnicities: two are Chinese, one is Thai, one is from northern Thailand, and one is a *farang* (Western) lady.
Chapter 1: A History of Lakhon Phanthang

Introduction

*Lakhon phanthang* is a flexible Thai performance genre. Its very name denotes adaptability. Categorised as both ‘a new form of lakhon’ and as a ‘hybrid dance theatre,’ it emerged as a dance and theatrical form in the nineteenth century outside the Thai royal court and underwent further development in response to the modernisation following the social revolution in Siam (the official name for Thailand for the period 1851-1939) (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 12; Damrhung, ‘From Phar Lor’ 112; Montrisart 115). The hybridity of *lakhon phanthang* is inter-Asian, an area of Asian theatre practice that has received much less scholarly attention than Asian-European hybridity. Asian chronicles and tales from Laos, Mons, Burma and China are used for the performance of *lakhon phanthang* mingled with Thai traditional narratives. Dance movements, instrumental music, songs and costumes are borrowed from other Asian performance traditions. Thai theatrical elements are mixed with Chinese operatic costumes and make-up or with Burmese dance costumes and movement. *Lakhon phanthang* represents foreign cultures from a Thai perspective and narrates stories through Thai dance movements. Thai aesthetics informs the new performance form (Virulrak, *Wiwatthanakarn* 230).

From inception, *lakhon phanthang* was presented on stage using Western theatrical elements, such as electrical footlights. The programme of performances for each week was advertised outside the theatre hall and there was an admission charge. This way of consuming performance was novel in the nineteenth century. It engendered a new relationship between theatre and society, and responded to new
cultural values in urban Bangkok. It was a form that articulated ‘the consciousness of a new [middle] class’ (Williams, *Marxism* 124).

From the mid-nineteenth to the earlier part of the twentieth century, Siam modernised very rapidly. Modernisation consisted of a strong influence of Western culture which spread throughout Siam, in particular in Bangkok at the royal court and among the common people (Winichakul 38). The Siamese elite linked with the royal court introduced modernity into Siamese society by attempting to integrate Western knowledge and behaviour with indigenous traditions. Modernity was articulated through a royal court perspective as a ‘mixture of Westernization and Siamization,’ with imitation of Western styles being the norm (Winichakul 42; Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 96). This could be seen in architecture, for example the new palace, the Chakri Mahaprasart Throne Hall in Bangkok and other buildings in the countryside were constructed and furnished by mixing Thai and European styles. Dinner at court was in a European style, consumed while sitting at table and using European cutlery (Peleggi 48). Modernisation, from the standpoint of the commoner, on the other hand, meant something quite different. The arrival of missionaries and their missionary zeal stirred the emotions of Siamese people, who strongly believed in and respected Buddhism and other religious traditions from India, such as Hinduism. The missionaries possessed expertise and skills hitherto unknown to Thais and they brought their new knowledge to Thai society; however, they were seen as inimical to Buddhism (Winichakul 41).

The impact of modernisation on the way of life of Thai people affected their traditional beliefs. Modernity generated a new social structure and renewed the relationship between society and its institutions (cf. Habermas and Ben-Habib 3-4). However, an awareness of change and the fear of losing indigenous traditions also
arose in the consciousness of Thai people. This consciousness was an ‘ambivalent effect’ of modernisation, based on the desire for novelty and a simultaneous awareness of the possible negative effects of modernity (Munakata 100). This is the reason why the missionaries in Thailand, at that time, were not able to convert but succeeded in introducing new knowledge and technologies.

Siam was a culturally diverse nation. Several multi-ethnic communities, such as Chinese, Laotian, and Malay, lived in the city of Bangkok. Each community was at liberty to carry on their traditions and culture. However, Siam retained its own culture and national identity and also integrated foreign cultures in the fabric of Siamese society, thus transforming them (Cornwel-Smith 11). The way of life of the Thai people was modernised through western influence. This includes theatrical practices.

*Lakhon phanthang* is a good example of a form of stylised theatre that was underpinned by the diversity of multi-ethnic cultures and Thai people’s desire to be novel during this period of modernisation. But, as we shall see, *lakhon phanthang* also expressed the ambivalence of modernity. It was developed in parallel with the emergence of the first public theatre in urban Bangkok, established by Chao Phraya Mahintharasakdithamrong, also known as Chao Phraya Mahin. The *Lakhon* of Chao Phraya Mahin was characterised by hybridisation of Thai traditional theatre with non-Thai theatre forms. This novel theatre form was for the Thai elite and the middle class, accommodating the taste of multi-ethnic audiences in modern Bangkok. Moreover *lakhon phanthang* was not only performed in public theatres but also at court.

This chapter will focus on the social and cultural circumstances surrounding urbanisation and modernisation in Bangkok, which generated emergent new form of
theatrical culture during the mid-nineteenth century. I would like to propose that *lakhon phanthang* is one way to explore and represent the diversity of multi-ethnic culture in Thai society. This art form is not the product of an individual but a cultural product of its time. Under the process of modernisation in urban Bangkok, stimulated by Western influence, an inter-Asian cultural hybrid arose in Thailand at this time. I argue that *lakhon phanthang* embodies an inter-Asian cultural hybrid, which differs from other popular Asian hybrid theatrical forms that came about mainly from a mix of indigenous Asian performance forms and Western theatre, resulting in genres such as *bangsawan* (Malay opera), *komedi stambul* (Malay opera in Java), *likay* (Thai folk dance-drama) and *ch’angguk* (Korean traditional opera) (Cohen and Noszlopy 7; Killick 47). Furthermore, I argue that the diversity we find in *lakhon phanthang* represents the Thai understanding of other cultures and the way Thais negotiate Asian modernity from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

Before going into the history of *lakhon phanthang*, I would like discuss the phenomena of urbanisation and modernisation in the nineteenth century.

**Urbanisation and Modernisation of Bangkok in the Nineteenth Century**

In the nineteenth century, Bangkok, known as the ‘Venice of the East’, was the busy cosmopolitan capital city of Siam. It was surrounded by the Chaophraya River, a major transportation hub and a major port of trade and immigration (Peleggi 31; Young, *The Kingdom* 1; Kenworthy 1). In Thai, Bangkok was known formally as *Krung Thep* or ‘the Great City of Angels,’ a reference to the legend that the great city was built by the gods as the dwelling place of angels (Cummings 23). Bangkok rapidly became the centre of political power, economy, culture, and education of the Siamese kingdom. The urbanisation of Bangkok began in the mid-nineteenth century.
and the city continued to grow until the first decade of the twentieth century, a period that corresponds with the rule of King Mongkut (King Rama IV, r.1851-1868) and King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, r.1868-1910). Westernisation had a vast impact on Siam, in particular on Bangkok, during this period, when colonisation from the West spread through South and Southeast Asia. Siam’s king introduced foreign policies to keep Western colonialism at bay and governed the country cautiously.

Westernisation in Bangkok stimulated the modernisation of society and culture. The arrival of missionaries, to disseminate Christian teaching attempting to convert Thais to Christianity, brought new disciplinary knowledge, such as medicine, printing, astronomy and foreign literature to Bangkok (Kitiarsa 17). In this way, the social structure, political system and customs were reformed widely (Bunnag 55).

The modernisation of Siam was initiated by the monarchy and spread to society at large. In the early nineteenth century, Western modernity was absorbed and localised by the royal court to turn the country into ‘a civilised nation’. Then, in the twentieth century, the modernisation of Siam was propelled by a new, urban, educated middle class. Not only were Western ideas, lifestyle, entertainment and sports presented at court, but also the ‘educational system, administration, infrastructure, the bureaucracy, the monkhood and the army were modernised under the direction of Western advisers’ (Peleggi 14). In addition, royal children, the leaders of the future, were educated in Europe. The royal court absorbed Western culture and believed that the West was a model of civilisation and modernisation’ (Baker and Phongpaichit 40; Kitiarsa 18).

Accordingly, the notion of Siamese modernity has been recently redefined in several ways. It suggests civilisation, which implies farang (Western) attitudes and behaviour (Baker and Phongpaichit 99; Peleggi 10). It might also be defined as a
new invention, which influences popular beliefs and ways of life opposing indigenous tradition. In addition, the modernity of Siam expresses the process of a ‘state of advancement, betterment, progress, even goodness or virtue’ (Winichakul 19). Siam embraced Western influence and modernity with an independent approach, which was different from that of its neighbours. It opted to confront the Western powers rather than ‘resist Westernisation because of its association with colonialism’ (Williams, ‘Wave of Cultural’ 52).

As Siam was never formally colonised by the West, modernity and its influence were articulated within Siamese national and cultural identity, or Thainess, rather than slavishly following a Western behaviour. Thainess is a notion by which Thais are distinguished from other ethnic groups by emphasising their difference (Winichakul 3). Thainess expresses the characteristics and qualities of being Thai. Sattayanurak discusses the ideology of Thainess under the absolute monarchy as follows: ‘When Thailand had to face Western culture that came with superior power, Thailand’s ruling class chose the accept Western-style material progress and maintain most parts of ‘Thainess’ in culture by assigning new definitions to various constituent parts of Thainess to prevent it from being viewed as barbaric’ (‘Thainess’ 8). Thainess from the nineteenth to the twentieth century was centred on the king’s power. The different ethnic communities in Thailand at that period lived as subjects of the king. The ideology of Thainess was meant to exclude and differentiate. For example, the terms chek and jeen refer to the Chinese, khake refers to Indo-Malay, Indian, Middle Eastern people, and most Asian Muslim people, and farang refers to Westerners, denoting European or white people.

Modernity in Siam was constituted by the hybridisation of the traditional and the modern, and by the diverse cultures in society (Canclini 2). Prince
Damrongrajanubhab stated that ‘The Tai [Thai people] knew how to pick and choose. When they saw some good feature in the culture of other people, if it was not in conflict with their own interests, they did not hesitate to borrow it and adapt it to their own requirements’ (Damrongrajanubhab quoted in Peleggi 10). Kitiarsa notes in the conclusion of his study ‘Farang as Siam’s Occidentalism’ that farang played a most important role in helping Thais to create a national and cultural identity, which was part of the modernity project of the country. This modernity project was a ‘production of hybridization’ between the Thai self and farang other in the creation of Thai modernity (42). Hybridisation with the West was demonstrated through court fashion. Court ladies were encouraged to wear lace blouses that imitated Victorian costume styles, matched with a lower silk wrap. Gentlemen, especially noblemen, wore raj-cha-pattern—a formal white shirt or jacket designed by King Rama V when he visited British-India in 1871, along with a jongkraben6 (Virulrak, Wiwatthanakarn 217). Buildings showed hybridity of style; for example, Dusit Park Palace was constructed in Thai-Western architecture as a royal villa (Smith, A Physician 74).

The royal court and the Bangkok public sphere were open to receiving and experimenting with the new inventions and modernity from the West. The royal court appreciated ‘Western materials and Western intellect’ and they used them as a mark of civilisation applying the Western fashions to Siamese court tradition (Peleggi 144). The English language and Western knowledge were introduced into the royal family by the king, who employed Western tutors to instruct the royal children and the court ladies (Smith, A Physician 11). New customs and knowledge were propagated by the king, such as commoners being allowed to wear shirts while in the presence of the king, and women being allowed to perform on the public stage.
Western astronomy was used rather than old Thai astronomy (Virulrak, Wiwatthanakarn 144; Rutnin, Dance, Drama 77). All of these changes attempted to prove that Siam was ‘the equal of the West in terms of knowledge’ and culture, and also that Siam was a civilised country (Winichakul 57).

Civilised Siam was marked by the way of life and customs of the Thai people in Bangkok. Bangkok grew rapidly as an urbanised society; multi-ethnic communities, transportation, and the economy were developed significantly. The network of canals and road systems was expanded and developed around the city (Peleggi 32). By royal command, commercial buildings and rows of houses were established for foreign merchants to rent. The Royal Thai Mint was established in 1860 and in 1861 construction of the ‘New Road’ or Tanon Charoen Krung (Charoen Krung Road) began, completed in 1864 (Smith, A physician 15). A Western architectural style appeared in Bangkok for palaces, temples, and commercial buildings. Public schools and hospitals were established in the city. Newspapers, journals, and advertisements were published in both Thai and English by the royal court and by Western missionaries to inform people about Siam and other countries, even though few Thai people were literate. At that time, newspapers were a channel for communication and expressed the ideas of Thai people. In addition, dramatic literature, such as Inao, Ramakien, Rachathirat, Samkok, and other stories, were printed and gained popularity among Thai readers (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 382).

The opening of the Siam economy to global trade increased the latter significantly after Siam signed the Bowring Treaty with Britain in 1855 (Winichakul 13; Bunnag 52). After signing the treaty, the economic system in Siam was developed as free trade rather than monopoly trade by the state (Virulrak,
Import-export firms and shipping businesses acted as bridges between Siam and the outside world. Modern companies such as engineering companies, sugar factories, rubber companies, printing and transport companies, both Siamese and foreign-owned, emerged in large numbers (Wright 198). Commercial buildings, roads, railways and canals were constructed to support capital growth and business activities.

With the expansion of business, free trade, and social development, the population, both Thai and non-Thai, increased considerably in urban Bangkok. By the end of the nineteenth century, Bangkok had an urban population of approximately 600,000 (Wright 248). It consisted of Thais (Siamese), Foreign Asians\textsuperscript{7} (Chinese, Laotians, Malays, Cambodians and Burmese, including Middle-Eastern and Indian people) and small number of farang (westerners) that had settled in Bangkok. The Chinese represented the largest group of foreigners that had migrated to Siam (Peleggi 36). They ran businesses and traded as merchants and sold various products, such as clothes and food. Malay sailors and labourers settled in the capital and in rural areas (Bowring 90). Laotians, Cambodians, and Peguans (i.e.Mon) were labourers and crafts people. In addition, Westerners from England, America, France and other European countries acted as missionaries, physicians, traders, and state officials. Most private company owners and labourers in Siam were foreigners from China, the Malay Peninsula and Laos, while indigenous people were state labourers and workers in companies. State officers were Siamese, but there were foreigners, in particular European people, that worked as state officers and as assistants to the king as well. The growth of urbanisation and modernisation led to the idea of social and cultural development, including the emergence of commercial theatre and entertainment in Bangkok.
Entertainment in Urban Bangkok

Bangkok as an urban city became a cultural hub that received cultural material from many directions. In the nineteenth century the three major groups in society, which had a role in creating theatre and performance were the royal court, Thai commoners, and the multi-ethnic communities.

The royal court was an important institution in determining the direction of traditions and culture in the country. During the nineteenth century, the royal court acted as a ‘coin of Thai identity,’ on the one side presenting tradition, and on the other presenting the modern (Damrhung, ‘From Phra Lor’ 111). Traditional theatres such as lakhon nai and lakhon nok were revived and encouraged, coexisting with the development of modern Western culture in Siam. For example, after King Rama IV ascended the throne, by royal decree he revived lakhon phuying, which had been prohibited from being performed at court during previous reigns (Virulrak, Wiwatthanakarn 166). Moreover the king allowed members of the aristocracy and private dance troupes with female dancers to perform lakhon phuying in public. King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, r. 1910-1925) decreed that Siam should be a lively and joyful country with entertainment available throughout the city. Thai dance and theatre should be seen as symbolic of the country’s honour. The king was empowered to request performances at court by private dance troupes on special occasions. Dancers would be handsomely rewarded by the king (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 96-97). This royal decree points to the emergence of a new culture of entertainment, by which the development of dance-drama in the country was encouraged (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 77).

In 1879, a new performance genre, lakhon phut or spoken drama in Western style, was first presented and performed at a temporary theatre in the palace of King
Chulalongkorn. The king participated in this performance as a director and as a performer (see fig 1.) together with other royals and members of the aristocracy. The first lakhon phut performance was based on a story of the Arabian Nights, the episode ‘The tale of the sleeper awakened’ (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 373; Rutnin, Dance, Drama 111; Virulrak, Wiwatthanakarn 227). The Arabian Nights had been dramatised in other South and Southeast Asian theatres at around the same time, including Parsi theatre and komedi stambul (Cohen, ‘On the Origin’ 316; Cohen, The Komedie Stamboel 347). The first Thai lakhon phut was in a style that mixed spoken drama, with monologues and dialogues in western theatre style and Thai traditional recitative singing (Virulrak, Wiwatthanakarn 226).

Outside the court, entertainment and social traditions were even more lively. During the era of the revolution, in a libertarian atmosphere, private dance troupes and theatrical businesses increased in number in Bangkok. Commoners trained their female servants to perform dance-drama on the public stage for business purposes. In Bangkok, commercial theatres emerged to present a variety of performances and shows and it was a highly competitive business. Theatres constantly developed their performance according to fashion in order to attract audiences (Virulrak, Wiwatthanakarn 241). Young notes that in the nineteenth century ‘Lakhon and Yeegai [likay]’ were popular forms of amusement, attracting both Thais and foreigners (Kingdom, 163).

The first commercial theatre in Bangkok in the nineteenth century was the Siamese Theatre established by Chao Phraya Mahintharasakdithamrong, a high-ranking aristocrat during King Mongkut’s and King Chulalongkorn’s reigns, who was also the owner of a private dance troupe named Lakhon Chao Phraya Mahin (Smith, Chotmaiheat 196; Yupho, Silapa 95; Damrongrajanubhab and
Narisaranuwattiwong 230). The Siamese Theatre was built on the grounds of Chao Phraya Mahin’s residence. Around 1882, this theatre changed its name to the Prince’s Theatre, and introduced entrance fees (Smith, Chotmaiheat 50).

![Image](image.png)

**Fig.1.** The first cast of *lakhon phut*, performing the *Arabian Nights* episode ‘The tale of the sleeper awakened’ in 1879. King Chulalongkorn sits in the centre of the picture surrounded by his brothers and other royal family members. Courtesy of The National Archives of Thailand.

The Prince’s Theatre presented traditional dance-drama performances (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 102). Later, Chao Phraya Mahin’s dance troupe began to perform stories from foreign chronicles and tales. This theatre offered new
productions and new performance styles, which differed from those of other dance troupes (Smith, *Chotmaiheat* 51). The new dance-drama style of Chao Phraya Mahin’s dance troupe was the basis for the later development of *lakhon phanthang* and will be described at length below.

The other new form of entertainment which should be mentioned here is *lakhon dukdamban*. *Lakhon dukdamban* (the dance-drama opera) originated in 1891 through the collaboration between Chao Phraya Thewetwongwiwat and Prince Narissaranuwattiwong (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 124). This performance genre was based on Western opera, especially its music and chorus. It had its first performance as the new Thai traditional dance-drama opera at Rong Lakhon Dukdamban (Dukdamban Theatre) in 1899 (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 470). This theatre style required the dancers to dance and sing in the manner of Western opera singers. Additionally, the setting and props were an important element of the show, aimed at evoking the appropriate atmosphere (Damrhung, ‘Lakon Dukdamban’ 370). *Lakhon dukdamban* reflected Western influence and acceptance of Western values in Thai theatre. *Lakhon dukdamban* was first performed for the nobility and became popular among sophisticated audiences, and was often performed to welcome royal visitors. Later, there were performances for commoners who bought tickets to see it. *Lakhon dukdamban* was in business for only ten years, and in 1911 performances stopped because of Chao Phraya Thewet’s health problems, and because Prince Naris was no longer able to take an active interest due to his court engagements (Virulrak, *Wiwatthanakarn* 237).

*Lakhon Mon Luang Tuan, Lakhon Krom Phra Narathip, Lakhon Narumit* and *Lakhon Luang Narumit*—all of these dance troupe names are linked to these the performances as also Prince Narathip Phraphanpong’s dance troupe, managed by the
Prince. Initially, this dance troupe did not own its theatre hall like other companies. Prince Narathip Phrathanphonpang rented Dukdamban Theatre to perform his dance-dramas, and this dance troupe was often asked to perform at the royal palace (Kamran and Talaluck 45). It performed Thai traditional dance-drama similar to that of the court dance style and also a dance-drama based on historical plays. Later, following advice by King Chulalongkorn, Prince Narathip improved the dance standard and also the themes of the plays. His dance troupe presented new dance-drama styles with new stories, which included love and romance rather than historical tales, such as Phra Lor (a tragic love story of a Prince and two Princesses from the Lao kingdom) and Arab Ratri (Arabian Nights) performed in lakhon phanthang style (Rutnin, Dance Drama 120). Lakhon Krom Phra Narathip was admired by court audiences and commoners alike; performances exhibited elaborate dance movements and storylines that were considered to be very enjoyable and full of emotion.

Likay, or what Young called Yeegai, one of the popular theatres in Bangkok in the nineteenth century, was developed by combining Suat Khake or Dikay (Islamic singing) and Suat Kharuehhat (Buddhist chanting at funerals) (Virulrak, Likay 29). It modified the Thai traditional performance elements (dancing, singing and music) in its performances (Brandon, The Cambridge 240). Likay used phleng ok phasa in the overture (Tramote, Karnlalean 71). The stories were traditional tales. Likay dance movements were unsophisticated in style; however, this performance emphasised farcical emotion and feeling, expressed through characterisation and acting styles. In the nineteenth century, the most famous likay troupe that performed in Bangkok was Likay Phraya Petchpranee (Virulrak, Likay 27). This troupe established a permanent theatre in the commercial area and began to sell tickets for
performances, like the Prince’s Theatre of Chao Phraya Mahin. The uniqueness of this troupe was in its costumes and plays. The owner adapted traditional dance-drama or lakhon costumes and plays, which had been popular with the audiences, to likay performances (Mahavajiravudh 3; Damrongrajanubhab and Narisaranuwattiwong 230). These performances were a popular form of entertainment among the lower classes in Siam (Young, The Kingdom 170).

In urban Bangkok, not only the permanent theatres, but also Rong Bon or gambling halls acted as art centres (Norman 421). The gambling hall allowed interaction of indigenous and foreign performances, among a diverse audience. Halls were located in accessible areas by the river, which was convenient for transportation. The gambling businesses were run by the Chinese:

The Chinese are inveterate gamblers…The gambling establishments are all in the hand of the Chinese. Gambling, like many other things in Siam, is a monopoly and the government sells to the highest bidder the privilege of licensing and controlling all such establishments in the country’…Men, women and little children all frequent the gambling-places (Mcdonald 149).

Gambling hall owners marketed their casinos by using performance to entertain gamblers. Tired and perhaps unlucky gamblers were thus relieved of their stress (see fig.2). The entertainment in the casino was Thai dance-drama and music, Thai folk songs, Chinese opera, and Chinese shadow puppet, and the shows began ‘late in the afternoon and lasted half the night’ (Bradley 233-235). Virulrak suggests
that the marketing strategy of the gambling halls was similar to that of casinos in the United States, and that these establishments might therefore be called ‘Casino Theatres’ (Wiwatthanakarn, 133). The gambling hall was a popular place for entertainment and leisure for both nobility and commoners from the time of King Nangklao (King Rama III, r.1824-1851) until a ban on casinos was implemented by King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, r.1910-1925) in 1917 (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnam Rueng Lakhon’ 362).

The performances and entertainments of the multi-ethnic groups of people in the Siamese kingdom were an important part of life in the capital. The migration of people from South and Southeast Asian countries to Bangkok allowed Bangkok to become a diverse cultural city (Peleggi 46). Multiethnic groups of people came to Siam and settled in communities within the city and in the outskirts. Each community had its own traditions, customs and entertainment forms. For example, the Chinese communities used their languages and preserved their original religious beliefs and Laotians had their own costumes and hairstyles which signalled their Laotian identity. This included their own music, songs, and dance (Bowring 89).

The Chinese were a large community in Siam. They consisted of Teochew, Hakka, Hokkian, and other ethnolinguistic groups, brought in for the most part by steam ships during the period of expansion of the Siamese-Chinese trade in the early nineteenth century (Baker and Phongpaichit 34; Peleggi 45). For the Chinese community in Bangkok, ngiu or Chinese opera was a popular form of entertainment, also appreciated by Thais (Miller 135). Virulrak states ‘At the beginning [King Chulalongkorn], Chinese operatic troupes were employed from China to perform in Siam. Later, they [Siamese] established troupes to perform Chinese opera. They
performed on various occasions and in various places, especially in casinos’ (Wiwatthnakarn 247).

![Gambling Hall Image](image)

**Fig. 2.** A gambling hall of the Chinese community in old Siam (Whitney 42)

Indonesian advertisements from Semarang (Java) reported the visit of the Giok Bing Hian Chinese opera troupe from Siam to Java in 1877; this troupe consisted of ninety members, including ‘four Siamese ladies’ (De Locomotief: Samarangsche Handels- en Advertentie-blad 25 August 1877). This advertisement is not only evidence of the popularity of Chinese opera within and outside Bangkok, but it also shows that Siamese women were allowed to perform on stage. As Rutnin states, ‘after Lakhon phuying was no longer restricted to the royal court, most dance troupes began to use female dancers in all types of dance-dramas. Thus, they were found not only in Lakhon Nai, but also in Lakhon Nok, Lakhon khake (Malay dance-drama in makyong style, with Thai dialogue), and later in Lakhon chatri’ (81) – and, I would add, in Chinese opera.
The latter gained popularity in the capital also at court. Phra Pinklao (the second king during the reign of King Rama IV) trained his female dancers to perform a Chinese opera in Thai language by the title *Ngiu Wang Na* (Chinese opera of the second king) or *Ngiu Phu Ying* (Female Chinese opera) (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 79). He created a new Chinese opera costume imitating the original operatic costumes from China, which was used in the performances at his palace (Smith, *Chotmaiheat* 149). Furthermore, Chinese opera had an influence on Thai commercial theatre, such as *Lakhon of Chao Phraya Mahin* and *lakhon rong of Prince Narathip*. Both dance troupes adapted the theatrical elements of Chinese opera such as dance movements, plays and costumes to their performances (Virulrak, *Wiwatthanakarn* 247-248).

As for the Laotian community, it had its own entertainment. In 1865, *ai lao* (Laotian folk song) gained great popularity in Bangkok. It consisted of dancing with music or singing with music, and it told romance or love stories, performed by Laotians (Bowring 89). At that time, Thais preferred *ai lao* to be performed at their events rather than traditional Thai performances. With a concern about national heritage and the honour of the Siamese country, King Rama IV issued a royal decree prohibiting the performance of *ai lao*. He feared that *ai lao* would cause a decline of traditional performance and thus negatively affect the entertainment business (Virulrak, *Wiwatthanakarn* 175).

The Malay community’s dramatic arts were known to Thais as *lakhon khake* (Malay dance-drama), which referred to two kinds of performance: *makyong* and *bangsawan* (Virulrak, *Wiwatthanakarn* 248). Damrongrajanubhap states that Malay performances came into Siam with the Malay immigration at the time of King Nangklao (King Rama III 1824-1851) (‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 368-369). However, it is usually thought that *bangsawan* appeared in Siam as an entertainment
of the Malay community during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V 1868-1910). During the period of King Rama IV and King Rama V, the government promulgated a royal decree that placed a tax on performance. *Lakhon khake* was also taxed (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 90-91). In addition, Damrongrajanubhab states that the *Lakhon of Ta Sua* (Ta Sua dance troupe) during the reign of King Rama IV performed a dance-drama that imitated the *makyong* style. The costumes followed a Malay design. Singing was in the Malay language, but dialogues were in Thai (‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 369). This would suggest that Bangkok had Malay dance and music companies and that they may have been engaged to perform for both Thais and Malay people.

Moreover, travelling performance companies journeyed to Siam and presented performances in Bangkok. For example, Giuseppe Chiarini’s circus, also known as The Royal Italian Circus, sailed to Bangkok after touring Java, Singapore and Burma. The Royal Italian Circus came to Bangkok in 1882. On 16 October 1882, they were asked to perform over three days for King Chulalongkorn in a big tent in a royal field (Smith, *Chotmaiheat* 23). Parsi Theatre and *bangsawan* toured to Bangkok as well. It is apparent that urban Bangkok of this time presented a diversity of cultures and traditions, and that the Thai people accepted other traditions as being part of their culture. Thai theatre has been influenced and surrounded by foreign cultures, but ‘the end result of this contact is quintessentially Thai’ (Miller 113). The royal court style, in particular *lakhon phuying*, was allowed in a commercial theatre, which collected admission fees. Local and foreign commercial theatre shared and borrowed performance styles from each other, and multi-ethnic cultures generated diverse audiences and increased the demand for performance in society. All of this
contributed to the emergence and development of a hybrid-popular theatre form such as *lakhon phanthang*.

**Lakhon of Chao Phraya Mahin: Dance-Drama before Lakhon Phanthang**

Chao Phraya Mahinthesakdithamrong was born with the name Peng Penkul in 1819. He was a Siamese government official from 1851 to 1894 (Nawigamune, *Tanon* 191). When he was twelve years old, his father put him in service with Vajiranayan (the name of King Rama IV when he was a monk). Vajiranayan was very kind to Peng. He treated him as his own child (Nawigamune, *Natta-kam* 214). After Vajiranayan quit monk status to ascend the throne, becoming King Mongkut (King Rama IV in 1851), Peng followed him and became a royal official.

In 1857, Peng was assigned by King Mongkut to go to England as a Siamese ambassador and royal visitor of Queen Victoria (*Birmingham Daily Post* 9 December 1857). At that moment, he had not yet been appointed with the title Chao Phraya Mahinthesakdithamrong. He was still known as Chau Mun Sarbbedh Pakde, a chamberlain of King Mongkut. While he was in England, with a group of other ambassadors, he had the opportunity to see several theatre performances in London and in other English cities. He saw opera and Howes’ and Cushing’s Circus in Birmingham. He also saw a pantomime performed at Astley’s and the Victoria Theatre, and went to the Princess’ Theatre and Her Majesty’s Theatre in London.

Chau Mun Sarbbedh Pakde spent almost three months in England as a royal visitor. He acquired new knowledge and experience, not only of newer theatrical performance styles and techniques, but also of industrial and manufacturing practices. *The Birmingham Daily Post* reported the visit of the Siamese ambassadors
to Birmingham, saying that they observed the manufacturing of brass and metal. They were curious and delighted to experiment with and learn about new things, and they were convinced that it would benefit Siam’s development (Birmingham Daily Post 10 December, 1857). In 1858, the ambassadors and their group returned to Siam. Chau Mun Sarbedh Pakde was promoted to the status of Phraya Bhurudrattanaratchaphanrob by King Mongkut, and then, during King Chulalongkorn’s reign, he was further ennobled as Phraya Ratchasupahwadee and Chao Phraya Mahintharasakdithamrong (Nawigamune, Natta-kam 213).24

Chao Phraya Mahintharasakdithamrong, or for short, Chao Phraya Mahin, had great artistic talent; he was a producer with his own dance troupe, a writer, and a theatrical director. In the past, Thai nobility believed that having a dance troupe was guarantee of high honour and superior status (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 366). Therefore, it was a popular trend among the nobility to have their own private dance troupes, taking pride in the skills of their ‘prima-donnas’ (Young, The Kingdom 163). Dancers and musicians were usually domestic servants (Norman, 422). Before Chao Phraya Mahin went to Europe, he too had his own private dance troupe. Sometimes his dance troupe was asked by the king to perform at court on special royal occasions (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 102). After Chao Phraya Mahin returned from Europe in 1858, he was inspired to create a public theatre, which had never existed in Bangkok. As he explained:

…When I [Chao Phraya Mahin] visited Western countries, I saw that the Western countries, such as France and England, had many theatre halls for entertaining people. At the theatre hall, there was a box seat for the queen, the king, the prince, the
emperor, and the empress. They allowed theatre owners to place royal arms in the theatre as a symbol of the honour of the country and of the theatre’s owner as well (Smith, Chotmaiheat 60).

Chao Phraya Mahin, therefore, established a public theatre at his home and named it The Siamese Theatre. However, the exact date and year of The Siamese Theatre’s establishment cannot be ascertained. Later, in 1882, the name of the theatre was changed to the Prince’s Theatre. This was the first commercial theatre in Bangkok, as mentioned earlier. Mattani Rutnin opines that the Prince’s Theatre was named after the ‘Prince’s Theatre’ in London which Chao Phraya Mahin had visited while in England (Dance, Drama 221), whereas Prince Damrongrajanubhab notes that the name Prince’s Theatre came from the name of Prince Penpatpong, the son of King Chulalongkorn and Chao Chom Manda Morrakot (one of Chao Phraya Mahin’s daughters). Prince Penpatpong was Chao Phraya Mahin’s grandson. Therefore, the Prince’s Theatre would suggest the meaning of ‘Lakhon of the Prince’ (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 378). I would like to query the information concerning the naming of this theatre. In 1857, Chao Phraya Mahin did not visit the Prince’s Theatre as Rutnin states, but the Princess Theatre in London. The Morning Post of the 20 January 1858 reports that the Siamese Ambassadors and followers attended the Princess Theatre to see a performance of Hamlet. My contention that the Bangkok theatre was named after the Princess Theatre in London is further supported by the date when the Princess Theatre and the Prince’s Theater were established in London. The Princess Theatre was built between 1840 and 1841.
and demolished in 1931, whereas all of the Prince’s Theatres in London were opened later.25

Young notes that ‘Siam had only one entertainment hall in the capital [Bangkok], where an admission fee was charged’ (Kingdom 162). The entertainment hall in Young’s note (dating from 1898) would be the Prince’s Theatre of Chao Phraya Mahin because, during that period, other public theatres in Bangkok had yet to be established.26 Before the twentieth century, public theatres were not fashionable among Thai people. The custom of going to a public theatre and buying a ticket in order to watch a performance deviated from the Thai tradition whereby Thai people could watch a performance for free on special occasions and at a gambling hall. Initially the Prince’s Theatre was not a public theatre; Chao Phraya Mahin wished to use this theatre for creating and rehearsing new pieces and has his dance troupe perform for his personal entertainment and for special guests (Smith, Chotmaiheat 60). Chao Phraya Mahin created a new performance style, different from that of other dance troupes. He made his troupe perform foreign stories and Thai traditional plays. He also employed dancers skilled in other performance styles, such as Chinese opera, to teach his own dancers and to perform in a mixed dance-drama style (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 119). But people who had watched Chao Phraya Mahin’s performances at his theatre were very impressed and asked Chao Phraya Mahin to arrange another performance for which they were happy to pay an admission fee. Chao Phraya Mahin eventually decided to open his theatre as a public theatre and to charge an admission fee, imitating the Western custom, which he had witnessed in Europe (Narissaranuwattiwong 121).

The Siamese Theatre and the Prince’s Theatre were located in the commercial area called Tha Tien, which was a prominent riverside market and a port of trade on
the east bank of the Chaophraya River in Bangkok (Phuchadabhirom 71). Audiences could reach the theatre by boat and by road (Smith, Chotmaiheat 60). The interior of the Siamese Theatre was decorated simply, but it was functional. There was no elevated stage; the performance area was marked out on the floor by mats. The audience sat on the floor close to the performers. At the back of the stage a small seat or small platform was raised for the dancers who performed the queen’s and king’s roles (Young, Kingdom 167). The two exit doors for performers to enter and leave the stage were drawn in the form of the Western pillars. The backdrop was built in the form of a Thai palace wall and small lanterns were hung on the ceiling.

![Siamese Theatre](image)

Fig. 3. Siamese Theatre. Image courtesy of Thummachak Prompuay.

On the other hand, the interior of the Prince’s Theatre was more richly decorated and more modern than that of the Siamese Theatre (see fig. 4). Electric lighting was used on the stage and in the theatre. A large chandelier and small electric lanterns were hung on the ceiling. The upper parts of the stage doors were
decorated with a Thai gable. Small clocks were placed on the upper part of doors. On the upper backdrop scene, written in Thai, was a sentence that read *Sa Dang Kwam Du Pen Tee Pa Lard Ta* (To present the spectacle of performances). Coats of arms were placed on poles, and in addition, seats for the audience were arranged in the theatre and ticket prices differentiated among seats position. The ticket system not only changed the old tradition of watching theatre performance among Thai people, but also marked a class distinction:

‘This entertainment [performances at the Prince’s Theatre] is a performance for ladies and gentlemen. The seats are an exclusive space and uncrowded with lower class people, who wear dirty clothes or are naked from the waist up. *Phu Dee* [high-class people] dislike seeing *lakhon bon* [dance-drama at a gambling hall] and *lakhon nguan pleak* [a temporary performance arranged for special occasions] which admission fees are not required. They do not want to mingle with poor people. So they prefer paying for a performance at the Prince’s Theatre’ (Smith, Chotmaheat 190).

The characteristics of the Prince’s Theatre remind me of an essay by Rustom Bharucha, ‘Note on the Invention of Tradition,’ in *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*. Bharucha states that ‘tradition’ in the nineteenth-century commercial theatre meant ‘spectacle’. It provided audiences with new possibilities of adoring gods and mythological heroes in kinetic, technicolour settings (Bharucha 193).
The Prince’s Theatre offered a wide variety of performances in both dance-drama and non-narrative dance. The *Chotmaihet Phra Rat Chakit Raiwan* (1935) (Memoirs of the king’s daily activities) of King Chulalongkorn records that, in 1880, Chao Phraya Mahin’s dance troupe was asked to perform for the king on a royal occasion. During a five-day event, this dance troupe performed *rabam* (non-narrative dance), *Phra Apaimanee, Khun Chang Khun Phane, Inao, and Rachatirat*. On the last day of the performance King Chulalongkorn gave a reward to Chao Phraya Mahin (quote in Nawigamune, *Natta-kam* 56).

In addition, Henry Norman, a British journalist, describes his experience when he went to a Siamese theatre, saying that Siamese people spent the whole night from seven p.m. to two a.m. watching the ‘same play, rather a portion of a play’ at a
theatre. The stories, from Hindu mythology, were familiar to the audiences. The actors were mostly young girls, aged between seventeen to eighteen years, who had been practising Thai dance-drama from an early age (421). The costumes and dresses were to Norman’s eyes very ‘exotic’ and beautiful, and differed from those of other dance troupes in Bangkok. While the name of this theatre is not mentioned explicitly by Norman, it was said to be owned by a ‘most distinguished nobleman, a personal friend of the King,’ and thus was likely the Prince’s Theatre.

Thai dance-drama costumes and other dance costumes in other styles were used in the performances at the Prince’s Theatre. The audiences were made up of ordinary Siamese and foreigners. The theatre had a seating capacity of around three to four hundred (Smith, Chotmaiheat 51; Norman 422). The performances at the Prince’s Theatre became an attractive form of entertainment for both foreign and Thai audiences, who were bored with the old classical style and sought novelty (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 102).

In Thai dance scholarship and in the documentation at the Thai national archives, information about the Prince’s Theatre is relatively scarce. Most of the documents mention that the performances at the Prince’s Theatre of Chao Phraya Mahin were in a mixed dance form, without providing a more detailed description. However, there is a most valuable rare document, a typescript programme of the Prince’s Theatre in Siam, now archived at the Newton Library of the University of Cambridge in England. It is the original copy of the programme of the Prince’s Theatre, dated 25th November 1889. I would like to quote the entire information from this programme here.
Fig. 5. The programme of the Prince’s Theatre performed on 25th November 1889. Photo by Phakamas Jirajarupat

THE PRINCE’S THEATRE.
Special Performance.
November 25th. 1889.

NOTICE.

This theatre called the Prince’s Theatre, can put upon the stage any stories, from whatever source they are taken, whether already dramatised or not; the company perform stories obtained from many nations, both Siamese, and Malay, Chinese, Indian, European, Peguan and Burmese.

For this reason, we have tonight made a various selection, some Chinese pieces, some Siamese, some Indian, in order to give a clear idea of the scope of the Company’s dramatic powers.

And they trust that you, as a traveller and tourist of varied experience, may obtain and disseminate among your readers, a clear idea of the performance of this theatre in Siam.

Programme on the next page.

Act I.

At the New Year, Te-pra-but and Te-pra-ti-dar, companies of male and female angels, meet together, and dance various dances.
Act II.

A male angel, named Te-pra-choon, comes down from heaven to meet these companies; they all dance and sing in various ways after Siamese custom, and then after European custom, including a Scotch dance. They will also use the tambourine in one portion of the dance.

Act III.

Then a female angel, named Ma-ni-me-ka-lar, holding a sacred crystal in her hand, comes from heaven to meet them, and they converse together. Then, they dance together after Chinese fashion; they stand in rank, making the figure of a Chinese dragon (Mangkorn) following the crystal. There is also a fan dance, with various movements. They then arrange themselves in various figures in six pairs, while a seventh pair give the best Siamese figure dances; then after various Pegu, Malay and European dancing, they leave the stage.

Act IV.

A giant named Rama-soon, comes to join these companies of angels, and when he sees the female angel Ma-ni-me-ka-lar, he falls in love with her. But her attendant angels are very frightened at the sight of the giant, and fear they will be killed; and they run in every direction. She herself, however, need not fear, as she has power in her magic crystal. The giant chases her to catch her. But she throws into the air the precious crystal, which she has in her hand; the flash of its brilliant light blinds the giant for the moment, and she disappears.

End of the Angel Piece.

Act V.

A Foreign Story called
The Adventures of Abou Hassan
(Put into Siamese form)

The Caliph of a certain town takes council with his wife, and decides to give a woman named Ooa Dat to be wife to a man Abou Hassan; and they arrange the marriage ceremonies of the pair, and the wedding is carried out.

After a time, Abou Hassan’s creditors bring him many bills and demand payment. He, however, has no money to pay. So he consults with his wife Ooa Dat. She advises that he pretend to die; she will then go and beg of the Caliph’s wife, who will probably give her money to assist the funeral ceremonies. This plan is carried out and the wife brings back the money that she obtains from the Lady.

The money, however, is not yet sufficient for Abou’s wants; so he suggests that his wife Ooa Dat should now in her turn pretend to be dead.

Then Abou goes to inform the Caliph of the sad news of his wife’s death, and the Caliph gives him money to carry out the proper funeral arrangements.

That day, however it happened that the Caliph went to see his wife; and mentioned in conversation that he had heard of the death of the woman Ooa Dat. But his wife contradicts him and says that Ooa Dat is not dead; but had that day brought the news of the death of Abu Hassan.
The Caliph and his wife then argue together as to which is right: and they are both in doubt as to what is the truth of the matter.

The Caliph then sends his servant Mesrour to go and find out the facts. On reaching the house Mesrour finds Ooa Dat lying dead; and returns with this report to the Caliph’s wife, however, will not believe it: and she sends one of her women to go and see the truth. This woman sees Abu lying dead in the house and returns with this tale.

Then the Caliph and his wife decide to go and see for themselves and they find both husband and wife lying dead: and they have no suspicion of the fraud practised on them; but think it to be really death: and they offer a large reward to any one who will tell the truth as to which of the two died first. Abu and Ooa Dat, on hearing this, at once rise and address the Caliph. He and his wife are terrified at first, thinking that the spirits are rising.

But when they clearly see the deception which had been so cleverly carried out, they laughed at it, heartily, and returned to the palace: and give to Abu and his wife sufficient money for their needs.

Finis.
Curtain and Midnight.

***

The programme captures enticing details of the performances at the Prince’s Theatre. The plays or the repertoires of the performance of this theatre derive from various national stories, not only Thai and Southeast Asian, but also from Europe.

The notice in the programme suggests that it was addressed to foreigner and elite audiences. The programme was in English, a language which in the late nineteenth century was not an known by commoners in Siam. It also conveys the notion that this company had highly skilled writers able to dramatise stories from different nations.

As I am a Thai dancer, I was fascinated by the variety of performances, which can no longer be found in the lakhon phanthang repertoire of today. The first part of the programme is devoted to the performances on an angel theme as found in the Ma-nime-ka-lar and Rama-soon story. Foreign dances were inserted into the story. The angel characters in the performance of the Prince’s Theatre were not only Thai
angels but also foreign angels. Additionally, European, Chinese, Malay and Pegu (Mon people) dances were inserted in the main plot line.

Act V of the performance is a dramatised story from the Arabian Nights episode ‘The adventures of Abou Hassan’. This performance is not the first instance of an of Arabic and Persian narrative dramatised in Siam. As mentioned in the early part of this chapter, the first spoken dance-drama of Siam was based on the Arabian Nights story ‘The tale of the sleeper awakened’ adapted and translated as Nithra Chakit by King Chulalongkorn in 1879. Thus, the adventures of Abou Hasan dramatised by the Prince’s Theatre Company was a continuation of the Nithra Chakit. This performance of the Prince’s Theatre reflects the popularity of Arabic and Persian literature in the dramatic arts of Siam and the Southeast Asia region in the nineteenth century; the Arabian Nights and related items were also in the repertoire of the komedi stambul from the time of its emergence in Surabaya, Indonesia (Cohen, Komedia 45-46).

In addition, some information can be gathered from the Singapore Free Press Newspaper of 6 November 1893, which is worth quoting:

Bangkok possesses a theatre, which is a somewhat surprising building, with its private boxes, stalls, dress circle, pit and gallery—all amazingly like and unlike a home theatre. There are well-painted drop scenes, and a fine orchestra, though to the English ear Siamese theatre music is an acquired taste. The orchestra, too, do all the talking or singing, the actors only acting in dumb show. Can it be that the French, who were so proud of their ‘L’enfant Prodige’ and
other dumb show performances some year or two ago, were not original, but borrowed the idea from Siam?

The play now on at the ‘Prince’s Theatre,’ Bangkok is very much up to date, and political to a degree. The fighting, of which there is a great deal, is Siamese *versus* French. The French blue and red uniforms are very well imitated, and the Foreign Legion are a sight to behold. Ruffianly, forbidding and filthy to a degree, I think more unholy looking villains never faced the footlights. The Siamese are beautifully dressed and, need one say that they—the Siamese—are invariably victorious in every encounter. The audience (which is largely composed of women and children) take it all very philosophically and never applaud. Of course there is a prince and a princess, but there seem to be no funny characters—no clowns or comic old men as there are in Burmese plays—actors so really funny that one has to laugh even without understanding a word they say. The Siamese theatre is quite a thing to see once, but to most European once is enough.’

The article provides a clear picture of the Prince’s Theatre in 1893. It indicates that the new dance-drama form shown at the Prince’s Theatre is neither traditional dance-drama mixed with other Asian theatre forms nor the presentation of Asian stories, as most Thai scholars maintain. It is a story about Siam and France, hinting at the political problems between Siam and France during the colonial period. Moreover, the Prince’s Theatre, as mentioned, also utilised modern theatre elements, such as footlights and painted backdrop scenes. Western costumes have been
described and the characteristics of the audience of the Prince’s Theatre have also been recorded in the article.

The other innovation introduced by the Prince’s Theatre was the word *week* or *wik* (in Thai), which was used to refer to the performance season of the Prince’s Theatre. After Chao Phraya Mahin established a public theatre and collected admission charges, the Prince’s Theatre offered a performance one week a month during the time of full moon and later, Chao Phraya Mahin extended the period of the performance to two weeks a month (Narissaranuwattiwong 121). Then, the Prince’s Theatre regularly housed performances during the time of the waxing moon and was closed during the waning moon period. This arrangement was for the convenience of the audience so that they could go to the theatre and easily return home late at night after the performance had finished (Young, *Kingdom* 162). The term *week* entered the Thai language from the theatre programme of the Prince’s Theatre. Chao Phraya Mahin was in the habit of posting the theatre programme at the front of his theatre asking the audiences ‘What stories or performances will be shown this week?’ (Virulrak, Wiatthankarn 215). In the programme, the word *week* referred to the period of the performance. However, this word was hybridised by audiences. They took the word *week* or *wik* to mean a theatre hall rather than the period of the performance. Since then, the word *wik* has been used widely to denote theatre halls and edifices, such as *wik likay* and *wik rong bon* (theatre at a gambling hall). The Prince’s Theatre ran until Chao Phraya Mahin died in 1894. His dance troupe and the theatre were taken over by his son Boosara Mahin, and renamed *Lakhon Boosara Mahin* (Nawigamune, *Ta-non* 191; Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 102).
Boosara Mahin: Siamese Touring Dance Troupe in Europe

Lakhon Boosara Mahin became famous and very popular among both Siamese and Westerners in Bangkok. Boosara Mahin inherited the concept of a variety of performance styles from Chao Phraya Mahin. However, he developed his theatre as a variety theatre. A Thai newspaper in 1897 discusses the performances of Lakhon Boosara Mahin as follows:

They [Lakhon Boosara Mahin] have a Trae Farang Wong Yai [Western Brass Band] to provide prelude music. The prelude dance is rabam [non-narrative dance], whose costumes are similar to farang’s [Western/ European people] god and goddess costumes. The dance movements imitate Farang Ram Tau [Western ballet], and as beautiful as in the original Western dance... In addition, the dancers in this troupe perform well in farang and jeen [Chinese] dance-drama styles... Their performances are more wonderful and astonishing than other theatres in Siam... (Siam Maitri 26 January 1897).

From the above, the performances of Lakhon Boosara Mahin were a hybrid performance style, which was a novelty and differed from the traditional performances. Western and Chinese performance styles are also mentioned and were in the repertoire of this troupe. In addition, this dance troupe also performed Inao in Javanese style. The dancers wore Javanese dance costumes and showed dance movements imitating those of Javanese dance (Siam Maitri 16 February 1897).
After Boosara Mahin took over the Chao Phraya Mahin dance troupe, in 1898 he established a new public theatre called Rong Lakhon Bot Mahin (Bot Mahin Theatre) in the commercial district (Bangkok Samai 20 April 1898). The new theatre of Boosara Mahin was a beautifully decorated theatre. Its exterior had many small lanterns and flags hanging around the outer wall, and the interior theatre floor was covered with linoleum. Two large chandeliers were hung on the ceiling, which illuminated the theatre. Many chairs were placed as seats for the audience. In addition, big and small boxes were built for groups of people. The theatre had a seating capacity of between six and seven hundred people (Nawigamune, Tanon 221). To build the new theatre, Boosara Mahin required a large sum of money. He encountered financial problems, which was the reason why he decided to break away from the court and take his dance troupe on a tour of Europe in 1900 (Nawigamune, Natta-kum 72).

In 1900, France held a world fair, the ‘Exposition Universelle’, in Paris, which ran from April 15 to November 12. At this fair, many countries around the world brought their products and arts, constructing pavilions to present their national cultures to the European public. Siam participated in this exhibition. In 1899, before the event, Siamese officials discussed the activities to be shown, the products to be exhibited and the construction of the pavilion. They agreed to send Thai crafts, food, musical instruments, and other products to Paris. A Sala Thai (Thai traditional style pavilion) was constructed as a symbol of the country. Siamese officials decided that they would not send a royal Thai dance or musical troupe to Paris. They were worried that foreigners would not appreciate Thai music and Thai dance movements, thinking that it might affect the number of visitors to the pavilion, thus compromising the success of the project (Nawigamune, Natta-kum 66).
However, Boosara Mahin considered this exhibition to be a good opportunity to help him earn money and release him from his financial woes. He sent a letter to King Rama V asking for permission to take his dance troupe to Europe as a private dance troupe. King Rama V replied that he would allow Siamese officials, who were on the committee of the project, to consider his proposal. The Siamese officials decided that it was inappropriate to send a Thai dance troupe to Paris. They stated that the female dancers would be in difficulties with the different language, food and weather, stranded in a strange land. In addition, they thought that it might give a bad name to the country (Nawigamune, *Natta-kum*67). But Boosara Mahin did not give up his dream to tour Europe. Finally, King Rama V instructed Boosara Mahin that if he wished to take his dance troupe to Europe, he had to resign from his post as royal chamberlain. Then, he could go to Europe as the dance troupe’s director with no connection with the court (Nawiggamun, *Natta-kum* 72). Boosara Mahin resigned at once and took his dance troupe to Europe.

Boosara Mahin and his dance troupe, comprising twenty-three female dancers and twelve male musicians, went to Europe as a touring performance company called the Boosara Mahin Siamese Theatrical Troupe (see fig. 6) (*The Straits Times* 9 June 1900). The Boosara Mahin Siamese Theatrical troupe toured Egypt, Russia, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Singapore, and other countries (Nawigamune, *Natta-kum* 57). The tour was not easy, nor was the journey comfortable. As Cohen mentions in *Performing Otherness: Java and Bali on International Stages, 1905-1952*, ‘Most performers who journeyed from Java to Europe or America did not travel in […] style. Hours of employment were long, wages low, accommodation poor and good food scarce’ (11).
The performances of the Boosara Mahin troupe in Europe impressed Western audiences. In September 1900, this company opened performances at the Berlin Zoological Garden, in Germany. The audiences were fascinated by the strange sound of Thai music and songs, and the dance movements and costumes, which were of extraordinary splendor and beautiful colour. At that time, the music and songs of the Boosara Mahin troupe were recorded onto a wax cylinder for playing on the phonogram of Professor Carl Stumpf, who was interested in foreign music and music psychology (Koch, Wiedman and Ziegler 227).

It was the first time that Thai music and songs were recorded by foreigners and presented to the world. However, when the Boosara Mahin troupe performed in St. Petersburg, Russia, they were unsuccessful. The company arrived in Russia in October 1900. They performed beautiful varied dances, such as a Fan Dance, a Lantern Dance, and an extract from a Thai dance-drama, but not many people came.

Fig. 6. The Boosara Mahin Siamese Theatrical Troupe touring Europe.
to the theatre because of the very cold weather (Nawigamune, *Natta-kum* 48). While touring Russia, however, the Boosara Mahin troupe had an impact on the Ballet Russes choreographer, Michel Fokine, who created a solo performance a decade later called *La Danse Siamoise* which was performed by Vaslav Nijinsky at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg and later at the Paris Opera.32

Fig. 7. *La Danse Siamoise* (1910) by Vaslav Nijinsky33

The performances of the Boosara Mahin dance troupe not only presented traditional Thai performance but also performance in a mixed style. When the Boosara Mahin troupe opened in Singapore at the Town Hall, *The Straits Times of Singapore* reported that ‘the performers showed the Siamese dance plays, which
were neither entirely Chinese nor Malay in character and had some features of both’
(The Straits Times 9 June 1900). These mixed traits of the performances of the
Boosara Mahin troupe can be seen in a photograph of the Fan Dance, taken on 24
September 1900 while they were in Berlin, Germany.

The fan dance was admired as the highlight of the programme of the Boosara
Mahin company. It was a popular performance piece with audiences in both
Bangkok and overseas (Nawigamune, Tanon 220).

Fig. 8. Fan Dance by Boosara Mahin Thai theatrical dance troupe in Berlin in 1900.

This picture shows the performers wearing Thai traditional costumes and
holding fans. The dance movements were based on Thai dance in terms of body
balance and hand gestures. The costumes were in Thai traditional dance-drama style,
showing different male and female characters. But the dancers wore black stockings and shoes and had fans, which were a symbolic prop of Chinese characters in Thai plays. This suggests that this performance was a mixture of traditional Thai dance and Chinese movement styles.

After touring Europe, in 1901, the Boosara Mahin dance troupe returned from Europe to Bangkok debt ridden; Boosara Mahin was unable to pay his dancers and musicians and went into litigation with them over their wages (Nawigamune, Nattakam 84). In the same year, Boosara Mahin died and his dance troupe was taken over by Khunying Luanrit Thephatsadin Na Krungthep, who was the landowner from whom Boosara Mahin had hired land to run his theatre before touring Europe. When Khunying Luanrit Thephatsadin Na Krungthep took over the dance troupe, she changed its name to Lakhon Phasom Samakkhi (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 102). However, by then, some of the dancers and dance masters had moved on and were in other dance companies such as Lakhon Chao Khun Chom Manda Pae and Lakhon Chao Intrawarorot Suriyawong Muang Chaing Mai (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 379; Virulrak, Wiwatthanakarn 253-254). In this way Boosara Mahin’s repertoire was reproduced.

**Prince Narathip and the Development of Hybrid Dance-Drama Theatre**

Pornrat Damrhung states, with reference to lakhon phanthang, that a hybrid dance style is a new theatrical invention attracting audiences, both Thai and foreign, beginning in the late nineteenth century. It was part of ‘a wave of experiments in dance theatre during the early phase of Thailand (Damrhung, ‘From Phra Lor’ 112). Lakhon Chao Phray Mahin from the Siamese Theatre and Prince’s Theatre and also Lakhon Boosara Mahin, the hybrid dance and theatre forms of the nineteenth
century, were developed from the commercial theatre and can be considered experimental forms. These commercial theatre forms were largely patronised by audiences who paid a fee to see the performances. However, in a country like Thailand, in which tradition and culture are directly influenced by the royal court, these hybrid theatres not only developed through the inclusion of local diverse audiences, they also successfully interacted with the royal court. The royal court played a part in the formalisation of the hybrid theatre forms through the dance-drama and the productions of Prince Narathip Phraphanpong.

Prince Narathip Phraphanpong or Prince Narathip was of royal blood and contributed to the development of these hybrid theatre forms into *lakhon phanthang* (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 119). Born in 1862, Prince Narathip was the son of King Mongkut and Chao Chom Manda Khein. He was educated in Thai and English at the Royal Language School in Bangkok, which had been established by his older brother, King Chulalongkorn (Gumran 4). Prince Narathip was very good at English and interested in history, archeology, and literature. He wrote several plays, poems, and works of fiction which were popular with Thai readers. Prince Narathip owned a dance troupe from the time he took the royal title of Krom Mamun Narathip Phraphanpong in 1889. His dance troupe presented Thai traditional dance-drama styles, such as *lakhon nai* and *lakhon nok*. Later his dance troupe started to perform the *lakhon rong* (sung dance-drama), which became an archetypal model of Thai traditional sung dance-drama (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 379).

Initially the dance troupe of Prince Narathip was known as *Lakhon Mom Luang Tuan*. It was frequently invited to perform at the royal palace, but it performed mainly outside the court. However, they did not have their own theatre so they occasionally rented Dukdamban Theatre of Chao Phraya Thewet for their
productions (Vasinarom 31). Later, as the performances of this dance troupe gained in popularity and success, Prince Narathip established his own commercial theatre, imitating the Prince’s Theatre of Chao Phraya Mahin (Damrongrajanubhab, ‘Tamnan Rueng Lakhon’ 379). In 1904-1905 Rong Lakhon Wiman Narumit (Magic Palace Theatre) was built and the dance troupe changed its name to Lakhon Narumit. In 1906, the Wiman Narumit Theatre burnt down, and on 2 November 1908 Prince Narathip established a new theatre named the Rong Lakhon Pridalai (Pridalai Theatre) (Vasinarom 31).

The Pridalai Theatre was located in the vicinity of Prince Narathip’s palace, which was in an urban area surrounded by Western communities and commercial buildings, the so-called Yan Karn Kha Tawantok (Western business area) (Vasinarom 262). At that time, the theatre was a wooden building beautifully decorated inside. The stage was a proscenium, including modern theatrical devices. There was a ticket office and a bar for selling alcohol, and various drinks and snacks, with two or three bartenders. The bartenders had to wear a uniform, which was a white, long-sleeved shirt and long white trousers. In the interior of the theatre there were boxes for the audience and amphitheater seats, including a special box for the king and queen, and the rest of the royal family and royal visitors. The performances of the Pridalai Theatre were lakhon rong and lakhon in hybrid style, developed by Prince Narathip and his group under the supervision of King Chulalongkorn (Vasinarom 35). A most famous production of the Pridalai Theatre was Sao Khrua Fa, the Siamese adaptation of the Italian opera Madame Butterfly, with the American soldier changed into a Siamese soldier and the Japanese lady into a Chaing Mai lady.

Prince Narathip ran a theatrical business like that of the Prince’s Theatre of Chao Phraya Mahin; his theatre presented chronicles and historical stories, which
were famous and successful. But audiences became bored with the chronicle plays. Prince Narathip was made aware by King Chulalongkorn that audiences preferred ‘farang things,’ which they saw as modern. They did not want to be old-fashioned, so they did not like the old performance styles and stories; they were utterly bored with them (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 119). If Prince Narathip aim was popularity, it was necessary to match his productions to modern tastes. Prince Narathip adapted and improved the productions, introducing romantic and adventurous stories in the performances at his theatre.

King Chulalongkorn played an important role in the development of Prince Narathip’s theatre. He gave constructive criticism to Prince Narathip about his plays and productions, and also watched rehearsals of new company productions (Vasinrom 35). King Rama V’s intention was to create a new theatre form, modernising theatre traditions as Narathip’s patron and supporter. For example, he sent a letter to Prince Narathip reserving performance tickets for him and his family, and went to the Prince Narathip Theatre to watch performances, mixing with audiences of all classes (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 112). King Chulalongkorn patronisation elevated Prince Narathip’s dance troupe to a royal troupe or royal company, which could produce performances for royal occasions and also be marketed as a public theatre. Since then, Lakhon Narumit became known as Lakhon Luang Narumit (Royal Lakhon Narumit). This royal support encouraged the development of this theatre in the form and quality of its productions.

*Lakhon Luang Narumit* is not the same dance-drama form, as practiced and performed in the past. They [Prince Narathip’s dance troupe] composed new stories; sometimes they adapted
farang stories for presentation at their theatre. Mostly, they presented lakhon phut [spoken dance-drama] in their style, which integrated Thai dance movements with character dialogue and sung narration (Vasinrom 41).

Prince Narathip enhanced the theatrical forms by modernising his productions and the theatre itself. He utilised Western theatrical techniques and equipment in his theatre, such as a proscenium stage, and backdrops and wings. Moreover, Prince Narathip wrote his own plays and composed new stories based on Thai folk tales and labeled his plays as being in phanthang style. When Prince Narathip started writing Thai dance-drama plays and literature there had been no mention of the word Phanthang but in 1908, he used the term Phanthang in connection with a new dance-drama based on the ancient Thai folk story of Phra Lor (Vasinrom 42). This is the first documented use of the term ‘phanthang’ in Thai performance.

King Rama V was directly involved with the Phra Lor production as he corrected the script of the play and attended rehearsals (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 120). Damrhung has stated that ‘Phra Lor of Prince Narathip unlike most earlier lakhon phanthang pieces such as those created by Chao Phraya Mahin Sakthamrong, was unique and was a fine example of a blend of popular and Western singing and dance, infused with a strong court style’ (‘From Phra Lor’ 113).

Prince Narathip modernised his productions by using Western theatre methods. For example, he applied a Western-style division into acts and scenes to his plays and separated the poetic narration by the chorus from the prose dialogues spoken and sung by dancers and actors, as done in Western operetta. Costumes and jewelry were not as in the traditional dance-drama form (Talalak 44). Realistic acting styles and movements were used in his productions. In addition, English words were
inserted in plays. All of this is evidence of the intention of Prince Narathip to modernise his performances following the notion of a Thai imitation of farang, which was a core idea for the modernisation of theatre forms, in keeping with royal policies. As Rutnin states, ‘It was an effective means of relating private enterprises to the service of the king and of compensating them with royal honour and prestige. In this way, the king was able to create a deep sense of loyalty to the throne among the leaders of society (Dance, Drama 112).

The Prince Narathip dance troupe, under the king’s supervision and patronage, refined and elaborated theatre productions and theatrical forms by making ‘Thai Lakhon appear like the Lakhon farang [Western dance-drama]’ (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 145). During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, in the royal court, Western knowledge and customs were held up as models of modernisation and civilisation. The royal court applied a Western veneer to all court traditions in order to show that Thailand was a modern and civilised country. Thus, Prince Narathip’s dance-drama productions were modernised following the direction given by the King’s court of a developing country.

Additionally, most of the audience members of Prince Narathip’s theatre were aristocrats and members of the elite, educated in and endorsing Western values. Theatre production, then, responded to the taste of the spectators. During Prince Narathip’s period, theatrical activity shifted from being one of amusement and variety to a form of theatrical culture for elite consumption. As a royal court company, the performances of Prince Narathip were developed within the standard of royal art. The lakhon in the style of Prince Narathip amalgamated the royal court dance style with new dance movements and foreign stories. Elaborate costumes
made with expensive materials, such as diamonds and gold, were part of the presentation.

Rutnin proposed that the Lakhon of Prince Narathip was created by ‘the combination of three geniuses’, generating a high quality dance-drama, worthy of the royal court (Dance, Drama 150). The high literacy level of Prince Narathip, the musical skill of Mom Luang Tuan (Prince Narathip’s wife), and the choreographic skill of Chao Chaom Manda Khein (Prince Narathip’s mother) turned the productions of this company into modern ones yet retaining the beautiful songs and traditional dance movements as per the standard of the Thai court dance-drama. However, the phanthang dance-drama style of Prince Narathip used and borrowed theatrical elements from other dance troupes and from other performances. A study by Vasinarom claims that Chao Chom Manda Khein had a chance to learn about Western traditions at the royal court when she was a consort of King Mongkut. She also learned other dance styles from the foreign consorts of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn in the royal palace. In addition, the performances at other public theatres inspired Chao Chom Manda Khein to choreograph the new dance-drama (48-50).

As for the choreographic style of the Lakhon of Prince Narathip, this art form demonstrates the intercultural mingling of dance elements, yet ultimately embodying the aesthetics of Thai traditional performance. Lakhon of Prince Narathip also preserved the high standard of royal court arts and traditional dance-drama. It was King Chulalongkorn’s decision to bring outside companies to perform in the Lakhon of Prince Narathip.
My personal preference is to have them perform together. She [Chao Chom Manda Khein] accepts that their [Chao Phraya Mahin Company] ideas, stories, role playing, and stage decoration are very good. She has nothing to do with it or against it. The only thing she refuses to compromise on is the dancing and to have the Lakhon of Chao Phraya Mahin regard her as khru [teacher]. She cannot join with them. It would be rather degrading to her honour and prestige (quoted in Rutnin, Dance, Drama 148).

The king’s wish of integration did not come true: Chao Chom Manda Khein refused to join the Chao Phraya Mahin dance troupe. Chao Chom Manda Khein was highly respected by the people of the royal court. She had many dance students in the palace, so if she was against joining the Chao Phraya Mahin troupe, it meant that her students would side with her (Vasinarom 45).

The Prince Narathip Company cancelled performances at the Pridalai Theatre around 1911 because the Prince became too busy with his official royal engagements (Talalak 63). However, the phanthang dance-drama style of his company was transmitted to several private dance troupes through the dance pupils of Chao Chom Manda Khein (Vasinarom 75). At present, the phanthang dance-drama style of Prince Narathip has become an archetypal model of lakhonas performed at the Thai National Theatre. Moreover, the lakhon phanthang style of Prince Narathip has been taught to the Thai dance students at the College of Dramatic Arts, Krom Silapakorn, and several other educational institutions. In 1931, Prince Narathip died, and after that Princess Luksameelawan (a daughter of Prince Narathip), a consort of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, r.1910-1925), inherited and preserved her father’s dance
style, especially the lakhon rong. The company named lakhon pridalai presented mainly the sung dance-drama.

**Conclusion**

The Thai hybrid dance-drama theatre namely Lakhon of Chao Phrya Mahin, Lakhon Boosara Mahin and Lakhon Krom Phra Narathip was created and developed within the framework of traditional Thai performance. The phanthang dance-drama style or the hybrid dance theatre was not only a new performance fashioned by individual experts, but also it was a cultural product that reflected the social and cultural, royal policies and the commercial changes of urban Bangkok in the nineteenth century. During that period, modernisation and urbanisation had a direct influence on the development of Thai performance and culture. With the desire for novelty of the majority of Thai people, the direction given by the royal court and the cultural diversity of the time stimulated the growth of modernity in Thai performance, as witnessed in the development of the phanthang dance-drama form. The modernity in phanthang dance-drama still included Thainess. Not only was this notion of Thainess expressed through the emergence of hybrid theatre, but also through other art forms and traditions that grew during the same period. The phanthang dance-drama style introduced a new theatrical tradition within Thai society. Theatres were supported through the purchase of tickets rather than through direct royal patronage, as had hitherto occurred. It was a dramatic transformation. However, the role of the royal court did not lessen in importance; it still contributed to the development of hybrid theatre and other national artistic and cultural forms. For example, the royal court supported the Lakhon of Prince Narathip as a royal company and determined the direction and quality of performances.
Notes

1. Chao Phraya Mahintharasakdithamrong, was a nobleman in the royal service during King Mongkut’s (King Rama IV) and King Chulalongkorn’s (King Rama V) reign (Yupho, *Silapa* 94).

2. The Venice of the East was an appellation of Bangkok, as given by the Westerners who travelled and settled in Siam during the nineteenth century. This name derived from the geography of Bangkok, with its canals and rivers. Aspects of the Siamese way of life were related to the river, such as house construction and transportation by boat; as Ernest Young notes ‘the water is the true home of the Siamese, and it is on this, their native element, that their real character and genius are best exhibited’ (Young, *Kingdom* 25).

3. The ‘City of Angels’ is also a nickname of Los Angeles in the United States, established in 1781, a year before King Buddha Yodfa Chulaloke (King Rama I, r. 1782-1809) of Siam kingdom ascended the throne and established a new capital city named Bangkok (Kenworthy 1). ‘Angel’ here does not refer to angels in the Christian sense, but to heavenly beings known as Deva or Devata, which denote gods in Sanskrit (Peleggi 3).

4. Civilisation or *Siwilai* is a Thai word that emerged at ‘the time of the encounter with the West;’ however, Thais have their own way of referring to civilisation according to their time and social condition (Peleggi 10-11). In the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of civilisation in Thai was an attempt to represent Thais to the West and the rest of the world as different from barbarians. Thais were a human group who were morally progressive and behaved the same as the Westerners. Civilisation is a notion connecting Thais to the West and it is a way of enhancing Siamese power in the world (Jackson 155-156).

5. *Farang* or Westerner in Thai refers to a Westerner, a European, or white person. In Thai, *farang* means far from Thai identity and the identity of Asian neighbors; however, *farang* presents an ‘ethnocultural mirror’ which identifies Thai and other Asian countries as ‘We-Self and Western Other’ (Kitiarsa 5).
6. Jongkraben is a type of traditional trousers, based on one piece of cloth. At the present, jongkrabeen is a uniform for Thai traditional dancers worn when they practise dance.

7. The term ‘Foreign Asians’ is used by Matthew Isaac Cohen in his article about the komedi stambul and the Parsi Theatre movement to categorise the foreign Asian population, including Chinese, Arabs, and Indians, in urban Surabaya in the nineteenth century (Cohen, ‘On the Origin’ 325). Following Cohen I use this term to denote the multi-ethnic population in urban Bangkok. However, in Thai terms, we have different words used to refer to other Asians, such as jeen (Chinese), khake (Arabs, Indians) and farang (Westerner and European).

8. Virulrak claims that the Arabian Nights was translated into Thai and performed in spoken drama style by King Chulalongkorn for three reasons. First, the Arabian Nights might have been an English textbook that King Chulalongkorn had studied with Anna Leonowens. With his good English ability, he translated this story to be performed as lakhon phut. Second, the royal joker performance (jam aud or talok khon - a short comedic piece performance in spoken drama style performed during a khon interval) may have inspired the king to create spoken Thai drama. Third, in 1870, the king visited Singapore, where he saw spoken Western drama, the performance of which may also have inspired him to create spoken drama at court (Wiwatthanakarn 229).

9. The Thai nobility were given a rank when they entered the royal services. The rank consisted of five levels, from the bottom to the top, as follows: Khun, Luang, Phra, Phraya, Chao Phraya, and Somdet Chao Phraya. The rank was placed before the official name (Bunnag 7).

10. Chao Phraya Thewetwongwiwat, also known as Chao Phraya Thewet, was a high-ranking official assigned by King Chulalongkorn to take care of several royal departments—entertainment, puppetry, mask dance, xylophone ensemble, and lantern dance—in the late nineteenth century. He also had his own dance and drama
troupe which was considered the best in the city at that time (Rutnin, Dance-Drama 98-99).

11. Prince Narisaranuwattiwong was King Chulalongkorn’s brother. He was a talented artist in a mix of Western and Thai art styles.

12. At first, this dance troupe was called Lakhon Mom Luang Tuan. This name derived from that of Prince Narathip Phraphanpong’s consort. However, audiences also knew and called this dance Lakhon Krom Phra Narathip. After Prince Narathip established his own theatre, named Rong Lakhon Wiman Narumit, he changed his dance troupe’s name to Lakhon Narumit. Lakhon Luang Narumit was named after his dance troupe and was supported by the royal court as a royal company (Rutnin, Dance-Drama 222).

13. Virulrak suggests that the first wik likay (likay theatre) probably emerged in 1896 or 1898 by comparing historical evidence between likay performances on stage in the 19th century and the emergence of other commercial theatres such as the lakhon of Prince’s Theatre and lakhon dukdamban. He also proposes that it is fair to estimate that the first wik likay was performed in 1897 (Virulrak, Likay 26-29).

14. Phleng means song, ok phasa refers to language and nations such as ‘people [foreigner] of twelve languages [nation]’ (Baker and Phongpaichit 62). For example, Mon, Laotian, Chinese and other national musical tunes were harmonised into the Thai musical tunes and melodies.

15. I would like to thank Professor Matthew Isaac Cohen, my supervisor, who gave me this interesting piece of information, kindly translating it from Dutch into English.

16. Ta Sua or ‘Mr. Tiger,’ is the name of the owner of the dance troupe.

17. Anaek Nawigamune claims that Chao Phraya Mahin was born in 1821. However, Chotmaiheat Stamsamai (a Thai newspaper published in 1882-1883) on 21st
November 1883, had a special column written by Chao Phraya Mahin. He wrote that ‘he began a dance troupe when he was 23 years old until now (in 1883) he was 64 years old’ (61). I infer from this that the year of birth of Chao Phraya Mahin is 1819 rather than 1821.

18. Chao Phraya Mahin was the fifth son of Luang Jindapichit, who was a Siamese official during the reign of King Rama III. Before Luang Jindapichit took an official position, he had been a monk and a close servant of Vajiranayan.

19. *The Era* 20 December 1857

20. *The Era* 3 January 1858

21. *The Era* 10 January 1858

22. *The Morning Post* 20 January 1858

23. *The Morning Post* 15 February 1858

24. The terms Chau Mun, Phraya and Chao Phraya are titles of royal family members and noble men in feudal Thailand. The rank of the title is decided by the king. The ranking from the lowest to the highest are Kun, Luang, Phra, Phraya, Chao Phraya and Somdet Chao Phraya. A noble man can be promoted to a higher ranking and the name after the title can be changed.


26. For example, the Dukdamban Theatre, a public theatre, performed Thai opera and was established in 1899 (Virulrak, *Wiwatthanakarn* 215). The Wiman Narumit Theatre and Pridalai Theatre where sung dance-drama and lakhon phanthang were performed were established in 1904 and 1908 (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 222).
27. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Dr. Matthew Isaac Cohen, who found this valuable information about the Prince’s Theatre and passed it on to me.

28. Boosara Mahin, But Mahin or Chao Mun Wai Woranat was the name of Chao Phraya Mahin’s son. He had been a chamberlain during King Rama V’s reign.

29. Boosara Mahin:

30. Boosara Mahin:

31. Boosara Mahin:

32. The Nation Weblog:


34. Berlin:

35. Phasom Samakkhi was derived from the combination of two words. Phasom literally meaning to mix, to join, to blend, and samakkhi which means unity, harmony or cooperation. Lakhon Phasom Samakkhi originated from the idea that
Khunying Luanrit Thephatsadin Na Krungthep dancers and Boosara Mahin’s dancers would perform together dance-drama as a commercial theatre.

36. Chao Chom Manda Khein was a royal court dancer during King Rama II’s reign, and became a royal court dance master during the fourth and the fifth year of reign. She was also choreographer for the Prince Narathip dance troupe (Vasinarom 49).

37. Mom Luang Tuan was the name of a consort of Prince Narathip. Her family background was as court musician. Mom Luang Tuan played an important role as a composer for Prince Narathip’s dance troupe. She composed Thai music and songs, in particular the music and songs of foreign accent, to accompany the dance-drama of her husband’s troupe.

38. Manissa Vasinarom completed her Master Degree in Thai dance at Chulalongkorn University in 2006. Her research entitled *Choreography of Chao Chom Manda Khien*, was a study of the life and works of Chao Chom Manda Khien, a consort of King Rama IV. At present, she is a Thai dance lecturer at Rajabhat Suansunadha University in Thailand.
Chapter 2: Lakhon Phanthang in the Nationalist Period

Introduction

Traditions can change through responses of their bearers to features of the traditions themselves in accordance with standards of judgment, which their bearers apply to them. These standards of judgment may derive from newly presented traditions, from traditions previously unknown in the society although well developed in alien societies (Shils 240).

Before 1949, the term lakhon phanthang had not been used in the classification of the dance styles of Siam though the term phanthang was used to describe, sometimes, the lakhon productions of Chao Phraya Mahin and Prince Narathip. As discussed in an earlier chapter, in the nineteenth century, dance-dramas and plays in phanthang style by both these dance troupes were performed and gained popularity in Bangkok. The innovation of purchasing theatre tickets was introduced during this period in connection with this kind of performance. This entertainment form was developed by the elite and was aimed at commoners. Furthermore, the phanthang dance style of that period became representative of Siamese dance and theatre through the touring of the Boosara Mahin dance troupe in 1900. Finally, this popular dance theatre was further developed by court authorities turning it into a court performance.

The transformation of a form of dance/theatre performance described as phanthang into a theatrical genre called lakhon phanthang is part of a larger movement against the backdrop of the changing political, social, economic and cultural policies of Siam in the twentieth century, by which Thai dance and theatre were formalised and standardised and became national heritage. For example, in
1923, the first textbook about Thai dance movements *Tamra Fon Ram*, which gives a description of traditional dance choreographic patterns and traditional dance movements and includes a discussion of the mythological origins of dance, was published in Bangkok under the patronage of Prince Damrongrajanubhap. Sixty-six dance movements were recorded through photos, a new way of preserving and presenting Thai national dance movements to the world (Damrongrajanubhab, *Lakhon Fon Ram* 2003).

In this chapter, I would like to focus on the formalisation of *lakhon phanthang* in the nationalist period discussing how the hybrid dancing and theatre forms of Chao Phraya Mahin and Prince Narathip became known as *lakhon phanthang* and became a traditional theatre genre. The hybrid dance-drama styles and plays of these two dance troupes were first named *lakhon phanthang* in 1949 and later became the model for the new *lakhon phanthang* in the repertoire of Krom Silapakorn in 1958. I would like to examine the revival of Chao Phraya Mahin and Prince Narathip’s hybrid theatre works by Krom Silapakorn following the end of the absolute monarchy period, with consequences on its subsequent development. Moreover, I argue that the changes in national policies and in the attitude of the Thai ruling class towards ‘otherness’ in Thai society impacted upon the survival of hybrid dance and theatre forms. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the cultural diversity of multi-ethnic groups, especially the Chinese, in Siamese society, was no longer appreciated by the ruling classes and in the context of the new national policies. Thus, the performance of *lakhon phanthang* was no longer supported.
Krai-thong and His Spear: The First *Lakhon Phanthang* production of Krom Silapakorn

On Friday 21st January 1949, the dance-drama production of Krom Silapakorn based on the dance-drama play of Prince Narathip *Krai-thong* was performed under a new rubric: *lakhon phanthang*.

The *Krai-thong* story is set in the Phichit province in the northern part of Thailand. It centres on Chalawan, a fierce crocodile king living in an underwater cave. Chalawan has two wives, Nang Vimala and Nang Luam-lai-wan. When in the cave, they are human in appearance but when they emerge from the cave they become crocodiles. One day Chalawan wanted to eat human flesh so he went out of the cave searching for food. He swam toward the house of the millionaire Phichit. At that time, Taphao-kaew and Taphao-thong, daughters of the millionaire, were also swimming. Chalawan saw Taphao-thong and fell in love with her. Then, Chalawan abducted Taphao-thong and she became his third wife. Taphao-Thong’s father was anxious about his missing daughter. He issued a notice that anyone who could catch Chalawan would be rewarded with half of his wealth and the hand of his daughter Taphao-kaew. Krai-thong, a young man, volunteers to fight with Chalawan and wins the day.

The *Krai-thong* production of 1949, offered an excerpt from this larger story, and was presented in four scenes, as follows:

**Scene I: Near the Muang Phichit River**

**Part I On the bank of the river**

**Part II Inside the cell of the Monk Khong**

**Scene II: Inside a miraculous cave under the water**
Scene III: On the Bank of the river in front of the house of the millionaire of Phichit

Scene IV: Under water

Part I In front of the miraculous cave

Part II Inside the cave (same location as in the second scene)

The play begins from with Krai-thong volunteering to fight with Chalawan on the river in front of the millionaire’s house. The fighting continues on the river and in the underwater cave of Chalawan. Eventually, Krai-thong kills Chalawan with his spear and a magic spell and returns Taphao-thong to her father. This first lakhon phanthang production of Krom Silapakorn was performed by an all female cast even though Krai-thong was a major male character. The dancers were a group of teachers and students of the School of Music and Dance, together with other artists of Krom Silapakorn.

**Beginning of the Story**

The lakhon phanthang by Krom Silapakorn as it emerged in the 1940s can be seen as an ‘invented tradition’. Invented tradition refers to traditions that are ‘invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period- a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity’ (Hobsbawm 4). Adapting an old dance play of Prince Narathip and fashioning a reinvented traditional theatre by the name of lakhon phanthang reflects changes in the cultural and social context of Thailand. In the nationalist period after 1932 practitioners felt compelled to work within defined genres; they needed the security of an institutionalised tradition, even if it required inventing one.
Aesthetic Shift

As mentioned in the previous chapter, both Boosara Mahin and Prince Narathip’s dance troupes ended their activities in the first decades of the twentieth century. Boosara Mahin, the owner and leader of the dance troupe that toured Europe, died in 1901 and his dancers moved to other dance troupes. Prince Narathip ended his dance business at Pridalai Theatre in 1911 as he was busy with royal engagements. In addition, the emergence of the new hybrid dance-dramas such as lakhon rong (sung dance-drama) caused a fading in popularity of the old hybrid dance-drama forms of Boosara Mahin and Prince Narathip.

Lakhon rong (sung dance-drama) was an innovation by Prince Narathip at the end of King Rama V’s reign. It was first performed at Pridalai Theatre in 1908; therefore it was sometimes called lakhon pridalai from the name of the theatre hall. Lakhon rong of Prince Naratip had great success as it presented a new entertainment style which mixed theatrical elements of the hybrid dance-drama of Prince Narathip, lakhon dukdamban (the dance-drama operetta) by Chao Phraya Thewet and Prince Naris, and the Malay bangsawan (Virulrak, Wiwattanakarn 243). Some elements of lakhon rong were adapted from Western performance; Sao Khrua Fa was derived from Giacomo Puccini’s opera Madame Butterfly (1903) and Tukata Yot Rak from The Enchanted Doll. Rutnin suggests that lakhon rong differs significantly from lakhon phanthang and lakhon dukdamban in the stories, dialogue, dancing, the musical accompaniment, the costume and the set designs and thus appealed as a novelty (Dance, Drama 142).

New entertainment forms such as cinema and spoken drama, reflecting the notion of civilisation and progress in Siamese society, gained popularity and replaced the old Thai entertainments (Virulrak, Wiwattanakarn 286; Barme 69). In the period
of the modernisation of Siam from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the Western or farang culture was a model to follow. It affected the taste of audiences, who preferred Western things. King Chulalongkorn commented on the audience of Sao Khrua Fa before the end of his reign saying that ‘People like Sao Khrua Fa more than other plays, to the point that there have been letters from the general public asking for repeat performances at a particular wik (theatre) because this is a lakhon farang story’ (quoted in Rutnin, Dance, Drama 141). Thus, the plays in phanthang style, mostly based on chronicles and tales of other Asian nations rather than Western ones, declined in popularity.

Traditional theatre such as khon and lakhon ram (Thai dance-drama) was preserved and composed anew in the New Siam. However, Rutnin states that ‘the lakhon ram in the traditional style was no longer adequate and effective for communicating new concepts and ideas to the modern public, since what was needed was immediate and direct verbal expression rather than a lengthy display of beautiful dance movements and refined gestures’ (Dance, Drama 162). This is a reason why the modern performance style, lakhon phut (spoken dance-drama), was supported by King Rama VI. The king was educated in England and was very appreciative of and interested in Western theatre. In his time there were many Western plays that had been translated into Thai as also Thai stories adapted from Western originals.

Nationalism

During the reign of King Vajiravudh, the king propagated ‘official nationalism’ to unify the Siamese against the ethnic rebellions in the country (Bowornwathana 34). Simultaneously, Siam in this period was modernised and
presented itself as a modern nation to the world. Chatri Prakitnonthakarn, a Thai architectural historian, proposes that the modernisation of Siam can be divided into two periods. The first was the period of transformation and reformation of Siam society from ‘Old Siam to New Siam’ starting from the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) to the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932. The next period was the so-called ‘New Siam to New Thai’ from the revolutionary period in 1932 until the end of World War II (Prakitnonthakarn 2). ‘New Siam’ in the first half of the twentieth century refers to the changing social structure, the attitude of the official government and cultural values. The old cultural values and beliefs were challenged and question by modernisation.

During the early twentieth century, Siam encountered Western dominance, and the pressures of democracy and communalism. The ruling class, especially the royal court, played an important role in the creation of Siamese identity. Siamese identity in the early twentieth century emphasised nationalism and patriotism. The concept of the three pillars of Siamese society consisting of Chart (Nation), Sartsana (Religion) and Phramaha Kasart (Monarchy/King) had been inculcated into the Thai people. As Sivaraksa states, the concept of three pillars of Siamese society contributed to the creation of a Siamese identity in the early twentieth century (36). Kasetsiri argues that these three pillars of Thai society were arrived at over the long process of building a ‘modern nation’. The concept of three pillars had been introduced during the time of World War I (Kasetsiri). Cultural activities and political campaigns in that period embraced this concept. For example, King Rama VI changed the old Thai flag, which was red with a white elephant in the centre, to the new Thai flag with its three-colour strips of red, white, and blue. Red signified nation, white religion and blue the monarchy or king.
Patriotism and nationalism were the basis of political policies during the reign of King Vajiravudh; multi-ethnicity, especially the presence of the Chinese was regarded as harmful to national security. The Chinese in Siam during that period faced many problems. Many of the country’s businesses were under Chinese control and money was sent back to China. The problems between Chinese and Thai people grew worse as can been seen in the book by King Vajiravudh entitled Jews Heng Burapathid (Jews of the Orient) in which the ethnic Chinese in Siam were identified as being more dangerous than the Jews in Europe (Chansiri 55-56). Consequently, the first decree on Thai nationality was issued by which all people either born in Siam or elsewhere, regardless of their parents’ nationality, were Thais with Thai nationality (Kasetsiri 169). Thus it could be inferred that the issue of diversity, especially in connection with Chinese ethnicity, was of public interest. Therefore the plays and dance-dramas in hybrid style of the Mahin family and of Prince Narathip, which told Chinese, Burmese, Laotian and other national stories, were impacted by such policies and debates. Observing a Thai performer in the role of a Chinese could no longer be seen as entertainment, instead, it raised grave political concerns. The hybrid dance-drama and theatre styles or dance-drama in phanthang style of the Mahin family and Prince Narathip were phased out of commercial theatres and replaced by new entertainments, as mentioned.

**Royal Patronage**

Furthermore, the royal court was interested in and patronised khon and lakhon phut more than other performance styles (Virulrak, Wiwattanakarn 286). The phanthang dance-drama style of the Mahin’s family and of Prince Narathip had been transmitted to other elite private dance troupes. The dancers and the dance masters of
both groups moved to new troupes such as the dance troupes of Suan Kularb palace or Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb, and Lakhon Chao Khun Phra Prayurawong or Lakhon Chao Chom Marnda Pae. The shift of dancers and dance masters ensured a continuation in the practice of the dance-drama of the Mahin family and of Prince Narathip. However, the Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb and Lakhon Chao Chom Marnda Pae dance troupes were not commercial, they only performed at private special occasions. Thus, the hybrid dance-drama and the phanthang form were not as popular as in the past. Later, the dancers and dance masters of these two dance troupe moved to Krom Silapakorn and became teachers at Wittayalai Nattasilp (the Dramatic Arts College).

Krom Silapakorn: The Route of the Hybrid Dance-Drama and Theatre Styles to Lakhon PhAnthang

In this section, I would like to focus on how Krom Silapakorn originated, and how the hybrid dance-drama and theatre forms of the Mahin family and of Prince Narathip were transformed there from popular entertainment into traditional theatre in a big melting pot which gathered dancers and dance gurus from private dance troupes to teach and perform under its banner.

In the past, from the early Rattanakosin era to the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Thai traditional theatre had been managed in a loose structure under the court’s authority. Thai traditional dances, theatre and entertainment were the responsibility of the Krasuang Wang (Ministry of the Royal Palace) (Krasuang Suksathikarn 278). There were various krom or departments such as Krom Khon (Masked-dance Department), Krom Hun (Puppets Department), Krom Piphat (Royal Music and Orchestra Department), Krom Hok Kamen Ram Khom (Acrobatic and
Lantern Dance Department) and Krom Mahorasop (Entertainment Department). Krom Silapakorn took care of museums, architecture and literature.

The officers of Krom Mahorasop were not full-time artists (Chansuwan 21). They did not report to work in the department every day but they had to attend rehearsals and performances when events occurred (Yupho, Silapa 55). The department of dance and music was reorganised during the reign of King Vajiravudh (1910-1925). All departments related to the entertainment of the nation were gathered together in one, the Krom Mahorasop (Entertainment Department). This department was under the direct supervision of the king and under royal patronage. It was the first time that the organisation of art and culture had been systematised, long after Siam’s Westernisation and modernisation. Montri Tramote, a former student of Rong Rian Phran Luang and a National Artist of Thai music, reported that

Krom Mahorasop was an art organisation, which included karn-chang [artisanship], khon [masked-dance], lakhon [dance-drama] and dontri [music]. King [Rama VI] considered all these arts very important. They were a part of national culture, in need of protection. If the king did not patronised in these arts, nobody would be. Therefore, Krom Mahorasop was established to protect all these national arts. With the king’s leadership, the public can follow in the king’s footsteps, resulting in the flourishing of national arts in the future (155).

Krom Mahorasop in the first two decades of the twentieth century was a theatrical lab for King Vajiravudh. The king organised dance rehearsals, amended
dance movements and khon plays, and performed khon and lakhon himself (Malakun 553). In addition, Krom Mahorasop at that time also functioned as a school for the training of artists and musicians who would become the national artists of the future. In 1914, Rong Rian Phran Luang Nai Phra Barom Rachupatham or in short Rong Rian Phran Luang (The Phran Luang School under the Royal Patronage) was established as part of Krom Mahorasop with the aim to train students in khon, lakhon, and dontri (music) and in Western dramatic arts along with the study of general subjects. The students of this school were children whose parents wished them to work as performers or become mahatlek (chamberlains) in the royal service. Teachers of dance and music subjects were the senior officers of Krom Marorasop and traditional dance and music professionals. The others were teachers who taught general subjects and came from other schools. Rong Rain Phran Luang produced valued dancers and musicians who were key figures in the establishment of the Dramatic Art College and Krom Silapakorn and still today have influence.

The establishment of Krom Mahorasop and Rong Rian Phran Luang ensured the transmission of Thai dance-drama knowledge from the old generation to the younger ones. The phanthang dance-drama and theatre styles of Chao Phraya Mahin and Prince Narathip were passed to the next generation of dancers through this process. Some great dance gurus and dancers of Chao Phraya Mahin and Prince Narathip became teachers and dancers at Krom Mahorasop. However, Krom Mahorasop and Rong Rian Phran Luang were dissolved in 1925 and 1926 respectively after the death of King Vajiravudh. In addition, Siam at that point in time was facing a financial crisis cause by the deprivations of the World War I period and the excessive expenditure of the earlier period (Meechubot 12-14). The
artists of Krom Mahorasop and students of Rong Rian Phran Luang faced unemployment. Some artists from Krom Mahorasop moved to other departments; some retired and returned to their hometowns, and some left the palace and joined private dance troupes (Rutnin, Dance Drama 187).

In 1926, the department for Thai entertainment was re-established due to the requirement for Thai dance and music performances for royal visitors and diplomacy (Yupho, Silapa 72). Thai traditional dance-drama, theatre and music were revived, and former artists from Krom Mahorasop were recalled to work once again but they were in the service of a new department named Kong Mahorasop (Entertainment Division) under the authority of Krom Silapakorn. In 1929, Kong Mahorasop recruited young boys and girls to practise khon, lakhon and dontri as the former artists of Krom Mahorasop were now old, some nearing the age of retirement. Many students of Kong Maharasop later became great dance masters and musicians at Krom Silapakorn, e.g. Montri Tramote, Arkom Sayakom, Aram Intraranat, Kree Worrasarin, Chamrieng Putpradub. They played an important role in revising and developing dance and music forms at the Thai conservatoire.

In 1934, a new school of arts and dance was established with the name of Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart. It was initially under the authority of Krasuang Thammakarn (Ministry of Education) but was transferred to Krom Silapakorn in 1935 (101 Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb 116). This school was the first dance and music school where training in dance and music were kept separate, as two subjects, and under royal patronage, after the end of absolute monarchy (Rutnin, Dance Drama 189). Supachai Chansuwan stated in a seminar about the life and works of Luang Wichit Watakarn at Bunditpattanasil Institute on 3 May 2013 that ‘the emergence of Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart seems a revival of the learning and
teaching systems of Rong Rian Phran Luang of King Rama VI (King Vajiravudh 1910-1925) as dance and music were a necessary element to give expression to the civilisation of the country. Education valorised the status of dance and music professionals in Thai society.’

Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart offered primary and secondary education. The curricula of this school were clearly meant to benefit the students by providing knowledge of the dramatic arts together with a general education. Half of the period of study in each academic year was spent on general subjects such as Thai and international histories, English, morality, psychology studies, health and physical education, on the basis of fundamental education rules and regulations set by the Ministry of Education. The other half was spent on performing art subjects. Since 1934, the school changed names several times: from Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart to Rong Rian Silapakon in 1935, to Rong Rian Sang-khitsin in 1942. In 1945, the school was named Rong Rian Natasin offering primary and secondary education and a two-year diploma in music and classical dance studies. Later, in 1972, the school was raised to the status of College of Art and Music with the Witthayalai Natasin. A bachelor’s degree in music and classical dance studies was first offered at this college in 1976 (‘History of Witthayalai Natasin’). For the early period of the school, there is not a detailed and accurate description of the subjects taught in the performing arts section but it can be surmised that the teaching methods adhered to the traditional training style as in the past (Fahchumroon 104).

The establishment of Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart under the authority of Krom Silapakorn in 1934 is evidence of the enduring transmission of ancient dance-drama and theatre forms in a modern art and culture setting. Under an educational umbrella many traditional dance experts of different backgrounds were gathered who
were specialists in their own dance styles. Pramate Boonyachai, a former student of Rong Rian Natasin, states that seniority is what allowed dance masters of different backgrounds to work together without any disagreement (Boonyachai). The younger dance masters admired the older artists’ ideas. The long experience in dance-drama and theatre of the older dance masters was seen as a valuable asset.

As mentioned, Krom Silapakorn was a big melting pot that gathered dancers and dance masters from different backgrounds. Standardising dance knowledge to suit the teaching in one institution was an important task which needed to be accomplished as soon as possible. However, it did not happen immediately after the establishment of the school under the authority of Krom Silapakorn due to the social, political and economic conditions of the country during World War II. Danit Yupho suggests that

In 1935, after the end of the absolute monarchy when Thailand became a modern nation state, *khon*, *lakhon* and *dontri* that had hitherto been preserved under royal patronage were transferred to the civil government under Krom Silapakorn. It is the duty of the Thai people and of the Thai government to protect and patronise the arts as national heritage. However, *khon*, *lakhon* and *dontri* had not been full revived and improved. The valuable *khon* and *lakhon* performances of ancient times had deteriorated...In addition there were new dance-drama and theatre forms emerging in that period, which caused a serious decline in popularity to the national arts (*Khon* 13).
In the beginning, after the School of Dance and Music was set up in 1934, it came under the supervision of Luang Wichit Wathakan, the first director of Krom Silapakorn. Before becoming director of Krom Silapakorn, he had lived and worked in Paris and London as a diplomat. While in Paris, he had registered to study law and political sciences and attended the Pelman Institute (Witayasakpan 177). In Paris, he had many Thai friends, who were progressive and later became key figures in the coup of 1932. Luang Wichit Wathakarn returned to Thailand in 1927 and established a printing house. His books and articles were mostly about history, psychology, but he also published political satires. Later, he resigned from government service to work full-time at the printing house. In 1933, he returned to work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was made Director of Krom Silapakorn the following year (Raphiphan 17-18).

At that time the dance and music of Krom Silapakorn were being used as a tool in propagating nationalism, which was a major policy of the government. The art forms of the period had been modified to present an image of Thailand as a civilised nation (Witayasakpan 152). The government implemented a policy of improving traditional dance and music using Western models. For example traditional dancers were forced to wear shoes while performing and traditional musicians were ordered to compose songs with Western music scales. These changes brought discontent among traditional dancers and musicians leading to the misunderstanding that the government did not encourage traditional dance and music (Phuchadabhirom 55).

A new theatrical genre, the Lakhon Luang Wichit (Luang Wichit Theatre) was created and promoted under Krom Silapakorn. It aimed to educate and persuade audiences to love and be loyal to the country. The style and presentation of the nationalist plays in the new form were a mix of Thai traditional dance-drama and
other elements, including everyday actions and dialogue. However, traditional
dancing, martial arts and singing were inserted during the intermission of these
nationalist theatre productions.

Witayasakpan states that Luang Wichit chose lakhon phanthang as the basic
dramatic form to which western elements could be added (201). However In An
Introduction to Genre Theory, Daniel Chandler suggests that it is difficult to make
clear-cut distinctions between one genre and another: genres overlap, and there are
‘mixed genres’ (such as comedy-thrillers). Specific genres tend to be more easily
recognised intuitively but are difficult (if not impossible) to define (Chandler 2). The
characteristics of lakhon luang wichit seem to overlap with the features of lakhon
phanthang. The issue concerning plays is an interesting point to note here. Lakhon
phanthang presents non-Thai stories mostly from Asia such as Laos, Burma and
China. Lakhon Luang Wichit is similar but most of the main story lines revolve
around Thai history and Thai ethics, instilling a feeling of nationalism and loyalty to
the ‘motherland’ (Witayasakpan 204).

The new theatrical genre Lakhon Luang Wichit gained popularity because it
supported national policies. However, the other old dance forms were still taught at
Krom Silapakorn but they were performed on stage less often than Lakhon Luang
Wichit.

The Revival of Traditional Theatre

The revival of traditional Thai dance-drama and theatre was significant after
the end of World War II and after Luang Wichit Watakarn left his position as director
of Krom Silapakorn. The end of absolute monarchy, the emergence of democracy in
Thailand after the coup of 1932 and the economic crisis in Thailand after World War
II affected traditional dance and theatre, whose performance had decreased (Virulrak, Wiwattanakarn 326). Witayasakapan states that national policies in the first part of the Phibun period (Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram in 1938-1944 and 1948-1957) reflect the idea of ‘the monarchy as an enemy’ of the government and country and it was an obstacle over the development of the country into a modern nation with a constitution. Therefore, the national policies of this period were against royal rule (102).

However, in 1940s, royalism was reinstated in Thai society in order to fight communism. The three pillars of the Thai social structure, Chart (Nation), Sartsana (Religion) and Phramaha Kasart (King) received new emphasis as the foundation of anti-communism. There were several works of literature written by members of the royal family introduced to Thai people. The remarkable novel Si Phaen Din (The Four Reigns) written by M.L. Kukrit Pramoj was published to reinforce the idea that Thais thrived under the absolute monarchy (Sattayanurak 119-120). During this period, the anti-monarchy ideology of nationalism, seen after the coup, was interpreted as having made Thai society worse. Thus, the old traditional culture of the court was reinstated, including traditional dance-drama and theatre. The Thai government realised the significance of these arts and went about promoting and revising traditional dance-drama and theatre (Yupho, Khon and Lakhon preface).

But the process of revival could not be completed in a short time. Western culture and tradition were still held as a model to follow in building up a Thai modern nation. For example, in 1944, a new entertainment form called ram wong (Thai social dance) was introduced to Thai people in the capital. It was modeled on local folk dancing named ram thon (a local social dance). Krom Silapakorn took on the responsibility of standardising this entertainment and promotes it. Traditional
dance movements were used in the dance form together with Western music provided by bands.

The performances and the dances from the royal court began to be revived and their genres were reclassified by Krom Silapakorn under the leadership of new director Phraya Anumanrachadhon in 1942. Saichon Sattayanurak suggests that Phraya Anumanrachadhon was a key figure in creating *Kwam Pen Thai* (Thainess) in Thai society in the Phibunsongkram’s second period (1948-1957) in 1940s (129). His works supported the Phibun’s national and cultural policies in building the Thai modern nation but his works also presented traditional Thai society in a positive light, proposing that Thailand was the best country in the world because the Thai people in each region have their own tradition and culture, which is transmitted from generation to generation. In addition, Phraya Anumanrachadhon also revived conservatism, encouraging Thai people to draw on traditional values as the basis of the transition of traditional Thailand into a modern nation. He stressed that ‘Thai people have the duty to protect tradition and culture because it is their national heritage’ (Satayanurak 133). Thus it can be said that after World War II, there was a period of revival of traditional dance-drama and theatre, now turned into high art and signaling the cultural richness of the nation.

Phraya Anumanrachadhon clearly stated in the preface of his book about *Ramakien* (Ramayana) that *Nattayasart* (dance-drama and theatre) such as *khon* and *lakhon* have to be protected because these arts are an instrument in transmitting ‘*Wattanatham Haeng Chart*’ (Culture of the nation) (Anumanrajadhon 200-201). Additionally, due to the renewed royalism of Thai society Phraya Anumanrachadhon keenly proposed that the monarchy was an important institution for the preservation of the traditions and culture of the Thai nation. Therefore, in 1940s traditional dance-
drama and theatre, especially that of the court was subject to a full revival at the hands of Krom Silapakorn.

The revival of traditional dance-drama and theatre was not only linked to the socio-cultural changes in the country. The connection between Thailand and other countries, especially America, through the United Nations, is also to be seen as an important factor, in that it pushed Thailand to support Thai culture as a tool for managing international relations. In 1949, Thailand joined the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), an agency within the United Nation (UN), which is responsible for promoting peace, social justice, human rights and international security via international cooperation in educational, science and cultural programmes. It promoted a culture of peace and the establishing of the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind to prevent another world war. The cooperation between Thailand and UNESCO led to the revival of Thai traditional culture, music and theatre. UNESCO requested lists of music and songs to establish a full directory of music forms and songs from around the world (Phuchadabhirom 81-82). The Thai government cooperated with this request by asking that Krom Silapakorn re-arranged and revised Thai classical dance and music to send an up to date list to the UN. Since then, the Thai government has implemented a systematic policy of preservation of Thai traditional theatre and music as a part of the nation’s cultural heritage.

Traditional Thai dance-drama and theatre were revived in many ways. The Thai government supported Kong Karn Sangkit (Performing Arts Division), a sub-organisation of Krom Silapakorn, which took care of Thai traditional dance-drama theatre and other entertainment. The aim of Kong Karn Sangkit was to preserve the Thai performing arts as a branch of national heritage following UNESCO’s policies.
The revival of traditional Thai dance-drama and theatre received new impetus when Dhanit Yupho took up the position as Head of Kong Karn Sangkit (Dance and Music Division), Krom Silapakorn. Under his supervision many Thai traditional dance-dramas and theatre forms were revived. The process of revival of Thai dance-drama and theatre began by inviting old dance masters and dancers to become teachers and artists at Krom Sialpakorn and the School of Dance and Music (Yupho, Khon and Lakhon preface).

The dance masters of that period were both khon and lakhon experts and they came from many different dance backgrounds, such as Luang Wilas Wong Ngum (Ram Intrarant), a khon dance master from Krom Mahoraop in the reign of King Rama VI, Mon Supaluk Pattranawik (Mom Kru Tuan) a lakhon dance master (female role) of Chao Phray Thewet in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, M.L Paew Sanitwongseni and Kru Lamul Yamakoup, the lakhon dancers of Wang Suan Kularb, Kru Manlee Kongprapat, a lakhon dancer of Phra Ong Chao Watchareewong and Kru Phan Morakul, a lakhon dancer of Chao Chom Marnda Pae. However, Pramate Boonyachai stated in an interview that during the first period of the revival of dance-drama and theatre forms in Krom Silapakorn, the lakhon that was supported was mainly derived from the Wang Suan Kularb by Kru Lamul Yamakoup and M.L Paew Sanitwongseni.

**Wang Suan Kularb Dance Troupe**

Boonyachai’s statement begs the question of why the dance forms of Wang Suan Kularb would influence the revival of dance-drama and theatre by Krom Silapakorn. Wang Suan Kularb was a dance troupe whose patrons were Prince Assadang Dejavut and Prince Chuthathuch Tharadilok, sons of King Chulalongkorn.
This dance troupe was established in 1911 and was regarded as the best dance school (troupe) for lakhon luang (dance-drama for the royal court) during the reign of King Vajiravudh (101 Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb 72). However, the performances by this dance troupe were presented mostly on special royal occasions and at private events of the dance troupe owner.

The dance troupe gathered the best dance masters and dancers to teach young students. Mae Kru Ngeum (Dance guru Ngeum) a former dancer of Chao Phraya Mahin dance troupe and Chao Chom Marnda Khein of Prince Narathip dance troupe became the dance masters of Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe (101 Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb 86-88). Thus, the phanthang dance and theatre styles were transmitted to the students and were based on the Rachathirat and Phra Lor repertoires, which had been with Chao Phraya Mahin and Prince Narathip dance troupe. However, the Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb troupe excelled at lakhon nai and lakhon dukdamban styles more than other dance-drama and theatre forms, as most of its dance masters had been royal court dancers during the reign of King Buddha Loetla Nabhalai (King Rama II, r.1809-1824).

101 Pi Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb (101 Years of Wang Suan Kularb Dance Troupe) discusses the Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe and the practice of Thai traditional dance, including dance in phanthang style at the School of Music and Dance, Krom Silapakorn, as follows:

‘The students of Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart [School of Music and Dance, Krom Silapkorn] were trained in traditional dance as the dance students of Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe. The teaching of dance was in very traditional style, with the master dancing at the front of the class and the students
repeating and following the steps of the teachers. In addition, the students of this school were required to wear the red *jongkrabea*n [the loincloth]. The red *jongkrabea*n became the uniform of the dance students, displaying unity and discipline. This is the custom followed by the dance students of *Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb*: they had a uniform, which consisted of a white shirt and a red long cloth’ (111-112).

The above passage shows the effort of the dance teachers of Krom Silapakorn in organising and systematising the teaching of traditional dance in the school by applying the traditions and customs of the Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe. It points to the effort made in reviving the old dance forms in the school. The dance and theatre in *phanthang* style, later known as *lakhon phanthang*, were taught at the Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart by the former dance masters of *Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb*.

*Lakhon Phanthang as a Genre*

The 1940s was a period of revival of dance-drama and theatre forms but their classification had not been significant. Phraya Anumanrachadhon states that when the literary works are adapted to performance, the story is not important because the audiences already know it. In contrast, it is the art of performance, encompassing dance movements, singing, music and including other theatrical elements that matters. For instance, everyone knows the *khon’s* stories (quoted in Fachamroon 160-161). Therefore, the revival process was at first focused on polishing dance
choreographic patterns, music and movements rather than engaging with a classification of genres

The term ‘Siamese Dance-Drama’ and ‘Performance of Siamese Classical Play’ were popular terms used to refer to the productions of Krom Silapakorn during that period. Moreover, from the 1940s to 1950s, during the leadership of Phraya Anumanrachadhon and Dhanit Yupho as Director Generals of Krom Silapakorn, several textbooks about Thai performing arts, dance-drama programmes, Thai dance-dramas and khon plays were published in both Thai and English. These texts aimed to provide knowledge about the Thai performing arts, to promote Thai arts to foreigners and also to elevate the status of the performing arts as a serious discipline in Thailand (Fachamroon 170). The first official textbook about the performing arts was Athibai Nattasilp Thai (The description of Thai performing arts) by Phraya Anumanrachadhon published in the Thai language in 1948. This book gave some brief descriptive information on the dance-drama and khon. The term Sang Keat Silp (the art of dance and singing) was used as a theme in this book, with reference to rong (singing), ram (dancing), tam phleng (music) in Thai performance in both folk and classical forms (Anumanrachadhon n).

Three dance pieces selected from the Phra Lor 
5
repertoire; -Phra Law Tam Kai (Phra Lor and the magic cock), Phra Law Kaw Suan (Phra Lor enters the royal garden) and Fon Rak (the dance of love), were discussed. However, the term lakhon phanthang was not yet used with reference to these three dances. The dances were described by giving information about the author of the Phra Lor plays, a short synopsis of the scenes in which the dances appeared, and some comments by the author. This publication testifies to the effort to begin a classification of Thai dance-drama and theatre, even though superficial. The Phra Lor performances in
**phanthang** style of Prince Narathip had not yet been classified as *lakhon phanthang* but were referred to generally as *ram* (dancing). Pornrat Dumrhung suggests that

Genre is not a Thai performing arts concept. Thai artists and audiences, especially in the past, were accustomed to calling the dance-drama forms by the name of their creator such as *Lakhon Chao Phraya Mahin* [Chao Phraya Mahin’s dance-drama], *Lakhon Mon Luang Tuan* [Mon Luang Tuan’s dance-drama], and *Lakhon Luang Wichit* [Luang Wichit’s dance drama]. It seems that the classification of Thai traditional dance began during the reign of King Vajiravudh, when the king presented his modern *lakhon* style, the *lakhon phut*, which was a drama style modelled on Western theatre (Dumrhung interview).

Thus, according to Dumrhung, classification of dance-drama and theatre in Thailand is a new thing. Thai dance artists took on board the concept of a systematisation of dance-drama when Thai society began to adapt itself to the modern world, which coincided with Western hegemony. The West provided a model of modernisation. However, the classification of dance-drama in Thailand did not just appear during the reign of King Vajiravudh as Damrhung claims. It had existed since the Ayudhaya period (fourteenth century) as evidenced in an ancient play which refers to *lakhon nai* (the royal court dance) or *lakhon kang nai* (the dance-drama in the palace) in the Ayudhaya period (Damrongrajanubhab, *Lakhon 230*). Therefore, it should be noted here that the classification of Thai dance-drama and theatre emerged before Siam had a connection with the West.
This notwithstanding, the classification of dance-drama and theatre in the past seems to have been ambiguous and loose in structure. For example, the terms Lakhon Nai, lakhon khang nai, lakhon phu ying and lakhon nang nai were used almost interchangeably with reference to the royal court dance-drama performed by female dancers. On the one hand, the words nai and kang nai literally mean a place inside. On the other hand, the word nang nai and phu ying refer to the ladies of the court, who work for the king, and to consorts and female dancers. With this in mind it can be seen that the classification of Thai dance-drama and theatre in the past was done by considering where the performance took place and in relation to the gender of the dancers.

On 11st February 2011, a cultural event under the title Khon Phu Ying Lakhon (Nai) Phu Chai (Female Khon and Male Dance-Drama) was arranged at Princess Chakri Sirindhon Anthropology Centre in Bangkok. Surat Jongda, a Thai dance-drama and khon expert, was a key speaker, and there was a dance demonstration by the students of Wittayalai Nattasilp Krom Silapakorn. Surat Jongda presented new findings which challenged the old paradigm. He showed that lakhon nai can be performed by male dancers, and that khon can be performed by female dancers. Jongda also suggested that the performing arts are not defined by gender. There are many factors leading Thai dance artists and students to hold this belief. However, Thai people have to modify their received knowledge by carefully considering concepts, techniques, principles and customs in relation to the dance rather than only the gender of the performers (Jongda, ‘Khon Phu Ying Lakhon [Nai] Phu Chai’). The classification of lakhon nai or court dance as presented by Jongda demonstrates that the ambiguity of old classifications of dance-drama leads to problems concerning the revival and development of dance-drama and theatre. Thai
dance scholars and artists are still adhering to outmoded ideas, thus the *lakhon nai* is assigned exclusively to female dancers and *khon* to male dancers, even though this was not the case in the past.

As for *lakhon phanthang*, this term was used officially in the *Krai-thong* production by the Division of Music and Drama, Krom Silapakorn in 1949. The programme notes said that ‘The play of *Krai-thong*’ composed by Prince Narathip is in ‘*Lakon Phanthang*’ style, different from all other Thai plays but very well suited to the actions of the characters, as the dances are beautiful and the whole performance is like a ‘*lakon nok*’ with features of ‘*lakon nai*’ in some parts’ (Yupho, *Khon* 193-194). This was the first time that the term *lakhon phanthang* appeared and was used to classify a production of Krom Silapakorn after the revolutionary period. However, the term *lakhon phanthang* in this programme gives a very brief and unclear connotation of the form and of the characteristics of the performance. The noteworthy feature of this statement is the consideration of other *lakon* forms such as *lakon nok* and *lakon nai* as a term of comparison to highlight difference with *lakhon phanthang*. The dance forms *lakon nok* and *lakon nai* were well known as major Thai traditional dance-drama forms with a long history like the *khon* performance.

The term *lakhon phanthang* as mentioned above does not refer to a mixed or hybrid dance-drama. The *lakhon phanthang* term becomes clearer in meaning nine years later, when the new *lakhon phanthang* production *Phya Phanong* was created by the staff of Krom Silapakorn. The programme of the *Phya Panong* production of 1958 refers to a ‘*Lakhon phanthang* entitled *Phya Phanong* in six acts’. The programme gives a brief synopsis of the story and a short explanation of the production as follows:
The name Phya Phanong was given to the hero of this romance who was father to Phya Karmuan, the founder of Nan. The term ‘lakon phanthang’ is used to define this dramatic performance and denotes a genre which is closely allied to the lakon nok or popular play with the addition of more complex music, dance and songs, as opposed to the lakon dukdamban, which is allied to the lakon nai or court drama. The word ‘Phanthang’, it may be added, originally signified ‘a mongrel’.

Hence the name given to this mixed type of Lakon (Yupho Khon and Lakhon 231).

Thai dance-drama at the end of 1950s regarded the theatrical elements of the performance such as music, singing and dance movements as more important than the gender of the performers and the place of the performance, as it had been in the early period. The term lakon phanthang was defined by comparing it in form with the popular play lakhon nok which was aimed at commoners. This definition also implied that lakon phanthang displayed complex theatrical elements but was more flexible than the dance forms of the royal court. This was the first time that the term phanthang was linked with mongrelism to denote the hybridity of the form. This was a cursory gloss but it was the precursor of future classifications of the dance genre as phanthang.

The classification of dance-drama and theatre in this period implicitly demonstrates that the revival of dance-drama and theatre in Thailand was really about establishing genres. The classification of Thai dance-drama and theatre through naming and defining the form and characteristics of the performance was introduced
after the old dance-drama forms were revived. All these dance forms became a model for the newly invented dance-dramas of Krom Silpakorn as in the case of the *Phya Phanong* production.

It is very intriguing that the systematization of the dance forms was happening after World War II. Phraya Anumanrachadhon mentions the dance and music activities of Krom Silpakorn of that period by using a metaphor: ‘When we are hungry, we want only food. People do not need dance and singing when the stomach rumbles with hunger’ (*Karn Ban Leng* 10). This suggests that during the War II, dance and music had been impacted as the rest of society. But after the World War II and when everything in the country went back to normal, entertainment was again available and it was time to re-organise performance.

The classification of dance-drama and theatre genres as effected by Krom Silpakorn was based on three principles. The first principle was *Fern-Fu Lae Prab Prung* (revival and improvement), achieved by gathering Thai dance experts to teach at the School of Music and Dance to pass on the old dance knowledge and wisdom to future generations. The second principle was *Sang-San Lae Peur-Pre* (structuring and promoting), which saw the construction of the National Theatre to support the activity of Krom Silpakorn. In addition, Thai dance-drama and theatre were widely promoted in the country and abroad. The third principle was *Wang Mardtrathan* (standardisation), which included the establishment of a performing arts organisation to protect national art. Additionally, dance artists were compelled to improve their skills and knowledge in order to reach the standard set by Krom Silpakorn (*Fachamroon* 356-357).

This shows that the standardisation of the dance-drama and theatre was part of a gradual process. This is the reason why the term *lakhon phanthang* was more
elaborately discussed in 1958 in connection with the Phya Phanong production than when first used in 1949 for the Kria-thong production.

**Lakhon Phanthang in the 1940s and 1950s**

In the 1940s, the revival and classification of Thai dance-drama and theatre continued. Seri Wangnaitham gave an interview about the work of Krom Silapakorn since the establishment of the School of Music and Dance in 1934 saying that ‘Luang Wichit created the new lakhon, to which he added a few dance movements. Meanwhile Dhanit Yupho (in 1940-1950s) revived the dance-drama by focusing on the Ramakien story. Lakhon nok and lakhon nai were revived but there were a few adaptations to make the production up to date’ (quoted in Fachamroon 175). The revival of Thai dance-drama and theatre in the 1940s was not a smooth process, as Prince Panupan Yukon says:

Krom Silapakorn’s intent and effort is on presenting high quality arts to enhance the arts as an honourable discipline as much as possible…But Krom Silapakorn has to reckon with the limits [kob-kate] and potential [kam-lang] of the organisation. We [Krom Silapakorn] cannot overstep our limitations and power (Krom Silapakorn, preface).

This suggests that the revival of dance-drama and theatre by Krom Silapakorn during that period was being accomplished under great pressure. The organisation had not enough financial support from the government and was subject to government policies. The terms kob-kate (limit) and kam-lang (potential) of Krom
Silapakorn implied that Krom Silapakorn had to do with a small number of professional artists and performers.

In 1963, Krom Silapakorn published a book entitled *The Khon and Lakon: Dance Dramas*, which was a collection of the dance-drama and theatre programmes presented by Krom Silapakorn from 1945 to 1962. It was the official book following the revolutionary period which authoritatively classified Thai dance-drama genres. In the preface of the book, Dhanit Yupho, at the time Director General of Krom Silapakorn, stated, in connection with selecting the stories and episodes to be presented on the Silapakorn stage after the World War II, that

> In presenting the masked play and the dance-drama, we [Krom Silapakorn] considered only the episodes or the items which were regarded by scholars as displaying good technique, and worthy of being regarded as part of the Thai art of dancing, so that students could learn from them and the public could enjoy. Consequently, the episodes of either *Khon* or *Lakon* have not been arranged in the order of the original stories. We have also modified the items to conform with the taste of audiences, which consisted of both Thais and foreigners, and at the same time we have retained the standard of Thai classical dancing…

> In order to make the programme collection more valuable to the reader, and more easy to follow, we have not printed the programmes in the sequence in which they were actually performed, but have arranged them in accordance with the episodes of *Ramakien* (the subject matter of the *Khon*) and

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the various categories of the dance-drama, the Lakon Jatri, 
Lakon Nok, Lakon Nai, Lakon Dukdamban and Lakon Phanthang (Khon and Lakhon vi-vii).

As per Yupho’s statement, the taste of post-war audiences was considered as an important factor in the revival of traditional dance drama and theatre. Although deemed a revival, tradition had to be modified to meet the needs of the audiences.

In addition to giving the names of the dance genres of the period, the book is a valuable resource for analysing the lakhon phanthang of the time. There were seven dance-drama productions by Krom Silapakorn, classified as lakhon phanthang presented at Silapakorn Theatre after the revolutionary period. These are:

1. Phra Law on Friday 17th December 1948
2. Kria-thong on Friday 21st January 1949
3. Khun Chang and Khun Phane in episode of Phra Vai’s defeat on Friday 11th November 1949
4. Phra Abhai-Mani in episode of Meeting Nang Laweng on Friday 18th January 1952
5. Rachathirat in episode of Saming Phra Ram volunteering to fight on Friday 28th March 1952
6. Khun Chang and Khun Phane in episode the Campaign of Master Pej and Bua on Friday 20th February 1953
7. Phya Phanong on Friday 28th February 1958

Lakhon phanthang productions of this period were danced by teachers, dance artists and students of Krom Silapakorn. Rong Lakhon Silapakorn (Silapakorn Theatre) became the exclusive stage for presenting khon and lakhon productions of
Krom Silapakorn during that period. The traditional lakhon and khon performances, as well as performances of Western music, were presented routinely every Friday and Saturday at 2.00 pm and 8.00 pm, and on Sunday at 10.00 am, 2.00 pm and 8.00 pm. Rong Lakhon Silapakorn was an old theatre auditorium in poor condition, with a tinned roof and wooden stage. Due to the noise on the tinned roof during the rainy season, performances took place in the Silapakorn Auditorium only from November to May (Fachamroon 155).

In the next section, I would like to discuss three lakhon phanthang productions of this period, Phra Lor, Rachathirat and Phya Phanong, as these three productions are acknowledged as sources for lakhon phanthang to this day. In addition, these three plays and their choreography are being passed on to the next generation as traditional lakhon phanthang through academic dance curricula. The other lakhon phanthang productions of the period such as Kria-thong, Khun Chang and Khun Phane and Phra Abhai-Mani are no longer perceived as lakhon phanthang as their stories and forms seem to resemble more closely lakhon nok and lakhon sepha (dance-drama in sepha verse).

The Stories

The stories of the seven productions I have mentioned were not limited to those of other foreign nations based on their chronicles. The location of five out of seven productions of lakhon phanthang of this period was the ancient kingdom of Siam. For example, in Phra Lor, Krai-thong and Phya Phanong productions, the location was the northern part of Siam. Khun Chang Khun Phane was set in the Suphanburi province, which was an outskirt of Bangkok. There was only one production, Rachathirat that related in significant portions to a Mon and Burmese
story. However, Phra Abhai-Mani production seems to be an exception, where the main plotline presented a Thai story and whereas Nang Laweng, one of the major characters, was a European (Yupho, Khon 240).

If the term lakhon phanthang implies Otherness, through mixing Thai and non-Thai dance styles, the story needs to be about non-Thais, according to the definition of lakhon phanthang given by contemporary Thai dance scholars and artists. But it seems that the definition of lakhon phanthang current in the 1940s was broader than that of the present. Lakhon phanthang of this period presents Otherness within the Thai kingdom. Lao tia ethnicity was mentioned with reference to the people in the northern province of the Thai kingdom, rather than the actual Laotians in Laos. Furthermore, it seems that stories of rural Thai people were included in the lakhon phanthang repertoire. However, the nationality of the characters in the play was also important as seen in the Rachathirat and Phra Abhai-Mani productions.

Nevertheless, lakhon phanthang productions of this period were in line with government policies. The Phra Lor production presented on Friday 17th December 1948 was a good example of Thai entertainment, which reflected the definition of Thainess as given by the government. Phra Lor is the tragic love story of Phra Lor, a king of Man Suang and Phra Phun and Phra Pang, two princesses of Mung Srong. They were enemy kingdoms, as the father of Phra Lor had killed the grandfather of the two princesses. The story is set in the northern part of Thailand. Phra Lor is the most handsome king of Man Suang. The town dwellers are proud of his charm and believe he is as handsome as an avatar of Indra (God Indra). Princess Phra Phun and Phra Pang heard a song in which the beauty of Phra Lor is extolled and they fall in love with him. Two maids of the princesses, Nang Run and Nang Roy, plan to go to Phu Chao Saming Prai, a great magician in the hills to ask him to use his magic to
lure Phra Lor and bring him to the two princesses. Phra Lor is compelled to come to Muang Sroung with Nai Kaew and Nai Kwan, his close servants. Finally, Phra Lor meets the two princesses and they all fall in love with each other. The grandmother of the two princesses knows about Phra Lor and her grandchild. She is angry and full of hatred and desirous of revenge for her husband. She plans to kill Phra Lor but her grandchild protects him with her own body. Finally, Phra Lor, Phra Phun, Phra Pang and their servants die together.

The Phra Law production was presented in three scenes beginning with the story of Phu Chao Sming Prai calling the magic cock, Phra Law entering the royal garden and Phra Law meeting Phra Phun and Phra Phaeng in the palace (Yupho, Khon 253). The programme did not refer to the production as lakhon phanthang but as Siamese Dance-Drama. The front page of the programme gave the title and the theatre’s name and showed a map of northern Thailand in the background. A small picture of the dancers showed the three main characters: Phra Lor, Phra Phun and Phra Pang. The dancers posed in tableau style and their picture was placed in a heart shape cutout, as seen in the movie magazines of that time. An English translation was provided along with the Thai to explain the production details for the benefit of foreigners in the audience. The programme gave details about the cast, play and a synopsis (Raksiam). Sattayanurak states that government policy in the second period of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram supported the idea of Ruam Chart or Pen Din Deaw Kan (United Thai Nation). Thus, ethnic groups throughout Thailand were encouraged to feel a part of the community of Thai people. In the past, the northern part of Thailand or Lanna was a multi-ethnic area, with groups such as Tai Kearn and Tai Lan Chang. They were encouraged to feel Thai. The idea of a united Thai nation
underpinned the policies aimed at building the Thai nation as a great Thai Empire (Sattayanurak 68-69).

Therefore, the *Phra Lor* production of this period assisted in valorising local communities of Thai people, suggesting that Thai people from the north provinces and Thai people in the capital were all Thai people of the same nation.

Phraya Anumanratchadhon comments on the historical background of *Phra Lor* in a textbook on Thai dance-drama in 1948 saying that
Prince Narathip blended the music and dance of the northern Thai people with the *lakhon ram* of Thai capital. He selected melody and rhythm on the basis of the plotline of *Phra Lor*, which related to the northern area of Thailand. Thus, this performance [Phra Lor enters the royal garden] addressed the close relationship between Thai Chao Neaur [Thai people in the north] and Thai Chao Taai [Thai people in the south especially in the capital city] (123).

Another production that should be mentioned here is *Rachathirat*. On Friday 28th March 1952, Silapakorn theatre presented an episode of *Rachathirat*, that of Saming Phra Ram Arsa (Saming Phra Ram volunteering to fight). The programme stated that this production was revived and recast by The Fine Art Department (Yupho, *Khon* 219). The production presented *Rachathirat* in six scenes. It was the first time this story was presented at the Silapakorn Theatre after World War II. This play was a famous story of Chao Phraya Mahin’s dance troupe. This production gained great popularity in 1952, when it was performed 112 times, the highest record of performance of any production at Silapakorn Theatre during that period (Fachamroom 149).

The front page of the programme of the *Rachathirat* performance had the picture of Saming Phra Ram, a Mon soldier and Kamani, a Chinese soldier, in a fighting stance. The programme consisted of a cast list and the name list of director, choreographers, composers and musicians, costume designer and scene designer. In addition, the historical background of the *Rachathirat* story was given in the introduction with a synopsis of the scenes. The *Rachathirat* production of 1952 did
not clearly adhere to the nationalistic policies of the government as the *Phra Lor* production in 1948. It only had two non-Thai characters, the Chinese and Mons soldiers.

![Cover of *Rachathirat* production in 1952](image)

Fig. 10. The programme of Rachathirat production in 1952. Photo: Krom Silapakorn, *Rachathirat in the Episodce Saming Phra Ram Volunteering to Fight* (Pranakhon: Prachan, 1952).

However, it reflects Thailand’s perception of China during the cold war period. China had become powerful country and dominated the Asian region, with ambitions of taking on leadership over the region, ensuring its stability. China’s behavior was seen as aggressive (Nathan 7). *Rachathirat* in the episode Saming Phra Ram Arsa tells the story of the Chinese Emperor Seng-chow who sends his best soldier Kamani to challenge the Burmese soldier. Should Kamani be defeated, the
Chinese army will be withdrawn from Ava. However, if Kamani won, China would reward Ava (the capital city of ancient Burma). The prisoner from the Mons country Saming Phra Ram, the best of the Mon soldiers, volunteers to fight with Kamani. Saming Phra Ram wins the fight and Kamani dies. This production was presented at the time when the power of China was dominant over Asia in the cold war period. It hints at the defeat of the Chinese army in its attempt to colonise Burma, during the cold war.

On Friday 28th February 1958, Phya Phanong a new lakhon phanthang production was presented at the Silapakorn Theatre. Phya Phanong was a new story adapted from a legend of the Nan province. It was the first lakhon phanthang in the repertoire of Krom Silapakorn, in which the story, dance movements and music were created by the staff members of Krom Silapakorn (Yupho, Khon 229). Dhanit Yupho summoned two key figures of Krom Silapakorn, M.L. Phaew Sanitwongseni, a powerful dance master and former dancer of Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb, and Montri Tramote, a skilful musician and former student of Rong Rian Phran Luang during the reign of King Vajiravudh, to create the Phya Phanong story. Phya Phanong is about King Ngummuang, the king of Woranakorn (an ancient city of Nan province in the northern part of Thailand) who falls in love with Nang Uasim, a lover of Khun Saiyos (Prince Saiyao), his adopted son. King Ngummuang wants to get rid of Khun Saiyos by killing him but he changes his mind and instead orders Khun Saiyos to govern a distant town. King Ngummuang then marries Nang Uasim and they have a son, who is in fact the son of Nang Uasim and Khun Saiyos. Khun Saiyos learns that Woranakorn kingdom is his, having inherited it from his real father. He leads an army to fight with King Ngummuang and reclaim his kingdom. Finally, the king is defeated. King Ngummuang gives the kingdom back to Khun Saiyos who is rejoined
with Nang Uasim and their son. Khun Saiyos then changes his name to Phya Phanong and governs the Woranakorn kingdom.

The performance was in six acts. The story was set between 1830 and 1890 and its location was the Nan and Chiengrai provinces. Although this story was a new production, the dance choreography and the music and singing resembled the Phra Lor story in that it was also set in the northern part of Thailand (Jongda interview). At present, these three stories are in the traditional repertoire of lakhon phanthang, taught to the students of Krom Silakorn and in university dance departments. The production and dancing have been modified to meet the aesthetic requirements of the audience and to make the productions up to date.

**The Dance Movement Style**

The dance movements of the Lakhon phanthang of Krom Silapakorn from the 1940s to the 1950s were created and transmitted by the dance masters and dancers of Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb. The dance movements and choreography of the Phra Lor production were based on the Phra Lor production of Prince Narathip’s dance troupe. The production and dance movements of Phra Lor of Prince Narathip was passed on to the dancers of Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe by Chao Chom Marda Khein (Prince Narathip’s mother) and was inherited by Krom Silapakorn via the former dancers of Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe (Vechsuruck 29-30). Kru Lamul Yamakoup and M.L Paew Sanitwongseni, who had danced with the Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe, were key figures in the revival of dance-drama and theatre at Krom Silapakorn during that period (*101 Pi Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb 73*). The Rachathirat production was passed on from these former dancers of Wang Suan Kularb, as in the case of the Phra Lor production. However, Pramate Boonyachai
claimed that the *lakhon phanthang* of Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe, especially the *Rachathirat* repertoire was transmitted by Mae Kru Ngeum, former dancer of Chao Phraya Mahin, who became dance master of Wang Suan Kularb dance troupe (Boonyachai interview). The dance movements of *Phya Phanong* were newly created, however, the style is similarly to the *Phra Lor* dance movements.

The dance movements of *lakhon phanthang* are interesting. *Phra Lor* and *Phya Phanong* are stories set in the northern part of Thailand. Thus, the dance movement style has remained faithful to the traditional Thai dance form. The basic hand gestures such as *jeep* and *wong* continue to be used in the choreography. The mixed dance movements in both these *lakhon phanthang* repertoires are not a hybrid of two different dance forms with a view to create a new form. It is, rather, a kind of twist on the existing dance techniques, which makes the dance movements look unusually different. For example, the body in Thai traditional theatre has a centre balance but in *lakhon phanthang Phra Lor* and *Phya Phanong* the body is off balance as can be seen in the figure 11 which shows the dancers Phra Lor, Nai Kaew and Nai Kwan (see fig. 11). Here the body balance is on the right, which differs from the dance stances of Kai Kaew (a magic cock). The magic cock in this picture is shown with the body balance in the centre even though her upper torso leans to the right. Another peculiar dance movement in *lakhon phanthang* is the swaying of the shoulders along with the music and singing, frequently used for Laotian, Burmese and Mon characters.
However, the dance movements of *lakhon phanthang Rachathirat* show a more hybrid form than that seen in the *Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat* stories. The Chinese characters in *Rachathirat* show hybrid combination of Thai dance movements and Chinese opera dance movements. The Kamani character does not use the basic hand gestures of Thai dance but is given the special hand gesture that imitates Chinese opera in which the index and middle fingers are pointed and the other three fingers are gathered together (see fig. 12). In addition, the movement of the feet consists of jumping, hopping and skipping with the toes mostly pointed forward rather than being lifted up as in the regular Thai dance steps. The Mon character, Saming Phra Ram, in contrast, displays a dance movement style that is a twist on Thai dance forms as in the *Phra Lor* and *Phya Panong* plays.
The Female Cast

The cast of lakhon phanthang in the 1940s was made up of female dancers, who were dance teachers, students and artists of Krom Silapakorn. The revival trend of this period was focused on the oldest traditional dance-drama and theatre forms by going as far as back in time as Krom Silapakorn could. Old dance masters and dancers from the court and private dance troupes were the chain linking Krom Silapakorn and the ancient dance forms. Phra Lor, Rachathirat and Phya Phanong productions were performed by female dancers, excluding the comedic characters, always performed by male dancers. The use of female dancers can be traced to the dance practices and performance styles of Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb, which was a royal female dance troupe of the period. It was usual for teachers to pass on their
experience and knowledge to their pupils. In addition, the use of female dancers in performance became the norm, after King Rama IV decreed that female dancers were permitted to perform outside the court, thus allowing private dance troupes to use a female cast for their productions.

However, this idea of using an all female cast differs from the convention relating to dramatic works in the reign of King Rama Vajiravudh, by which the use of chai cing ying thae (actual male and female) was encouraged at court and in public performances (Kerdarunsuksiri 55). It also differs from the phanthang dance and theatre style of Chao Phraya Mahin in the nineteenth century because the performances at the Prince’s Theatre were by a mixed cast. The reason why only female dancers were used in the performances is perhaps that at that time Krom Silapkorn had more female than male dancers. In addition, the male dancers were expected to be khon rather than lakhon performers (Jongda interview). In the 1940s, the classification of Thai traditional theatre was gender based. Thai traditional theatre at that time was divided into two major groups: khon performance, which was for male dancers and lakhon performance, for female dancers (Boonyachai interview). However, the sub-genres of lakhon such as lakhon nok (the dance-drama of the people performed outside court) originally performed by male dancers was also performed by female dancers.

The Hybrid Costume

The costume of lakhon phanthang is a hybrid one. The hybridisation of lakhon phanthang costumes can be observed in different ways. The first hybrid costume was one which mixed the Thai dance costume with other ethnic dance costumes such as those of the characters in Rachathirat. Kamani, a Chinese soldier,
wore a Chinese opera costume, Saming Phra Ram, in contrast, wore a Mon costume in Thai design. The hybrid costume in Phra Lor and Phya Phanong were mixed in other ways. The costumes of both productions were obtained by hybridising Thai traditional theatre costumes. For example, the Phra Lor costume was based on yern-kareng (the traditional costume pattern of khon and lakhon) with short sleeves, changing the form of headdress. Nai Kaew and Nai Kwan’s costume were as seen in folk dance styles. This mixed style could be observed in the costume of Phya Phanong as well. King Ngammuang, a king of Woranakon, wore the yern-kareng like as the Phra Lor character, whereas Princess Uasim wore the costume of folk dance styles.

![Fig. 13. Phra Law, Phra Phun and Phra Pheng from Phra Lor production in 1948. Image courtesy of Anansak Kultilok](image)

I would like to discuss an example of hybrid costume of Lakhon phanthang in the Phra Lor production. The costume of the Kai Kaew or a magic cock illustrates the process of creating a hybrid costume. As this character is not human, this costume aimed to show the characteristics of an animal character. In the picture of Kai Kaew taken in 1948 (see fig. 14), this costume is shown with a headdress coming from the
lakhon nai performance known as *Pan Ju Red*, regularly used for a minor male role character. A small fake cock was placed at the top of the *Pan Ju Red* headdress to denote that this character was not human. The shirt had a modern cut but the trousers were in the *jongkrabean* pattern. There was some embroidery on the collar and the wings. Belt and necklace were in the traditional dance jewellery style.

Fig. 14. Kai Keaw in Phra Law Production. Image courtesy of Anansak Kuldilok

The *lakhon phanthang* productions from the 1940s to the 1950s clearly show the process of the revival and systematisation of hybrid dance-drama and theatre from the nineteenth century to what became *lakhon phanthang*, a national Thai traditional theatre. Some old traditional dance conventions were revived but they were adapted to serve the needs of changing national policies and the taste of the audiences. The English language was used in the programme notes alongside with the Thai language to provide information about the performance to a mixed audience and to promote
Thai traditional dance internationally. The *lakhon phanthang* productions of this period were classified and systematised and became the model for the *lakhon phanthang* of the future.

**Conclusion**

The role and function of *lakhon phanthang* in the early period of the twentieth century as a popular theatre, representing the diversity of Siamese society, were in decline due to political and social changes. *Lakhon phanthang* was included in the repertoire of elite and royal private dance troupes, which performed this dance form and other Thai dance forms in privileged settings and not as popular theatre. The creation of dance organisations such as Krom Mahorasop and Rong Rian Phran Luang under royal patronage in the early twentieth century set a standard for the national dance form, especially *khon* performance. The *lakhon phanthang* of the period was not supported by the court as its performance reflected Otherness, against the nationalistic policies. After the end of the absolute monarchy, there were several changes in Thai society. Krom Mahorasop became Krom Silapakorn and the management of entertainment earlier under royal patronage shifted to the care of Krom Silapakorn, with governmental support. The dance-drama and theatre productions of Krom Silapakorn had to support national policies. Krom Silapakorn became a melting pot gathering the former traditional dancers and artists to teach at the School of Music and Dance and to perform dance-drama and theatre for the state rather than for the king, unlike the past.

After the establishment of the School of Music and Dance in 1934, the traditional dance-drama and theatre were not immediately revived but a new invention in the *lakhon* form emerged. *Lakhon Luang Wichit* was introduced to Thai
society as a new theatrical form to support national policies under the leadership of Marshal Pleak Phibunsongkram. This new theatrical form could not be categorised as lakhon phanthang even though it shared some theatrical elements with it. Traditional lakhon phanthang was formalised by Krom Silapakorn after the end of World War II. From the 1940s to the 1950s, six dance-drama productions were revived under the lakhon phanthang genre and one new lakhon phanthang was created. This was a period of revival of dance-drama and theatre in Thailand and it had an impact on the subsequent standardisation and traditionalisation of Thai dance, dance-drama, and theatre. Lakhon phanthang after the end of the World War II was revived with consideration to the original dance movements and performance choreography, as known from the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Therefore, the lakhon phanthang of this period was performed by the female dancers. Its costumes were a mix of the standard costume pattern of Thai traditional theatre and folk performance and costumes of other performance styles. Music and singing were provided by a Thai musical ensemble with non-Thai musical instruments to mark other music accents. However, the lakhon phanthang of this period was underpinned by nationalism, which was a major governmental policy.

The lakhon phanthang from this period of dance drama revival was transmitted to the next generations through the teaching of the School of Music and Dance. Its dance was standardised and placed in the curricula of schools and universities controlled by Krom Silapakorn. Later, other universities opened dance or performing arts departments and took on the set dance choreographic patterns and taught them as part of their curricula, to this day.
Notes

1. *Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb* was a private dance troupe of Prince Aussadangdechavudh, a son of King Chulalongkorn. This dance troupe trained only female dancers and was admired as the best dance troupe in the reign of King Rama V (101 Pi Lakhon Wang Suan Kularb 49).

2. *Lakhon Chao Khun Phra Prayurawong* or *Lakhon Chao Chom Marnda Pae* was a private dance troupe founded by Chao Chom Marnda Pae who was a consort of King Chulalongkorn. Virulrak states that after the end of the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the three dance masters, Pao, Plean, and Ka-rue from Chao Phraya Mahin moved to Chao Chom Marnda Pae dance troupe (295).

3. Krom Mahorasop (entertainment department) was in charge of royal traditional performances, which consisted of five different dance forms namely *rabeng, mongkhrum, kula-tee mai, kra-ua thaeng khwai and thaeng-wisai* performed by male dancers. These dance forms were mainly performed for royal ceremonies especially the royal topknot-cutting ceremony. The purpose of these dances was not only to provide entertainment but also to praise the king’s honour (Jirajarupat 2000).

4. In 1956, Dhanit Yupho was promoted to the post of Director-General of Krom Silapakorn.

5. *Phra Law* was the style of spelling in the 1940s, which I will only use when I cite this term from the original sources from the 1940s. However, in recent academic scholarship, this word is mostly spelled as *Phra Lor* and *Phra Lo*, as in a performance review by Catherine Diamond entitled ‘Phra Lor by Patravadi Mejudhon: Manop Meejamrat’ (Diamond 2010) and an article entitled ‘From Phra Lor to Jai Jao Lor: Representing and Presentation in Thailand’s Hybrid Dance Traditions’ by Pornrat Damrhung (Damrhung 2009). Therefore, I would like to use the recently spelling style in this thesis so *Phra Lor* will be used throughout, except where indicated.
Chapter 3: The Modernisation of Lakhon Phanthang: Seri Wangnaitham’s Phuchanasibtid

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century the phanthang of Chao Phraya Mahin and Prince Narathip was popular. This form represented the multi-ethnic culture of Siam. In the twentieth century following changes in cultural policies, the earlier theatre was classified and preserved as a traditional art form and as national heritage. With the phanthang dance-drama coming under the patronage of Krom Silapakorn, the hybrid dance-drama and theatre forms of the late nineteenth century came to be known by the new term lakhon phanthang. The dancing of the lakhon phanthang of Krom Silapakorn became a traditional form taught to the dance students of the Dramatic Arts College of Krom Silapakorn, following its own pedagogy.

In 1985, Yakhob’s popular novel entitled Phuchanasibtid was adapted for the theatre by Seri Wangnaitham, and performed as lakhon phanthang at the Thai National Theatre. This production reflected the faster pace of modern society, while maintaining the aesthetic values of Thai traditional theatre. It was performed at the Thai National Theatre over a continuous period of eight years and gained immense popularity with audiences across the country.

In the 1980s, the idea of developing and simultaneously preserving traditional theatre was commonly applied to theatres around Southeast Asia. For example, ketoprak, a Javanese traditional theatre, was modernised and identified as ‘a modern-drama’ (Hatley 2008). In Malaysia, bangsawan, a popular theatre, was supported by the Malay government, and also developed as a political tool, spread through government policies (Tan 1993). Socio-cultural and economic changes, the pressures
of modern society, political policies, and consumer needs propelled the modernisation of traditional theatres and their conservation in contemporary society.

This chapter considers the modernisation of Thai traditional theatre in Bangkok during the late twentieth century through an analysis of Seri Wangnaitham’s *Phuchanasibtid* (1985-1994) by Krom Silapakorn. Additionally, this chapter focuses on how theatrical invention emerges in traditionally-based modern theatre. I would like to propose that *Phuchanasibtid* a newer production, not only established a new form of theatre but also brought about the development of other performance genres in its wake. The analysis of cultural factors underpinning the representation of traditional arts will be examined, demonstrating how this successful performance influenced later Thai popular performances.

**Social and Cultural Change in Bangkok in the 1980s and 1990s**

With the Green Revolution of the 1970s, Thailand was transformed from an agricultural-based to an industrialised country (Reynolds, ‘Thai Identity’ 308). The capitalist economy grew rapidly as rural people migrated to the capital in search of work, soon augmenting Bangkok’s population. Additionally, the Thai middle class came to play a major role in determining the socio-economic system and political policies (Samudavanija 63). The increase in size and the influence of the Thai middle class went hand-in-hand with changing consumer behaviour in Thailand. Telecommunication businesses expanded their networks, supporting the rapid growth of modern communications. Possessing a new automobile and new technologies became ‘symbol [s] of prestige and of middle class status’ (Ockey 315). New roads and expressways were constructed around Bangkok for facilitating rapid economic and social development. The goals and values of the Thai middle classes placed them
in opposition to the conservatism of both the aristocracy and lower classes. The middle classes’ lifestyle was based on individual desires and aspirations, much more so than on traditional values (Frykman and Lofgren 197).

Walipodom argues that modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation were causes of demoralisation and dehumanisation in the Thai society of this period. The young generations were more concerned about prosperity and social status than morality and ethics (199). An old way of life could no longer support the new social demands. Thai home styles of the past were replaced by condominiums and townhouses and shopping malls were constructed to meet the needs of an urban middle class and its lifestyle. Broadcast media were the preferred modes of entertainment for young people. Television productions were presented in serial form as telenovela,¹ and often were supported by the fashion industry in return for promoting their products (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 248). Entertainment and art were mostly dominated by American products. Western pop music influenced local music industry and Thai directors made teen films to respond to new target audiences. Television was an ‘open window to the world’ for Thais in search of modernity (Katz and Wedell 203).

Thai traditional performing arts, under the control of Kong Karn Sangkit (The Office of Performing Arts Division), a sub office of Krom Silapakorn, declined in popularity. Theatre scholar Surapone Virulrak has critiqued the plight of Thai performing arts of this time, stating that:

Dramatic productions in Thailand in both traditional and folk styles, as well as Western-style theatre, abounded but the typical plotlines remained unaltered. Conventional dramatic stories were
reproduced many times by Krom Silapakorn. The film business spent large budgets in making movies without researching the historical background of stories, and did not enrich human intelligence and the quality of human life (‘Ha Yake’ 17).

Virulrak argues further that the growth of the entertainment industry served the immediate needs of society rather than having any concern for the development of traditional theatre. The pressure from a rapidly changing society and the increase in consumerism raised concerns in government circles about Thai identity. This occurred not only in Thailand but all around the Southeast Asian region, especially Indonesia and Malaysia (Lindsay 657). The government under the leadership of General Pream Tinsulanonda campaigned to make people proud of Thai culture, and aimed to turn Thailand into an international ‘brand name’ (Reynolds, ‘Thai Identity’ 311). For example, the American product Coca Cola was advertised in Thailand with the image of the popular music band Kharabao, singing Pleng Pur Chewit (Songs of life), with the slogan Song Serm Khun Kha Kwam Pen Thai (Promoting the Value of Thainess).

The Office of the National Culture Commission (ONCC) was officially established in 1979 under the authority of the Ministry of Education with the remit of protecting national Thai culture and heritage. The role and duty of this organisation included propagating, protecting, and supporting Thai classical and folk theatre, and encouraging coordinated action between state cultural agencies and private organisations in developing Thai culture. With the formulation of government cultural policies and the establishment of the ONCC, the goal of developing and preserving traditional arts under the pressures of a rapidly changing society became a
major mission for Krom Silapakorn. Theatre productions of Krom Silapakorn at the National Theatre typically responded to the policy of the ONCC to preserve ‘original’ forms of traditional theatre and revive Thai folk performances (Silapakorn 1). Since 1980, Krom Silapakorn expanded the definition of Thai theatre to embrace folk performances. The folk dances and music of each province, which represented local identities, were supported and presented to Thai and foreign audiences. Cultural centres were founded in many provinces, aiming to preserve Thai folk arts and cultures and encouraging Thai people to value Thai arts (Ungsavanonda 78).

The work of Kong Karn Sangkit (The Office of Performing Arts Division) of Krom Silapakorn after the 1980s propelled Thai society into modernity. Thai traditional theatre and performances were modernised in theory and in practice. For example, in 1982, the year of the Bangkok Bicentennial, a great celebration was arranged around Bangkok and across the country. Many traditional performances such as masked dance, traditional dance-drama and music were presented on this special occasion. The Lantern Dance (ram kom), an old Thai classical performance, created during the reign of King Rama I, was revived and reproduced to commemorate the establishment of the Bangkok province. Moreover, in 1983 Labanotation was introduced as a notation system for Thai dance with the intended purpose of simplifying Thai dance-drama, representing it in a universally understood idiom and thereby bringing Thai performing arts to prominence at an international level. Rutnin states that ‘the 1980s are significant years in the development of contemporary Thai theatre, not only in its expanding activities but also in the interrelationship between various theatre groups’ (Dance, Drama 202). Thai arts and cultural activities were presented and promoted at many events. Theatre productions
became the favourite means to raise money for charity among the upper middle class and dignitaries.

Developing and preserving the traditional arts became a major mission of Krom Silapakorn when creating productions for the National Theatre. A study by Australian ethnomusicologist Margaret Kartomi suggests that in the modern period, ‘class, gender, nationality and ethnic minorities, popular art forms, the growing commercialism of art and the destruction of the environment and traditional arts’ became major issues of debate about modernity and the traditional arts (376) in Thailand and Southeast Asia. However, the work of Krom Silapakorn was critiqued by journalists as inadequate for the development of traditional performances. The role of Krom Silapakorn as a Thai cultural guardian also came under attack. On 10th March 1989, the newspaper Siamrat reported that Krom Silapakorn had adapted traditional dance movements and introduced comic scenes into traditional dramatic plays such as khon. This was deemed to be harmful to the aesthetic value of Thai traditional arts (Siamrat 10). Krom Silapakorn seemed to have run into difficulties in trying to maintain a balance between old traditions and the needs of modern society.

Productions at the National Theatre presented the old traditional performing arts styles such as lakhon nai (court dance-drama) and khon (masked dance) in short episodes and were deemed to be more sophisticated than the new forms of entertainment. But the productions of traditional Thai performing arts by Krom Silapakorn faced a decline in popularity and diminishing audience sizes--a fate shared by traditional performing arts around Southeast Asia in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Kartomi 1995). Something new, and fairly radical by the standards of Krom Silapakorn, would have to be done. And Seri Wangnaitham was the man for the job.
Seri Wangnaitham and the Modernisation of Thai Traditional Theatre

Seri Wangnaitham was born in Bangkok in 1937 into a middle class family and studied at the Wittayalai Natasin (College of Dance and Music) at Krom Silapakorn, completing his bachelor degree in Thai classical music in 1955. He started his career at Krom Silapakorn as a Thai classical musician, but being a well-rounded artist, he also often created short comic scenes performed in between the main acts of the programme of the National Theatre. From 1962 to 1965, Wangnaitham was a scholarship student of fine arts at the East-West Center of the University of Hawai’i in the United States. After he returned to Thailand, he resumed working at Kong Karn Sangkit (the Office of Performing Arts) and, perhaps inspired by his overseas experience, set his mind to modernise the Thai theatre as an actor, playwright, choreographer, director, producer, and orator.

Pairoj Thongkumsuk, a scholar of Thai traditional theatre, has analysed the teaching and artistic style of Seri Wangnaitham suggesting that Wangnaitham is both a modern artist and teacher with a talent for integrating topical commentary into traditional dance-drama (Thongkumsuk 290-294). His expertise was in comic roles, especially in khon performance, creating jokes that referenced current issues in society. His farcical scripts were adapted from daily news and contemporary social situations. Clowns provoked laughter among spectators through their always-polite jokes, which never stepped outside the bounds of the story. Through his topical and civil humor, Seri Wangnaitham’s productions made a favorable impression on the audience and gained popularity with all age groups.

Wangnaitham’s talent in Thai performing arts was not only limited to comic acting. He was also a talented playwright, choreographer, director, producer and orator. Many Thai dance lyrics and plays were written and turned by Wangnaitham
in verse form, for performance at the Fine Arts Department on various special occasions. His diverse opus includes song texts, original plays and adaptations, lyrics for a blessing dance for the birthday of a member of the Thai royal family, adaptations of *khon* plays, and the central focus of this chapter-- *lakhon phanthang*.

In the mid twentieth century, before Seri Wangnaitham took up the position of director of Kong Karn Sangkit, Krom Silapakorn, Thai traditional theatre had been suffering from a gradual decline in popularity. Due to the retirement of older artists and low salaries paid to dance teachers as government officers, Krom Silapakorn was encountering a lack of dancers (Ungsvanonda 47). New entertainment from the West, including modern theatre, television drama, films and radio attracted Thai audiences of all ages and created a new following among the Thai educated middle classes.

Seri Wangnaitham had the idea of modernising Thai performing arts by reigniting Thai audiences’ interest in *khon*. Wangnaitham understood that Thai audiences were estranged from *khon* due to a lack of knowledge of its dance movements and of the dramatic characters and stories of the *Ramakien*, the Thai version of the Ramayana. *Khon* needed to be modernised to cater to the tastes of modern Thai audiences, who had little interest in the old-fashioned dance-drama stories (Samosorn 24). Therefore, he re-edited the *khon* plays and composed new episodes writing up full biographies of each individual *khon* character (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 197). The spectators could thus follow the life history of a character during a performance of one to two hours’ duration. His plays focused on story line and contained clear and concise narration, simple verse, and a comedic scene.

Seri Wangnaitham believed that if the audiences knew the background of each character in the plays that would benefit their enjoyment of the performance
and their understanding of the story (Samosorn 25). In the past, masked-dance plays had been composed in the form of long episodes narrating the story of the battle between *Phra Ram* (Rama) and *Tosakan* (Ravana), the main plot of *Ramakien*. However, the masked-dance plays by Seri Wangnaitham differed from those of the past by focusing on sub-plots such as the story of Hanuman, a white monkey, who is a loyal soldier of Rama.

New episodes by Wangnaitham such as *Hanuman Chan Samorn* (The Story of Hanuman) and *Marn Sur Chur Pipeak* (A Loyal Demon Named Pipeak) became popular with all audience groups, especially young audiences, thus becoming instrumental in preserving Thai traditional art in a changing society. Wangnaitham’s approach lessens the complication of the ancient *khon* plays for all audiences. On the one hand, he modified *khon* to become readily intelligible to ordinary people, on the other, this was a way to preserve Thai traditional performance in a changing society. Seri Wangnaitham demonstrated that *khon* is not only cultural entertainment of the nation, but it is also an effective tool for persuading Thai people to live in harmony in and with the state. A good example is the khon episode *Pali Son Nong* (Pali’s Exhortation to His Brother), as re-interpreted by Seri Wangnaitham and presented at the National Theatre in 1974, the year after a democratic coup, a time when young people had lost trust in the government and were ready to protest at all times (Samosorn 34). This interpretation of *Pali Son Nong* brought out the teachings of loyalty and devotion to the Thai monarchy and persuaded young people to move from disagreement in politics to harmony through shared devotion to the beloved king. The *Pali Son Nong* production was successful and lauded in many Thai daily newspapers. Government officials attended this production and requested that
Wangnaitham continued to put on performances of other khon episodes along these lines (Samosorn 35; Thongkumsuk 48).

The modernisation of Thai traditional theatre by Seri Wangnaitham involved not only the re-making of the masked-dance play, but also producing a new performing arts programme for the Thai National Theatre. In 1975, this was the Sri Sook Ka Nattakam (Joy from Performing Arts) aiming to encourage people to realise that Thai performing arts are living arts, part of the Thai way of life, and of the culture of the nation (Thongkumsuk 48). The Sri Sook Ka Nattakam programme has been running on the last Friday of every month on the Thai National Theatre’s stage until present times. Through this programme, the complex performances in sophisticated artistic genres, such as khon and lakhon nai, were condensed into short episodes. High dance-drama arts and folk dance and music were scheduled together in daily shows. As a consequence of this initiative, audiences made up of both young and older people increased in numbers. They came to the theatre wishing to see their favourite actors or actresses, and witness new performances under Wangnaitham’s direction, which were different each time. Wangnaitham not only produced new performances he also directed dance rehearsals. The dancers were from Krom Silapakorn, trained in Thai performing arts for more than ten years and with great experience in dance and performing arts. Therefore, the high quality of performances set the standard for the national performing arts.

These noteworthy efforts did not completely offset, throughout the 1970s, the declining popularity of the traditional arts whose style and content were simply no longer relevant to peoples’ lives. Additionally, the retirement of the older dancers of Krom Silapakorn brought about, as mentioned, a lack of Thai dancers trained in the traditional forms (Ungsvanonda 47).
Seri Wangnaitham aimed to create performances that aimed at more than entertaining, striving to provide knowledge of the arts to his audiences. He said of himself:

What I [Wangnaitham] have tried so hard to achieve was the creation of a ‘full-cycle performing art field,’ with good performers, teachers, and viewers, all knowing and understanding one another and with true knowledge of the arts. And I think I have achieved that. My audiences have become so knowledgeable that when a performer puts a decoration or flower in the wrong place, they immediately know it and point it out.
(Wangnaitham quoted in Samosorn 33)

Wangnaitham attempted to reinstate the popularity of Thai traditional theatre by developing his audiences through pre-show talks in which he explained plotlines, the symbolic meanings behind dance movements, and any associated cultural custom. The development of an expert audience was crucial to what Wangnaitham called a ‘full-cycle performing art field,’ which depended as much upon knowledgeable cultural producers as on critical spectators.

In 1986, Seri Wangnaitham produced what remains the most famous lakhon phanthang to date, his adaptation of the Thai novel Phuchanasibtid. This production was presented both on the indoor and the open-air stage of the National Theatre over a period of eight years. The Phuchanasibtid production is noteworthy in a number of ways. It used a mix of ordinary language with the refined and elevated language associated with lakhon forms; it divided up the novel into clearly delineated acts and scenes modeled on Western dramaturgy; and it adapted the accompanying music in
novel ways. In this way, it became a signature piece of Seri Wangnaitham’s artistic style and representative of the modernisation of Thai theatre at the end of twentieth century (Rutnin, *Dance, Drama* 201).

**Phuchanasibtid: From Modern Novel to Lakhon Phanthang**

*Phuchanasibtid* (The Conqueror of Ten Directions) is a classic of Thai literature, a modern novel by the Thai writer Yakhob (a.k.a. Chote Praephan) which was published in the early 1930s. The plot tells the story of a Burmese king who rose from humble origins to become a great monarch. This story is the second episode of *Yodkhunpol*, published serially in the Bangkok newspaper *Suriya* from 1931 to 1932 and in the Bangkok newspaper *Phrachachart* from 1932 to 1933 and subsequently reprinted in book form many times. *Phuchanasibtid* is considered to be an historical romance, which aimed to entertain rather than provide factual historical knowledge (Samosorn 32). Yakhob created *Phuchanasibtid* based on eight lines of the Thai translation of the famous Burmese *The Glass Palace Chronicle*. This historical chronicle was first translated into English by U Aung Thein (a.k.a. Thein Subindu or Luang Phraison Salarak) at the request of his friend Prince Damrongrajanubhab, who wished to learn the Burmese perspective on the hostilities between Siam and Burma, and published in four installments under the title ‘Intercourse between Burma and Siam as Recorded in Hmannan Yazawindawgyi of the Burmese’ in *The Journal of the Siam Society* between 1908 and 1913. This English version was then translated into Thai by Prince Narathip Phrapanpong under the title *Phraratcha Phong Sawadan Phama* (The Burmese Chronicle) and published in 1913 (Narathip Phrapanpong 2007).
The situations and actions of characters in Yakhob’s novel are embroidered history. In the novel’s preface, the author states explicitly that ‘regarding this book, I humbly inform the reader that I do not dare confirm Phuchanasibtid as a reliable chronicle. This story is based on my imagination’ (Parephan Preface). Nithi Aeusrivongse argues that Phuchanasibtid accurately represents the native rituals, beliefs, culture and tradition of the Burmese and Mon nations. We can only assume that the author conducted research and possessed knowledge about Burmese history far beyond his reading of eight lines of a chronicle. This novel, however, was written by the author with the intention of creating an ambience of history within the frame of literature rather than presenting the facts of history (Aeusrivongse 3-8). Situations and names of characters in this novel are based on actual Burmese history, but they are shifted in the wrong place and time. Readers are not only entertained with the narrative but are informed of the historical aspects too. This is a reason why Phuchanasibtid has become a great favourite with Thai readers.

The style of Phuchanasibtid is based on old Thai literary works such as Inao, Phra Apaimanee and Khun Chang Khun Phan (Aeusrivongse 14). While set in Burma, it features ‘traditional Thai values, concept[s], and literary themes in the modern form of fiction’ (Rutnin, Modern 33). But it also contains elements of innovation. Phuchanasibtid expresses the idea that one’s class of birth is less important than what a person might contribute to society and nation. Yakhob created Ja-det, the hero, as a commoner who rose from low-class birth to become a great king of Burma, named Bureangnong, by using his talents, abilities, and ethics. This is in utter contrast with the typical hero of classical Thai literature, in which the hero is usually from the royal family or of aristocratic lineage. However, in line with the ideal characteristics of Thai classical heroes, Ja-det was created to be good
looking, brave, and gallant. The author avoided mentioning ethnic conflicts between Burmese and Thai characters out of sensitivity to his Thai readership. He wanted instead to portray, through the Ja-det character, universally heroic characteristics such as honesty to friends, loyalty to leaders, and unselfishness (Rakthum 81).

Moreover, Ja-det in *Phuchanasibtid* reflects the needs of people and the social conditions of 1932, a year in which class distinctions and inequality of social status were under heavy critique. The old political regime of absolute monarchy in Thailand was at its end and the democratic system was emerging to serve the needs of society. Thai people began to believe in equality, individualism and modernism discarding the values of royal patronage and charisma prevalent under the old system. All these increased *Phuchanasibtid*’s accessibility to Thai readers, who were middle-class, well-educated and hungry for independence and modernity.

Yakhob remade Ja-det as a Thai nationalist hero, thereby effacing some of his distinctly Burmese traits. This is in line with the argument of Sulak Sivaraksa who states that Thai historically have ‘wanted to promote Thai identity at the expense of other ethnicities and ended up looking down on our own indigenous cultures and despising our neighbors, the Laotians, Khmer, Malay and Burmese (37).’

*Phuchanasibtid* pointed to the revolutionary conditions of Thai society under the garb of Burmese history without causing Thai readers to reflect on the history of conflict between Siam and Burma.

This novel was not only popular with readers,9 it was also adapted to Thai television drama at least six times, to film production three times, and to likay performance several times10. This led to the novel achieving popularity and renown with a wide range of audiences. The popular adaptations, particularly likay versions, have been charged with taking considerable liberties with the novel and distorting
many of its ideas and purposes (Rakthum 82). Aeusrivongse states that ‘Phuchanasibtid has become a part of Thai cultural heritage. If the author [Yakhob] were still alive, he would find that he has no right to forbid people from critiquing [adapting] his novel anymore (2).’

The popularity of Phuchanasibtid is not limited to broadcasting and local folk performance. It was also diffused through Thai traditional theatre. In the late twentieth century, productions at the Thai National Theatre suffered from a decline in popularity after the vast impact of broadcast media, and new entertainment forms such as music concerts, singing, and Western and Chinese films. The Thai National Theatre mostly presented old traditional performances such as lakhon nai, lakhon nok and khon. Thai people felt an overwhelming desire to modernise their way of life in ways that mirrored the Thai political, economical and sociological systems (LePoer 1987).

Entrusted by the board of Krom Silapakorn with creating a new production to bring in new audiences to the National Theatre in 1985, Wangnaitham latched onto the idea of adapting Phuchanasibtid into a lakhon phanthang (Tangtronjit 48). This was one of his favorite novels; he had read it repeatedly during his studies at the East-West Center as it was the only Thai novel that happened to be in the house where he lodged. He read this novel until he had memorised the details the story and could confidently visualise it (Wangnaitham, ‘Phu Yu’ 51). Wangnaitham’s proposal to adapt Phuchanasibtid was initially rejected by conservative classical dance masters because they considered the Phuchanasibtid story to be associated with the low-class likay drama and thus inappropriate for the National Theatre (Mahapaoraya 14). However, Wangnaitham remained resolute, and in the end his production of Nam Nom Mae Laochee (The Feeding of Royal Nanny Laochee), based on a chapter
of Yakhob’s novel, premiered on the massive outdoor stage of the National Theatre on November 16, 1986 (Wangnaitham quoted in Matichon 2007). Even with no publicity on television or in newspapers, tickets were sold out before the day of the show. When Nam Nom Mae Laochee was repeated a week after, it was reported that approximately 2500 spectators were in attendance. More episodes were produced, which were reworked when transferred to the National Theatre’s indoor stage in June 1987. In all, some 56 episodes were created between 1986 and 1994, divided up into 7 volumes in the published edition of the plays (Wangnaitham 1991). Phuchanasibtid was praised as the most popular Thai dance-drama of the decade by audiences across the country. Audiences had to queue up for more than three or four hours for tickets and it is reported that some people would travel from the provinces and wait in line for a whole day to purchase their tickets.

The Dramatic Innovations of Phuchanasibtid

Serí Wangnaitham believed that Thai traditional theatre could stand on the same level as modern theatre and media and makes a mark on Thai audiences if it were enlivened discarding some of the more monotonous dance interludes (Mahapaoraya, ‘Serí’ 25). He desired to modernise Thai traditional performance through his production of Phuchanasibtid, having less dancing and more stage drama. His juxtaposition of traditional dance with Western theatrical techniques was a big challenge for Thai traditional dancers and for the staff of the theatre.

Serí Wangnaitham’s Phuchanasibtid was created in the form of lakhon phanthang. The main idea of rendering this novel in lakhon phanthang style derives from the main plot, which is originally from a Burmese chronicle. Therefore, other theatrical elements, such as music and singing, costumes, dance movements and sets
have been rendered in a hybrid form. This is the one of the core ideas in Thai performance. Productions choreographed to include a mixture of indigenous Thai theatrical elements and other theatrical styles, are always regarded as *lakhon phanthang* or *phanthang* style (Muangsakorn, Vasinarom and Pothivetchakul, interview).  

Wangnaitham’s production is faithful to the spirit of Yakhob’s novel, which reflects the way of life and the humanity of both high-ranking individuals such as kings and queens and low-class characters. The novel’s eternal truth about the essential virtue of human beings is also at the core of Wangnaitham’s adaptation. The novel is written in a literary register with many idiomatic expressions and metaphors to impress its readers (Watcharaporn 202). Gunawardana proposes that the new Westernised aesthetics of modern theatre in Asia requires a production to begin with a written script and to develop coherent action through characters, situations, and dialogue. Music, dance, singing and stylized gesture, if used, are to be functional adjuncts, not the primary focus (60). Wangnaitham compressed and simplified the language in his adaptation of the novel to dramatic verse. For example, Yakhob long descriptions of the different love that Ja-det feels for his two wives, Chandra and Kusuma, is abridged into a simple but memorable passage in which Ja-det declares that his love for Chandra is based on loyalty but his love for Kusuma is passionate. Such simplifications allowed Wangnaitham to compress Yakhob’s 276 chapters of prose (collected in 8 volumes) into 56 *lakhon phanthang* episodes.

One of the main problems Wangnaitham confronted in modernising Thai theatre was the difficulty of finding traditional dancers that would take on his new acting style. Traditionally, Thai dancers are limited in their display of emotion. They were unable to express feelings through dialogue. Words had to be delivered in a flat,
affectless manner using conventional hand gestures and a limited range of bodily expressions. Ceylonese theatre scholar A.J. Gunawardana wrote in 1971 about the lack of ‘realistic modes of speech’ and the difficulties faced by performers trained in traditional techniques in India, Japan, Indonesia and other Asian countries in adapting to the ‘new acting styles’ needed to portray ‘social and domestic themes’ (Gunawardana 60). Phuchanasibtid called upon dancers to memorise and rehearse scripts which were spoken in the manner of modern theatre, not sung as per tradition. The dialogue, though in verse, was closer to everyday speech than to the formal language of the Thai traditional repertoire. In lakhon phanthang before Wangnaitham’s production, performers imitated the accents associated with the nationalities of the characters they portrayed. In Phuchanasibtid, the cast spoke in standard Thai dialect, even when performing non-Thai characters, so that their dialogue could be easily comprehended by the audience. Only the comic actors spoke in dialect, for comedic purposes (Sukvipat 127) (see fig.15).

Mastering the realistic dialogue and acting was a challenge for the traditionally trained cast. Tuangruedee Thapornpasi, one of the actors in this production, who played the role of queen of the Mon kingdom, says that:

We [Thai dancers] were very concerned about the expression and the acting without Thai dance movements and little confident that we could deliver. The acting style in this production was very new for all of the Thai traditional dancers. At first, the acting of the dancers looked clumsy and uncomfortable. We did not know, for example, how we could move our hands without traditional dance hand gestures (Thapornpasi interview).
Some of the dancers learned to act by watching television soap operas and imitating the expression of TV actors. Some dancers were sent to learn special action skills such as martial arts from an expert (Ayuthaya interview). Wangnaitham took on the role of director and also acted as a main character. He personally supervised the acting and dance rehearsals. Rehearsal was the most important moment of this production, during which Wangnaitham taught the new method of performing to the dancers. He started rehearsals for each episode with what he called ‘round-table work,’ a script reading involving all of the actor-dancers in which he described the intentions of the characters to the performers (Sukvipat 135). He cultivated the idea of understanding the characters in the play as an essential skill for performance. Casting strictly followed gender - men played male roles and women played female ones. Unlike previous productions of lakhon phanthang there was no cross-dressing in order to emphasise the compatibility between the inner and physical aspects of the performers and the characters they portrayed. Audiences of the Phuchanasibtid production were very pleased with this display by the cast hand picked and trained
by Wangnaitham (see fig.16). M.L. Nuang Ninlarat, a wealthy and influential fan of the *Phuchanasibtid* production, commented as follows:

Pakorn Pornpisud, who performed Ja-det, was a very handsome and charming person, and this made him suitable for this role. His dancing was spectacular. Supachai Chansuwan, who played Mangtra, was properly cast and performed brilliantly. He perhaps looked small and was shorter than the Mangtra of Yakhob, but his performance skills, such as acting and dancing, were beyond compare. Both were the audiences’ favorite actors. If a scene did not include them, audiences felt unpleasant like a hunger who had not had enough food to eat (73).

Wangnaitham de-emphasised the Thai dance hand gestures in the delivery of dialogue. To appease the conservative dance masters, who were powerful figures in Krom Silapakorn, he retained some traditional Thai dances in his production, and also increased the repertoire of traditional dance by commissioning new dances in the classical style. One of these was a War Dance newly created by traditional dance master Thanpuying Paew Sanithwongseni, which was featured in a battle scene in the episode *Mae Tup Kon Mai* (The New General) (Chanchareon 104).

The music and songs of *Phuchanasibtid*, as in previous *lakhon phanthang* productions, was mainly in the hybrid style known in Thai as *phleng ok phasa* (see Wongthes 2013), which involved reworking non-Thai melodies for a Thai musical ensemble (*piphat*) comprising two xylophones, large and small gongs, a small cymbal, and a battery of drums. *Pleng ok pha sa* is used in *lakhon phanthang* style
because the accents and tunes in the music and songs are not Thai. Phuchanasibtid contains in all 127 songs in this idiom, classified into five ethnic ‘accents’: Burmese, Mon, Khake (Indian, Javanese, and Malay Muslims), Chinese, Thai, and Nguneu (Hill Tribes) (Chonlapatan 250-254). Wangnaitham encouraged singers to vocalise the feelings of the characters. A sad song, for example, was sung in a sobbing voice (Sukvipat 137). This allowed the audience to empathise with the characters more easily. Some spectators wept uncontrollably during tragic scenes due to the vocal expression of singers (Yossoontorn 68). The freedom of musical expression warranted to singers and musicians became part of the modernisation of Thai theatre through lakhon phanthang Phuchanasibtid with the intention of impressing audiences and simplifying sophisticated literary lyrics. Moreover, it encouraged the singers and musicians to become involved in the story and production because they had to create the vocal expression following the characters in the play, so they had to know and understand the script well, and mastered the interpretation of each character.

Costumes, based on the characteristics of the nationalities and ethnicities portrayed in the play, used color in a new way. Traditional theatre had color-coded costumes. For instance, heroes and heroines were always clad in green and red. Actors would not change costumes in a production, even if the scenes in a play in which they appeared were separated by days or years. Phuchanasibtid’s costumes, in contrast, were in colors that complemented the colors of the sets and props, and were compatible with other costumes in the scenes (Chantaraksa).
Fig. 16. The main performers of the *Phuchanasibtid* productions, the Mangtra character interpreted by Supachai Chansuwan, in a black shirt stands beside his queen Natthawadee. Ja-det interpreted by Pakorn Pornpisud is in a white shirt. The two female dancers standing beside him were Chandra (wearing a pink colour costume) and Kusuma (wearing a yellow colour costume). Image courtesy of the Office of Performing Art, Krom Silapakorn

This production presented bright and colourful costumes much like those of *likay* but in different designs. The design was derived from the costumes of Burmese and Mons characters in traditional *lakhon phanthang* such as the *Rachathirat* story (Thapornpasri). Light and sound techniques were applied to create a realistic ambience (Yossoontorn 69). Some artificial properties and sets, such as a Thai pavilion, hermitage and throne were used, which Wangnaitham specified in his scripts. Painted backdrops depicting pavilions, hermitages, and throne rooms were recycled from old scenery belonging to the National Theatre to cut down costs.
Although the main story of *Phachanasibtid* is derived from the Burmese and Mons chronicles, the presentation of this production tends to make use of a Thai theatre style rather than real Burmese theatre style. The Burmese ambience in the plays derives from the old *lakhon phanthang*. The concept of modernisation in Thai theatre, then, does not involve changing or modifying everything, rather, it refers to inventing something which encourages Thai people in a diverse and changing society to understand and cherish their traditions as part of their national heritage.

The process of modernisation of *Phuchanasibtid* resulted in this theatre becoming a syncretic form. According Christopher Balme, the characteristics of syncretic theatre are:

1) A new theatric-cultural system is introduced which eclipses and overlies an existing one. 2) The existing system remains dominant. The new theatric-cultural system is visible only in
the form of a few identifiable elements. 3) A new equilibrium is established between the old and the new systems with a balanced number of elements from both being utilized (17).

Lakhon phanthang Phuchanasibtid embraces the content and form of traditional Thai theatre and mixes it with other dance or theatrical elements but it is of recognisable Thai origin. Phuchanasibtid shows elements of Western influence on Thai theatre, but Thai traditional dance remained dominant in the production. The modernisation of Thai theatre through the Phuchansibtid production emerged as the result of internal and external changes within the culture. However, this production did not present the indigenous and other theatrical materials ‘in equilibrium’ as in Balme’s third defining point of syncretic theatre. The process of hybridisation of lakhon phanthang in Phuchanasibtid is established between Thai, Burmese and Mon theatrical elements but the Burmese and Mon element in the productions were interpreted by Thai artists using Thai theatrical elements in the dance forms. Therefore, the production favoured Thai over other elements.

Audiences: A New Phenomenon of Thai Traditional Theatre

The analysis of Chuenpraphanusorn concerning the audiences of Thai theatre states that before 1995 Thai audiences were drawn to see live performance, including folk theatre in order to see their favourite performers in the flesh (156). The adoration of stars is something associated with likay but the same pattern can be seen in more elite forms of theatre (see Virulrak Likay). Wangnaitham was aware that the Thai middle class, with their buying power, constituted a new target audience, which could be coaxed away from the mass media and into the National Theatre if stars
could be developed. All the lead actors in *Phuchanasibtid* attracted fans who showered their favourite performers with money, food, and valuable goods as tokens of their appreciation. Additionally, the serial nature of the production wet the appetite of the audience, who awaited the follow-up episodes like spectators of serialised television programs.

In the case of *Phuchanasibtid*, many audiences came to the theatre to see their favourite performers rather than the production. Some audience members offered money and goods to their favourite performers as a reward for giving them pleasure. Consequently, the production at the National Theatre resulted in an increase in the popularity of traditional theatre and acted as a link between the old and the modern world. Interestingly, *Phuchanasibtid* was rarely promoted in the newspapers or other media but gained fame primarily through word of mouth, across the country; Thai fans even flew in from the United States to see performances (Wongthes, *Nattasilp* 9). Many audiences came to the theatre in the early morning of the day before the show and queued up to ensure they could buy tickets for the best seats. There are accounts of spectators lining up for more than 24 hours to purchase tickets and leaving greatly disappointed because the tickets were sold out before they reached the front of the queue. Some spectators gave money to ticket scalpers and agents for buying tickets because they wanted the best seats in the first row and were swindled (Niinlarat ‘Lau Thung’ 60-16).
From November 1986, Phuchanasibtid was presented on the outdoor stage of the Thai National Theatre, the Sang Keet Sala (Music and Dance Pavilion) every Saturday. Ticket admission was 10 baht. Phuchanasibtid was a profitable production for the National Theatre reportedly grossing 25,000 baht per show. After transferring to the National Theatre’s indoor stage, Phuchanasibtid ran mid-month on a Friday (two performances), Saturday (three performances) and Sunday (three performances). The production made significant profits: during the first three years (1986-1989), the production grossed around 7,300,000 baht (around £188,659) (Wangnaitham quoted in Matichon 2007). Profits from this production funded training, research, and pensions of Krom Silapakorn artists and the maintenance of props, sets, and equipment.
Phuchanasibtid was a long running production, continually presented by the Thai National Theatre as its main programme for eight years. In addition, it was performed at special events, arranged by Krom Silapakorn and other organisations to raise money for charity. This production was one of the longest consecutive and most popular ones of the Thai National Theatre generating new trends. (Phothivechkun interview; Sukvipat 134).

The emergence of fans, also known as mae yok ¹⁴ (literally, ‘Mother Supporter’) was a new phenomenon started by this production. Mae yok were in the past discouraged at the National Theatre, as this mode of spectatorship was associated with likay and other folk and popular arts. The National Theatre’s administration believed that it was unseemly for spectators to mount the stage after performances to festoon their favorite performers with garlands (malai) of bank notes or flock to the dressing rooms to shower them with gifts in the manner of likay performers. Krom Silapakorn was entrusted with the task of preserving the high art
of the country and maintaining the aesthetic values of national art, which meant being vigilant that work on the National Theatre stage did not cross the line that separated it from popular performance. With Phuchanasibtiid and subsequent lakhon phanthang productions, the gap between high art and low art decreased, and mae yok, including members of the royal family, housewives, working women, and market sellers, were actively courted. Actors and dancers became closer to the audience, who treated their idols more like movie stars than national artists preserving and protecting the national cultural heritage.

Mae yok of the Phuchanasibtiid production included people of both upper and lower class, and comprised almost entirely women (Ayuthaya; Thongkam; Chantharaksa, inteview). They were wealthy and most of them had previous knowledge of Phuchanasibtiid; they were readers, listeners, television and movie audiences or members of likay audiences. Patronage of dancers and productions by mae yok usually contributes to the financial status of dance artists. Many performers of Phuchanasibtiid became rich and famous. Wangnaitham talks about his first reward from some mae yok of Phuchanasibtiid, describing how ‘they [mae yok] gave me [Seri Wangnaitham] a mango, a glass of beer and money. Then the rewards became extravagantly expensive such as gold and land deeds (Wangnaitham, ‘Phu Yu’ 47). Pakorn Pornpisut, a famous actor of this production, who performed as the character of Ja-det, describes mae yok of the Phuchanasibtiid production as being like a member of a family; they are like mothers, aunts and grandmothers, who come to the theatre to cheer up their children. The generosity of their rewards to dancers and actors, is like that of the elders towards the young (Pornpisut quoted in Sukvipat 178).
Not only does the emergence of *mae yok* on the Thai national stage seem to bridge the gap between the high and low arts, it also encourages audiences to appreciate Thai traditional art more greatly than in the past. Audiences feel free to express their satisfaction at watching performances by giving rewards to actors of the National Theatre as they do for the local dancers of *likay*. The actors and dancers became closer to the audiences like movie stars rather than as national artists with the duty to protect national art and culture. Additionally, *mae yok* groups of national theatre productions seem to be interested in the different aspects of theatre production. They pay attention to the scenery, the acting of dancers and the comic script of minor roles in the play (Sukvipat 172). *Mae yok* and audiences of *Phuchanasibtid* are committed to seeing the productions in which their favourite dancers perform.

The popularity of *Phuchanasibtid* encouraged the founding of an audience club, the *Chom Rom Round Kur Kon Doo* (We are the Audience Club). The name of this group imitated that of a television program *Rai Karn Round Kur Kon Thai* (We are the Thai Program) produced by Wangnaitham and broadcast on Channel 3 on Mondays and Tuesdays, starting in 1990 (see fig.20). This program aimed to provide knowledge about Thai performing arts and literature. The educated middle class members of We Are the Audience Club played an important role in promoting Wangnaitham’s productions at the National Theatre.

Fans could be critical as well as adoring in their appreciation and wrote to newspapers and magazines. For example, in 1991 Wangnaitham produced a new dance-drama in the form of *lakhon phanthang* based on Mala Khamchan’s award-winning novel *Chao Chan Phom Hom Nirat Phra Thad In-Kwean* (The Story of the Long-and-Fragrant Haired Princess Chan’s Journey to the In-Kwean Stupa), about
the pilgrimage of a Burmese princess to a stupa dedicated to the god Indra. When fans got wind that Wangnaitham would present his adaptation of the novel at the American University Association Language Center (AUA) in Bangkok with performers from the Phuchanasibtid production, club members previewed the production, speculating about which actors should be cast in which roles and the challenges of adapting a modern novel to the lakhon phanthang dramaturgy (Pinit 44-45). We Are the Audience Club members promoted productions, communicated their personal opinions to the National Theatre’s cast and crew, and acted as mouthpieces of the general audience, conveying its sentiments.

Fig.20. Newspaper advertisement for the television program Rai Karn Round Kur Kon Thai (We are the Thai Programme). Photo by Phakamas Jirajarupat
Not only audiences but also the Thai dancers and artists of Krom Silapakorn were most appreciative of Wangnaitham’s work. The private dance group named *Kana Round Kur Kon Thai* (We are Thai Dance Troupe) was founded by the Thai dancers and artists, who loved and had faith in Seri Wangnaitham (Mahapaoraya, ‘Seri’ 30). ‘We are Thai Dance Troupe’ presented dance-drama and theatre performances at many events with Seri Wangnaitham taking on the role of director, producer and actor. The success of *Phuchanasibtid* encouraged Wangnaitham to produce other new *lakhon phanthang* performances based on Thai folk tales, foreign novels, historical chronicles, and ancient myths such as *Phra Nang Soi Dok Mark* (Princess Soi Dok Mark), a tragic love story about a Chinese princess, *Tam Nan Chao Mae Lim Kor Neaw* (The Legend of the Chinese Goddess Lim Kor Neaw) and *Burma Sia Muang* (The Defeat of Burma).

Not only did Seri Wangnaitham’s *Phuchanasibtid* have a great influence on audiences and artists, it also had an impact over other performance forms. After *Phuchanasibtid* achieved popularity, traditional dance performers became famous with audiences. Wangnaitham continued to challenge the abilities and talent of his performers by creating a performance piece in musical concert format entitled *Kusodoor* Concert for the National Theatre named after one of the main characters of the *Phuchanasibtid* story with Wangnaitham himself in the title role (Chonlapatan 270). Singers were drawn from the cast of *Phuchanasibtid*. Songs were based on the film and stage versions of *Phuchanasibtid* and the popular music and song by the Thai jazz band Soontaraporn (founded 1939). Short scenes from the *Phuchanasibtid* production accompanied by *piphat* were sometimes inserted; other numbers were accompanied by a Western band. The National Theatre’s actor-dancers were not accustomed to performing as singers in a musical concert format and found this quite
challenging (Chonlapatan 323). Performers were sent to study with a vocal music teacher of Krom Silapakorn and had private lessons from professional singers. This developed the vocal skills of the performers and brought new appreciation of Phuchanasibtid. Moreover, this concert generated cooperation between the Performing Arts Division and the Western Music Division of Krom Silapakorn—these divisions had rarely worked together in the past.

Phuchanasibtid’s popularity spread to television and in 1989, Channel 3 of Thai broadcast television presented Phuchanasibtid in the form of television drama, directed by Pisarn Arkraseranee. The famous male star Suntisuk Promsiri acted as Ja-det, Tripop Limpapat acted as Mangtra, accompanied by two female stars, Nattaya Dangbunga in the character of Chandra and Sinjai Hongthai as Kusuma. This was the second time that Phuchanasibtid was presented in the form of television drama. Following the broadcast of Phuchanasibtid critical reviews appeared in newspapers about the inappropriateness of the casting of the Phuchanasibtid television drama version, which perhaps caused its failure, compared with the success of the live performance of Wangnaitham’s Phuchanasibtid (Wongmontha 25). Pisarn Arkraseranee, the director of this production, stated that the major obstacle was not how to turn it into a movie, but about connecting a younger generation (actors) with the original fans of Phuchanasibtid (the novel and dance-drama production’s fans) (Chonlapatan 84). The critiques and the comments about Phuchanasibtid as a television drama reflected the difficulties in working on the famous novel in the wake of the success of Wangnaitham’s Phuchanasibtid.

One of the most important outcomes of the popularity of Wangnaitham’s Phuchanasibtid in relation to Thai traditional dance circles was the enhancing of the reputation of Thai traditional dance artists within Thai society and the admiration of
the public. In the past, being a professional dancer had not been praise worthy, and though Krom Silapakorn were entrusted with protecting national heritage, the artists were not admired (Yupho, *Silapa* 120). Seri Wangnaitham’s *Phuchanasibtid* subverted this prejudice. Supachai Chansuwan, one of the main actors, stated in an interview that:

Wangnaitham has been responsible for putting the Krom Silapakorn’s dancers on equal artistic footing with modern drama actors. Many dancers from this production became the superstars of traditional theatre. They were very rich and famous thanks to the patronage of their fan clubs; some were offered positions as actors on television dramas and as singers. Thai traditional dancers could be proud of upholding the aesthetic value of Thai traditional arts; their professionalism attracted the admiration of society (Chansuwan interview).

In 1992, with the success of *Phuchanasibtid* on their minds, a group of dance scholars of Krom Silapakorn debated new directions for developing Thai traditional theatre in modern society (Ungsvanonda 49). Guidelines were agreed which encouraged the simplification of traditional dramatic scripts to match modern life; as Rutnin notes, ‘the brevity of the modern dramatic scripts is necessary to suit the rapid pace of modern life and of the masses (*Modern* 63).’ New multimedia theatrical technologies were encouraged to attract the interest and attention of a young audience. To be commercially viable, it was suggested, Thai traditional dance would need to be integrated with other traditions, such as body massage, and Thai traditional performances should be tailored to the needs of tourism. Audiences
needed to be provided with knowledge about Thai traditional dance-drama so that these arts would not be from the Thai way of life in a modern context (Burusratanaphand 90).

Wangnaitham succeeded in opening up the world of Thai traditional dance to a broad audience who could participate in productions as performers and spectators. Wangnaitham attempted to bridge the gap between low and high art, in parallel with cultivating the concept of a national art. This meant that all kinds of performing arts of Thailand could be presented at the National Theatre. Wangnaitham stated that as the National Theatre was built from the revenues contributed by all Thai people, its stage belonged to Thais of all classes (‘Phu Yu’ 37). Therefore, local and popular performances deserved to be presented on the national stage as well as the traditional arts. Even likay could be performed on the national stage in the wake of Phuchanasibtid; likay performances by Krom Silapakorn artists, sometimes mounted in collaboration with a likay master and folk performers, remain among the most popular programmes at the National Theatre to date.

Conclusion

Seri Wangnaitham was honored as a Thai National Artist in the performing arts in 1988, in view of his artistic talents and contributions to the performing arts. The following year he was awarded the EWC Distinguished Alumni Award 1989 by the University of Hawai’i. He was also awarded an honorary doctoral degree in Thai literature by Bangkok Silapakorn University in 1990 (Luksanasiri 46-47). On February 1, 2007, Seri Wangnaitham died from heart disease at the Mission Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand. His funeral rites were held at Wat Tritossathep under the royal sponsorship of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.
Through his production of *Phuchanasibtid* and other *lakhon phanthang* productions, Seri Wangnaitham modernised Thai traditional theatre. *Lakhon phanthang* proved to be more accessible to Thai audiences than other traditional theatre forms. The result, for the National Theatre, was an increase in the popularity of traditional theatre, linking the old world with the new. Thai directors were presented with a gateway that allowed them to modernise theatre and work beyond the limitations of ancient conventions. Wangnaitham challenged Thai traditional artists to use new methods based on Western theatrical techniques such as characterization and inner motivation with the intention of developing and preserving Thai national heritage and cultivating the idea that ‘Thai arts belong to all the Thai people’ (Wangnaitham, ‘Phu Yu’ 34).

Modernising Thai theatre does not necessarily involve a complete subversion, discarding everything. Rather, it is a case of inventing new ways to encourage people to embrace the diversity and changes of society in order to understand, appreciate, and cherish tradition and the value of the arts as a national heritage. Today *Phuchanasibtid* is rarely included in the repertoire of the National Theatre, except in the form of short excerpts as there is no one to replace the Kusodor performed by Wangnaitham and for the two main male roles Ja-det and Mangtra by Wangnaitham’s cast, at least according to dancers and staff of Krom Silapakorn (Muangboon). But it remains a crucial reference point for all Thai performing artists.
Notes

1. Telenovela is a type of limited run serial drama. It is shorter than soap opera but longer than serial.

2. In 2010, the Office the National Culture Commission (ONCC), Ministry of Education was changed into Department of Cultural Promotion (DCP) under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture.

3. The Office of Performing Arts, or Kong Karn Sangkit is a sub office of the Fine Arts Department, Bangkok Thailand. This organisation has the duty to conserve, support and disseminate Thai traditional dance and music and folk performance as national heritage. Therefore, the development of Thai performing arts is enacted under the authority of this organisation.

4. The innovations of khon performance instituted by Wangnaitham can be compared to those made to Indonesian theatre of the same period. Lakon carangan was introduced to Central Javanese wayang kulit (shadow puppet theatre) by Ki Nartosabdho (1925-1985), one of the most influential performers in both traditional theatre and music. Nartosabdho’s is known for performances that innovated on traditional wayang stories, including the humour and experimentation of his new approaches to presenting the narratives of traditional stories (Petersen 106-107).

5. ‘Joy from performing arts’ is the literal meaning of the phrase Sri Sook Ka Nattakam, however, this phrase as used by Wangnaitham refers to variety of performances.

6. Yakhob was a writer and journalist, well known in Thai literary circles in the decades before World War II. His work is understood to reflect the democratic aspirations of the generation of the coup d’état of 1932 and he is still admired as a great Thai novelist working in this period of major political changes.

7. This same chronicle was later translated by Pe Maung Tin and G.H. Luce and published under the title The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma (1923).
8. These ideas are also presented in *Luk Phuchai* (The Real Man), a novel written by Si Burapha, and other novels of the 1930s. For a discussion of these literary aspects of the novel (see Rutnin 1988).

9. *Phuchanasibtid* was nominated in 1997-1998 by The Thailand Research Fund as one of the hundred Thai-language books that every Thai person should read (see Chiangkun 1999).

10. In 1958, *The Conqueror of Ten Directions* was first produced as a black and white television drama on Thai Television Channel 4 *Bang Khun Phrom*, the first television channel in Thailand. In 1966, this novel was brought to the Thai film industry. On *Likay*, see Smithies 1971 and Virulrak 1996.

11. Wangnaitham perhaps was drawn to employ the *lakhon phanthang* form for his adaptation of *Phuchanasibtid* as it involves a hybrid of diverse theatrical elements. Music, singing, costumes, dance movements, and the ambience of plays mix indigenous Thai elements with other styles. This is a defining feature of *lakhon phanthang* or *phanthang* style (Muangsakorn, Vasinarom and Pothivetchakul interview). The hybridity of *phanthang* allowed the director to produce the dance-drama without the restrictions of convention. *Lakhon phanthang* also offered a tool for narrating the other in Thai terms.

12. This principle can be found, generally, in Southeast Asian performance. The idea is that one name can refer to different kinds of theatre or generate different forms of theatre just as the word *wayang* in Indonesia is used to refer to Chinese opera, Javanese shadow puppetry or even film. However, as with *lakhon phanthang*, the opposite is the case. The word *lakhon phanthang* had been defined, before the emergence of the *Phuchanasibtid* production, as referring to hybrid theatre, able to adapt and develop in different contexts with different contents and characterised by hybridity, in the same way as the theatrical outlook in the production of *Phuchanasibtid*. 
13. Chandra is a princess of Burma, the older sister of King Mangtra. Ja-det falls in love with Chandra at first sight. Kusuma is a princess of the Mon kingdom. Ja-det falls in love with her when he goes to war against the Mon.

14. In Thai, the term Mae usually refers to a female, the mother of a child or a person acting as mother. Yok is a verb meaning to support, lift, raise, carry and donate.
Chapter 4: Mae Tup Kon Mai (The New General)

Introduction

This chapter translates a script of lakhon phanthang Phuchanasibtid, specifically the episode Mae Tup Kon Mai (The New General) as adapted by Seri Wangnaitham from the modern novel of Yakho (Wangnaitham, Bot Lakhon 134-147). The modernisation of the Thai traditional play scripts through lakhon phanthang Phuchanasibtid production shows how the dance movements have been cut and the dialogues have been emphasised in the Thai traditional theatre plays. This production was first presented on 8 March 1987 at Sang Keet Sala, the outdoor stage of Krom Silapakorn, and transferred to the National Theatre’s indoor stage on 5 March 1988. This is one of the three most popular lakhon phanthang episodes of Phuchanasibtid (Chanchareon). In this episode, all the famous characters, such as Mangtra, Ja-det, Kusodor, Chandra, and Nanthawadee, are presented on stage.

The background to this episode is as follows. Mangtra, King of Tong-U (ancient Burma), commands Ja-det, his adjutant, to be a spy in Mueng Prae (ancient Mon), one of Tong-U’s enemies. While Ja-det lives in Mueng Prae, he changes his name to Mang Cha-Ngai, a Mon name. The king of Prae discovers that Mang Cha-Ngai is Ja-det disguising himself as a spy. However, he is not angry but admires Mang Cha-Ngai for his abilities. At the same time, Kusuma, the Princess of Prae, falls in love with Mang Cha-Ngai. The king of Prae offers Mang Cha-Ngai the chance to be a lord chamberlian and asks him to promise to stay in Mueng Prae and not return to Tong-U. Mangtra hears that Ja-det has pledged allegiance to the king of Prae, which angers him as he assumes that Ja-det has betrayed him. He moves the troops to Mueng Prae to test Ja-det’s loyalty. However, Mang Cha-Ngai refuses to
fight Mangtra because he is still loyal to Tong-U. Therefore, he send word to Mangtra about war tactics and warns him about Prae’s trap. However, Mangtra ignores Ja-det’s warning and leads Tong-U’s troops to fight with Mueng Prae.

This play is translated to demonstrate the verbal characteristics of the modern lakhon phanthang’s playscript. As will be seen, Thai verses and colloquial phrases are used throughout the play to express a character’s thoughts and narrate situations. Sometimes verse is used as part of a conversation between characters. Colloquial language is also to be found. When reciting verse, the actors execute dance movement to the accompaniment of choral singing and instrumental music. A normal Thai dialect is used in other dialogue with a modern acting style.

**Play Translation**

*Mae Tup Kon Mai (The New General)*

**The curtain goes up.**

**Scene I:** The throne room of Tong-U. The Burmese cabinet ministers Khun Wang Tong-Wun-Yee (the Minister of the Royal Household Tong-Wun-Yee), Neng-Ba and Si-Ong are present.

**Mangtra:** King Ta-Beng-Chawei-D¹ of Tong-U comes in to the throne room.

All the aristocrats are waiting for the king, and then they bow to the king.

The king is surprised when he sees Ja-det entering the hall.

How dare Ja-det come to see him?

*(Ja-det comes to see Mangtra.)*
Mang Cha-Ngai: Mang Cha-Ngai [Ja-det] bows to the king and responds to the king.

He is always grateful and his heart will remain loyal to the king.

The kindness of the king will be stored in his heart till his death.

He will serve and protect the king without fear of any danger.

Mangtra: The king listens to his words but he still feels angry.

As a great king, he needs to remain calm.

The king looks around the hall to vent his anger.

He sees Tong-Wun-Yee, and then he speaks sarcastically to Tong-Wun-Yee.

Mangtra: As General Commander of Tong-U, I am hurt and very sad because our friends have died and their souls were left to struggle in the battle near Muang Prae. Every time, when I close my eyes, I can hear the fire crackling and cries from the flames. Tell me! Are you deaf to all this sound? Or is Tong-Wun-Yee a weak and cowardly man unlike the old brave general. Tell me now!

Tong-Wun-Yee: Tong-Wun-Yee listens to the king. The king's sarcastic comments irritate him.

He is an honest and just person so he disagrees with the king.

He raises his hands in obeisance and replies to the king.

As to the king's question, I would like to tell the truth.

The soldiers die in the flames of battle not from carelessness.

Nor are they lack fighting skills in the war.
However, it is because of the General who is careless and vain.

The army and navy were defeated because they trusted the General.

**Mangtra:** How dare you reply to me like that! Is this from the senior rank General? Your age might be senior but I cannot trust you. You have lost your courage. You let the rebel sit here freely but you do not prosecute him. Is this the appropriate duty of your position?

**Tong-Wun-Yee:** Your Majesty, I, Tong-Wun-Yee, have not been a great General since the reign of Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di but since the reign of Meng-Ka-Yin-Yo, who had all the virtues of kingship. Thus, I know exactly what is my role and what is my duty. Though elderly I have not lost my courage. Rather I am cautious to avoid making mistakes.

**Mangtra:** Ah... Now, you dare to reply me like this.

**Tong-Wun-Yee:** Your Majesty, I cannot understand what Ja-det has done wrong and being called a rebel? Therefore, I cannot arrest him however if your majesty desires for him to be arrested, please order it and I will arrest Ja-det right now.

**Mangtra:** If so, I, Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di command you to arrest Ja-det now!

**Tong-Wun-Yee:** Ja-det, is the accusation of the king true? You act so calm but you must face the truth. I am an outsider, but I believe in your loyalty. And, why are you acting like you accept this accusation?

**Mangcha-ngai:** To be born as Tong-U in this life,

One must be full of appreciation,

Whether good or bad, high or low, my destiny is not to protest,
My life is his, subject to the King’s order whether right or wrong.  

Thus, why speak in defence when living is like death?  
Is it good to be so naive?  
I’d rather die than carry this shame.  
If I die thus my name will remain as beautiful as a peacock’s tail feathers.  
My loyalty is not for sale, it comes from my body and honest soul.  
If it can be commanded or compelled, that person is not a man but a buffalo.  

Mangtra:  
Oh! Ja-det, you speak with such irony.  
You make a fool out of me, you traitor.  
A Tong-U’s words come from a scorned heart,  
With speech that seems loyal but is scheming.  
What a disgrace is all this deceiving.  
How sad that we had been fed by one mother but you ruin our friendship-- why is beyond me.  
When you were punished and almost died, I rescued you from your deathbed.  
I thought you an honest man and yet, you are a son of a tiger, a son of a crocodile.  
You are an inconstant man, ready to lick your new master.  
You are parlous, with an ungrateful mind.
**Mangcha-ngai:** Mangtra, please argue with reason. Do not be over exaggerated.

**Mangtra:** Why!!! What are you going to do to me Ja-det?

**Mangcha-ngai:** If I was in fact loyal to No-Ra-Bo-Di (King of Prae), why was I jailed? Before the armies were defeated, I sent Neng-Ba and Si-Ong to inform you not to separate the army and navy, and to warn you about the camp location. If you situated the camp in the forest, Prae’s army would burn your camp down. Neng-Ba and Si-Ong heard my warning and told you. But you, Mangtra, you are overconfident so Tong-U’s armies were defeated without fighting as befits brave soldiers. In return, you are angry with me. Is it the carelessness of the General? I may ask.

**Mangtra:** Get out…Take Ja-det out of here and kill him right now!

**Sena:** Your Majesty, Phra Maha Thein Kusodor comes to request to appear before your highness now.

**Mangtra:** I am not available. Why does he come to bother me now?

**Maha Thein:** Mangtra…it is because you are now Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di that you have no respect and admiration to me?

**Mangtra:** Maha Thein, I know why you here already.

**Maha Thein:** Yes, of course… you understand so well.

**Mangtra:** I always knew that Ja-det was your favourite student but I have no desire to see you now.

**Maha Thein:** Okay, good. I would like to thank you for your courage, and for speaking to me with such directness. I am an old man, a worthless man to you. I would like to say something in the direct way as well.

**Mangtra:** I am concerned that you will become your worst enemy because of your favourite student.
**Mangtra:** A man, who is a terror against the kingdom, is not worth the support of a priest. How can you acquire merit when you are helping the a sinner? It is like helping a cobra. You protected Tong-U and expressed such gratefulness, Why have you no regard for the country, and why instead are you protecting these bastards?

**Maha Thein:** Maha Thein sits still but his heart is on fire. If he remains in silence, it’s like stroking Mantra’s ego. He said, I am damned like a melted candle that burnt out its light. A student taught by me, repays me with insults.

(*Maha Thein turn to talk with Khun Wang to insult Mangtra.*)

**Maha Thein:** You see Khun Wang Ta-Ka-Yor-Din! Do you not feel sympathy for me? I, myself, with my hands holding the talipot. I used to hold the swords and spears ages ago. Please tell the Lord of the kingdom that before Tong-U is prosperous and peaceful. It was because of Mangsinthu who achieved glory for Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di. Therefore, do not dare to underestimate my love and loyalty to Tong-U. I come here to talk on behalf of Ja-det because I have consider Mangsinthu to have helped Meng-Ka-Yin-Yo (Mangtra’s father) and vice versa. I want my pupil to aid Mangtra, the son of Meng-Ka-Yin-Yo, as well.

**Mangtra:** Ha Ha Ha... Wanting Ja-det to help Mangtra! You say this to exempt him from punishment. How absurd, Tong-Wun-Yee. And coming from you, a man who helped build Tong-U with your own hands. If you ask in return for my gratitude, I
will not deny you. But, Ja-det is a destroyer, it cannot compare what you had done with Ja-det in the same page.

**Maha Thein:** Ah...Ta-Ka-Yor-Din, you dare to retort my word. Fine! Might we converse with reason?

**Mangtra:** Fine, we can talk. During my father’s reign, he gave you an order. You did it with no hesitation but Ja-det did not. I trusted him but he abused his power and prestige granted by a foreign king. Finally, he failed to fulfill his order. I brought the army to fight with Prae but I lost my soldiers. This you already know.

**Mangtra:** Our army fought like a blind man and lost their lives.

Maha Thein comprehends this, and still begs for pardon.

Many soldiers die, so how do I repay them?

Or let the dead be forgotten; that is the question?

**Maha Thein:** Your majesty, Maha Thein said, the dead are dead.

Even if you kill Ja-det, the dead cannot be revived.

People of Tong-U died because of Prae, so destroying Prae would be the solution.

Why do we need to kill our people? I beg you to listen.

Although Ja-det was accused as a rebel or a traitor, the facts must be discovered.

Why not, Your Majesty, consider bringing victory to Tong-U?

Send Ja-det with the army to fight and defeat Prae to right his wrong.

If he cannot defeat Prae, you can send him to his grave.

**Mangtra:** If this request were to come from anyone else, but you, I would punish them for deceiving me. However, this is you, my royal master, so Mangtra cannot
refuse. But I am not an infant who always follows your order. Thus, I cannot give the betrayer my army and then let him defeat Tong-U.

**Maha Thein:** Mangtra, in this situation, you cannot act hastily like a child. Although Your Majesty is young in age you were born with a high family status. However, you must be cautious, as you are the king of the country. I consider my judgment to be truthful and beneficial to Tong-U. This is why I urge you to send Ja-det to fight with Prae and if he cannot bring back victory, you can send him to his grave.

**Mangtra:** If he surrenders my army to the King of Prae, not only will I lose my army, my revenge will not been completed. So will I not lose everything? And who will be responsible if I lose everything?

**Maha Thein:** I will take this responsibility. I will give you my life.

I give you my word as guarantee.

If Mang Cha-Ngai’s is disloyal and fails to defeat Prae or return in time,

I, the master who caused such offense will behead myself.

**Maha Thein:** Does this satisfy you, Mangtra?

**Mangtra:** Listening to Maha Thein’s firm statement,

I dare not pick a fight as it may hurt the master’s feelings.

In response to Maha Thein, I do not wish to object.

You can do what you consider appropriate.

**Mangtra:** I do not want to appear as an ungrateful pupil. If you think this is the suitable solution, then please press on. But please do not forget that you gave me your head as a guarantee. I declare now that I do not want wish to see any more culprits.
(Mangtra frustrates Maha Thein, he walks out of the stage. Maha Thein thanks Tong-Wun-Yee and apologise Khun Wang. He suggests Ja-det to go back to his temple first.)

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Scene II: In the royal garden beside the Chandra’s villa

(Jalengkado is waiting Ja-det)

Jalengkabo: Mang Cha-Ngai, are you alright? How did you get out? Did Mangtra not order his soliders to punish you?

Mang Cha-Ngai: If Maha Thein had not arrived here in time, I would have been dead. Was it you who informed Master Maha Thein?

Jalengkabo: It does not matter, Mang Cha-Ngai. I am just glad that you survived. I was very worried about you.

Mang Cha-Ngai: You have not replied to me yet. Was it you who informed my master?

Jalengkabo: Yes, it was me. But, I did it because I was worried about you. I advised Na-Ka-Ta-Che-Bo before sending this news to the priest.

Mang Cha-Ngai: Ahhh… Na-Ka-Ta-Che-Bo. Where is he? Is he with you?

Jalengkabo: He is with me but only I am waiting here for you. He has gone to town. Do not worry about him. He will be back as soon as he gets bored.

(Maha Thein comes to see Ja-det. He tells Ja-det about his concerns and asks Ja-det about the plans for the war.)

Mang Cha-Ngai: During my time in Prae, I learned that Prae’s troops are weak despite the strong navy

I’m not afraid of fighting the armed forces,
With the help of twentieth thousand soldiers,
We do not need the navy, as bringing more would waste our
men
We have good war strategies so we have nothing to fear.

**Maha Thein:** Maha Thein is glad to learn about his student efficient
strategies.
He is very pleased and proud of Mangsinthu’s student.
He closes his eyes and foresees the future.
As he sees everything so clearly, thus, he tells his pupil.

Although, I can see that you will achieve victory I am concerned that, at such a
young age, you may lose out to Prae’s general and his knowledge. This is the first
time that you have lead the army and you must bring victory. If I were not a priest
and a captive of Mangtra, I would fight with you. However, I will find someone to
help you.

**Mang Cha-Ngai:** Maha Thein, in your opinion, who do you think can help me?

**Maha Thein:** On careful consideration, I think a man who has gone through
difficulties.
This is Ta-Ka-Yee, who has fought alongside me in battle.
If he can be your advisor in this battle,
You will go on to victory.
I will compose a letter, and call him here.

*(Maha Thein asks his other students to bring him paper and pencil to write the letter
to Ta-Ka-Yee. Then, everyone leave the stage.)*

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Scene III: In Chandra’s Royal Garden

(Chandra is presented only on the stage)

Chandra:

Oh beautiful moon,
You float in the sky under the moonlit night.
Even the dark clouds conceal the moon,
It still floats away unlike me, poor Chandra,
All this suffering and never-ending darkness,
When the sky is clear under the moonlit night,
I wish to see Mang Cha-Ngai as I see the moon tonight.

(Kantima in the Burmese woman dress comes to see Chandra)

Kantima: Your highness, Mang Cha-Ngai has found ways to prove his loyalty. Why are you unhappy? What are you thinking?

Chandra: I feel anxious about two things. Firstly, Ja-det has to lead the army to beat Prae. This war does not worry me. However, the war in Ja-det’s heart is my utmost concern.

Kantima: Your highness, I don’t think that it will be more than Mang Cha-Ngai can handle. He will defeat Prae because he knows Prae inside out. The victory of this war would prove his loyalty and faithfulness to Tong-U and Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di. Ever since I disguised myself as Na-Ka-Ta-Che-Bo, I have coe to strongly believe that Mang Cha-Ngai can do it.

Chandra: What about Princess Kusuma? Do you not think Mang Cha-Ngai will be anxious about her?

Kantima: Your highness, may I say something that would put your mind to rest about the relationship between Mang Cha-Ngai and Princess Kusuma. As far as I
know, despite their relationship, Princess of Prae (Kusima) is in love with Mang Cha-Ngai however; Mang Cha-Ngai does not feel the same.

**Chandra:** Why you are confident of that?

**Kantima:** Before the King of Prae sent Mang Cha-Ngai to jail, the king persuaded Mang Cha-Ngai to marry the Princess in order to protect Prae from war with Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di. However, Mang Cha-Ngai rejected the king’s offer. He declared firmly that his wife must be a lady of Tong-U who is always in his heart.

**Chandra:** It does not mean that Ja-det’s Tong-U lady refers to me.

**Kantima:** I am sincerely telling the truth of Ja-det’s heart’s desire, he is loyal to you, Princess Chandra, so please do not doubt him.

One time, I mentioned the name Chandra and he was in tears.

I asked him about the name of the woman in his heart, and he admitted that it was Chandra.

It is the truth. I am so delighted for you. I know that Mang Cha-Ngai stays at the temple of Kusodor with Maha Thein. If you want to see him, I volunteer to send him the news.

**Chandra:** No, Kantima. Please do not. The fire in this Palace just died down; do not add fuel to the fire. You know that Mangtra is breathing fire on Ja-det. If he finds out that I am meeting Ja-det in the palace, our heads will no longer stay on our shoulders. It is getting late; you should return to the palace and I will follow you in a few minutes.

*(Kantima exits the stage. Chandra is left alone.)*

**Mang Cha-Ngai:** Your highness, Chandra.

**Chandra:** Ja-det!
(The two embrace, holding each other tightly. Then, Chandra cries.)

Mang Cha-Ngai: My dearest princess, it has been a year. I spent every single minute waiting to see you. I never thought that on this day I might meet you and see you in tears. Chandra, my princess, please look at me. (Ja-det kneel down in front of Chandra.) In the past, I was a common man with no noble title but with perseverance. I have completed my training in the art of war. This is because of you, who encouraged me. You gave me my life, so why have you chosen to kill me with your words?

Chandra: Oh…Ja-det.

Chandra: I heard a rumour but I refused to believe it.

The story of you and Kusuma’s engagement, how can I prevent such thoughts?

Please put yourself in my shoes, then you will see the torment in my heart.

I love and care for you with my all, but those pains Chandra could not bear.

Mang Cha-Ngai: My precious lady, you deserve to be the woman in my heart.

The truth about Kusuma, the Princess of Prae, I love her as a friend. No one touched my heart like Chandra.

I do not wish to protest nor have excuses for such rumours.

Mang Cha-Ngai: The time of separation approaches so fast, my dearest Chandra. Please do not fill with rage or anger. I have to leave you and may be gone long, like the changing faces of a waxing moon to a waning moon. I know you are in doubt and may not love me as much as before but I would love to have your blessing.
Chandra: I am a Tong-U lady, with strong beliefs in honest love.

May the power of Buddha act like shining armour.

And, may all the power in the universe shield the new general from attack

And help him to conquer in this battle both in Prae and in his heart. Nothing in this war can harm him.

Close Curtain-

(The curtain closes and a short, semi-improvised scene with Maha Thein, Ta-Ka-Yee, Ja-det, Jalengkabo, Neng-Ba, Si-Ong and Maha Thein’s pupils is presented in front of the curtain.)

Maha Thein: I appoint a brave man, Ta-Ka-Yee as my deputy for this battle.

Please ask for advice from Ta-Ka-Yee about the war strategies.

Each word and advice from Ta-Ka-Yee are my words.

You must obey his advice; don’t be arrogant or stubborn.

(Maha Thein repeats his order to Ta-Ka-Yee and his pupils and says that tonight is a full-moon night, an auspicious evening, let’s go over there. I will perform a ritual of ‘cutting a stick’ according to Pichaiyuth’s bible, and I will make holy water to bless you all. He whispers to Mud ‘What about the business I asked you to find out?’ Mud said ‘The palace sent me news to follow the order of Maha Thein, and everyone in the palace is ready.’ Maha Thein orders everyone to go back inside.)

Scene IV: Tong-U Palace (Two royal maids bring food and drink to the palace for the king.

Nanthawadee: Speaking of her majesty the queen of Ta-Beng-Chawei-Ti,
She is preparing food and drinks according to the plan.

Food and drinks are prepared perfectly,

Waiting for the king to arrive, with the help of the royal maids.

(Mae Nom Lao Chee, Lao Chee’s nanny, and Kantima arrive at the palace.
Nanthawadee greets Mae Nom Lao Chee.)

Nanthawadee: I would like to pay my respect to Mae Nom Lao Chee. Please have a seat here. Kantima, please help me look after Mae Nom.

(Chandra and her maid, Tong-Sa, arrive at the palace. Nathawadee and everyone greet Chandra.)

Chandra: I am still concerned and afraid that our plan will not succeed. If this plan fails, it’s like throwing dust in our eyes.

Nanthawadee: My sister, please do not worry. Phra Mae Chao (the queen mother) will join and bless us to achieve success.

(Maha-Dhe-Wi, Mangtra’s mother, and two royal maids arrive at the palace, and everyone greets Maha-Dhe-Wi)

Maha-Dhe-Wi: Yesterday, I saw Mangtra. I made every effort trying to persuade him to calm down.

However, he has too much pride and determination.

(Mangtra arrives at the palace with his six royal bodyguards.)

Mangtra: The greatest black-tongued king of the world, who is fearless.
He enters the familiar royal dining room and
His eyes wander and then sees, his wife, mother and sister,
including Mae Nom Lao Chee, are presented.
He can read Mangtra’s heart and feels that something unusual
will happen.
He sits at the centre of the dining table and smiling, greeting
everyone.
His heart is anxious to know what will happen; but he
must control his eagerness.

Mangtra: Mother, you came to see me yesterday. I met you early this morning and
again in the evening, I am very happy. Have you got any business with me?
Maha-Dhe-Wi: No, I do not have any business with you, my son. I was free so I
thought I might like to pay a visit.
Nanthawadee: Please have a drink, your majesty.
Mangtra: Ah…Mae Nom Lao Chee, you also visit me. I heard that your health is
poor. I am very worried. I have attempted to visit you many times but my time is
very limited. Are you getting better?
Mae Nom Lao Chee: Due to your kindness, your majesty.
Nanthawadee: Your majesty, please have a seat over there and enjoy your drink and
food.
Mangtra: Oh…My sister Chandra, you are here as well. Regarding Mae Nom Lao
Chee’ health, I would like you to take good care of her. If there’s something wrong,
please inform me immediately. Oh… and what about you Chandra, my sister? You
have never visited me before this evening. Perhaps you have something to tell me?
Chandra: No, I have nothing to tell you Mangtra, my brother. I knew that Maha-Dhe-Wi and Mae Nom Lao Chee were visiting you, so I thought I might join them.

Mangtra: So, today must be a good day. I am so glad to meet everyone. Is there anyone waiting outside?

Nanthawadee: There is no one outside, your majesty. Please enjoy your dinner.

Maha-Dhe-Wi: I heard that our army is well prepared,

And thus waiting for a new general.

No one knows who this might be,

The new general who will fight this war.

Mangtra: Mother, everyone in this place knows already. Why do you provoke me by asking this question?

Nanthawadee: Your highness, why do you speak to your mother so aggressively?

(Khun Wang Ta-Ka-Yor-Din and Tong-Wun-Yee enter the royal dining room.)

Khun Wang: Your majesty, Mang-Sin-Thu, Kusodor (Maha Thein) would like to have an audience with you, sir.

Mangtra: What urgent business do you have at this late hour?

Maha-Dhe-Wi: Why do you speak like that Mangtra, my son? Do you see Maha Thein as a stranger?

Nanthawadee: Please allow him in to see you, Father (Khun Wang Ta-Ka-Yor-Din). Would you please invite Maha Thein in?

(Maha Thein, Ta-Ka-Yee, Jalengkabo, Neng-Ba, Si-Ong enter the dining room to see Mangtra.)

Maha Thein: These people are loyal to Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di and Tong-U reign. They volunteer to fight and bring Prae to you. Ta-Ka-Yee, a great master of sword fighting from a Karen village will fight on my behalf with his three musketeers:
Jalengkabo, Neng-Ba and Si-Ong. Twenty thousand soldiers assemble outside the palace.

Mangtra: Ha ha ha, only twenty thousand soldiers to fight Prae. He will either go on to victory or go to die. Is this the Maha Thein who loves his pupil?

Maha Thein: The General of the Army requests only this amount. How can I decline him?

Mangtra: Fine!!! By the way, I perhaps have to kill the priest this time.

Maha Thein: Stop Mangtra! This utterance is a speech of a drunk Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di. I came here at this hour not to seek an argument with my beloved pupil, my King. I want instead to present you the General of the Army. You can give him permission to go to war according to the ancient royal custom. In this manner, the loyal soldier Ja-det will be cleared of the rebel charge.

Mangtra: I have given clearly my permission for him to fight a few days ago.

Maha Thein: Then, where is the sword of the absolute power? Why not give him the sword to protect his head?

Mangtra: You mean to hide his head? !!!

Maha Thein: Oh… yes. Khun Wang Ta-Ka-Yor-Din, why do not you bring Ja-det in? Ahhhh… you are afraid that Ja-det will be the favourite of Mangtra as previously, are you? Go and send him in.

(A nobleman brings the sword of absolute power to Mangtra. Khun Wang leads Mang Cha-Ngai, who wears the warrior uniform to see Mangtra. Mangtra takes the sword and gives it to Maha Thein instead of Mang Cha-Ngai.)

Mangtra: Maha Thein, my royal master, I am not only a king but also your pupil, who loves and respects you like a son. You gave me your life and head as a guarantee. Someone who betrays Tong-U not only lack gratitude to the motherland
but also to the royal master. Therefore, with the power of this sword I command you to provide this sword to that man on Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di’s behalf.

(Mangtra sends the sword to Maha Thein but Maha Thein ignores him. Then, Maha Thein exits. So, Mangtra has to provide the sword to Ja-det by himself.)

Mang Cha-Ngai: I would like to take leave. I will bring your honour and power to my soul.

I will fight with loyalty and faithful.

I give my life to you, Your Royal Highness

(The curtain closes. Ja-det and his army appear on stage and the play concludes with the chorus singing the war dance song.)

Chorus: The new general named Ja-det is brave and strong.

All the troops are ready and the auspicious time is coming to march.

***

Notes

1. Ta-Beng-Chawei-Di is the name of Mangtra after he ascends to the throne.

2. Meng-Ka-Yin-Yo is Mangtra’s father.

3. In the absolute monarchy, the king has absolute power. He can send people to live or to their deaths. The king’s order is an absolute decision in which everyone has to obey without auguring. In the Thai context, absolute power might be signified by the term Chao Chee Wi, which means ‘Lord of Life.’

4. Thai people believe that honour will remain after they die. Even though the body is buried and a soul separated from this world, honour will exist forever. It is likely a
peacock’s tail. The peacock leaves behind his tail but the beauty of the pattern and colour remain forever.

5. The word ‘buffalo’ in Thai is an insulting word used to call an inept person. It is like the word “donkey” in English.

6. Mangtra, Ja-det and Chantra grew up together in the Tong-U palace. Ja-det is a son of Mae Nom Lao Chee (nanny Lao Chee), who was the nanny of the prince and princess of Tong-U (Mangtra and Chandra). The relationship between the three of them is like brothers and sisters. Ja-det fell in love with Chandra since they were teenagers. Mangtra has known about the relationship between Ja-det and his older sister and he supports them.

7. The son of a tiger, a son of a crocodile or in Thai Luke Sure Luke Ta-Khe is an insult to call someone who is not to be trusted. Generally, the tiger and crocodile are fierce animals but they will not be dangerous while they are still young. However, they can harm when they grow enough. The meaning is similar to the English expression of nursing vipers in one’s bosom.

8. Sena is not the name of character but refers to a low-ranking soldier.

9. The talipot or in Thai Ta-La-Pat is a symbol of a priest in Buddhism. Thai monks use talipot when they chant rituals.

10. Mangsinthu is the former name of Kusodor.

11. As noted above, Meng-Ka-Yin-Yo is Mangtra’s father.

12. Na-Ka-Ta-Che-Bo is a name of Kantima, a daughter of Ta-Ka-Yee, when she disguises herself as a man.

13. This phrase means Mangtra is still angry at Ja-det.
14. Pichaiyuth’s Bible refers to an art of war book.

15. Mud is a servant of Maha Thein Kusodor.

16. Having a black tongue defines someone who has an extraordinary character. For example, Mangtra, a dignified and powerful king, a brave and strong leader who conquered many areas in Burma, is prided as a black-tongued king. However, this word does not mean that Mangtra’s tongue is actually black. The term black tongue is also applied to a special dog. Thai people believe that if they possess a black-tongued dog, the dog will convey luck to their family.

17. Natthawadee is a daughter of Khun Wang Ta-Ka-Yor-Din. Before she became queen, Natthawadee fell in love with Ja-det. Mangtra meets Natthawadee at Khun Wang’s house and he falls in love with her immediately. So Mangtra asks her to marry him and become queen of Tong-U. Natthawadee has to put Ja-det out of her mind to get married to Mangtra.

18. The Karen people are a Burmese hill tribe.
Chapter 5: Lakhon Phanthang in Contemporary Times

Introduction

In the twentieth century, continuing into the twenty-first century, lakhon phanthang and other forms of Thai traditional dance-drama have come under the direct patronage of Krom Silapakorn. They have been classed as forms of traditional art representing the Thai nation. This categorisation has unfortunately placed Thai traditional dance-drama in a difficult position, threatening its survival and future development within modern society. As Damrhung explains, ‘Traditional is a powerful label, a brand that connotes a sense of what is familiar, old, restrictive, sacred, fixed, formal, belonging to our past (for the Thais) or exotic (for others)’ (‘From Phra Lor’ 111). Dumrhung’s claim relates to what John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff’s discuss as the ‘commodification of tradition’, the process of turning tradition into a brand, marketing and presenting culture and identity to a broad public (18). Traditional theatre as a brand means making a claim that it is an art object, a heritage form of the Thais. This branding establishes Thainess as an identifying attribute.

According to Damrhung, traditionalism is an obstacle for the future development of Thai dance and theatre forms because its proponents require fixed forms and routines. It is a label that limits the creativity of artists, especially the performers from Krom Silapakorn. Traditional dance and theatre are part of the national identity. Khon performance adorns court events, and dance from Krom Silapakorn celebrates the nation-state. Thai traditional dance and theatre’s survival risk becoming frozen in time and may no longer reflect the changing tastes and values of a new generation of theatre goers.
This chapter considers the existence of and threats to Thai traditional theatre through an analysis of lakhon phanthang in two different institutions: lakhon phanthang at the Thai National Theatre and lakhon phanthang within the educational system. I argue that the survival and development of traditional theatre, particularly in a dynamic country like Thailand, is threatened by the commonly understood equation of tradition with nation. Traditional dance and theatre are glorified as part of the national identity in the official rhetoric. Thus, productions by national art organisations are frequently restaged verbatim, constricting Thai traditional art into a national heritage frame and resulting into a performance frozen in time. Additionally, Thai traditional dance and theatre are routinely imparted as part of the dance curriculum of educational institutions. Thai students copy dance and theatre choreographies set in Krom Silapakorn. The opportunity to experiment, create and invent new art forms based on traditional dance and theatre is not available, thus leading to stagnation. I suggest in this chapter that a possible way to rescue traditional dance and theatre from their current plight would be to integrate them with the Thai way of life, specifically through ritual events. This kind of events could possibly resurrect frozen traditional performance injecting new life into it. They would give artists scope to experiment creatively and develop new art forms suitable for rituals aimed at serving the needs of local communities and audiences.

This chapter initially discusses lakhon phanthang at Krom Silapakorn giving a picture of lakhon phanthang productions today in the context of a centralised Thai cultural organisation. Lakhon phanthang productions of Krom Silapakorn purportedly aim to serve the artistic needs of an ever-changing society. However, these productions are developed within the framework of older Thai traditional dance forms. Major lakhon phanthang productions today rely on repertoires handed down
by the private and royal dance troupes of the nineteenth century. The single element linking old traditions and modern society is the performers, the young artists of Krom Silapakorn. There are currently new conservative organisations whose aim is to encourage the development of lakhon phanthang and other Thai traditional theatre forms. Most of the young artists involved in such organisations have been trained in the performing arts and are experienced in both traditional dance forms and other dance styles. Thus, today’s young artists could have some leverage in the contemporary development of Thai traditional theatre. Unfortunately their intervention is hampered by the hierarchical nature of Thai society.

In the structure of Krom Silapakorn, senior dance artists, especially the leaders, are respected elders. Their authority is so powerful that it disenfranchises young and new artists, restricting individual development and creativity in performances. Young artists of Krom Silapakorn are a subordinate group dominated by their seniors who are the leaders within the organisation. This system enhances the leader’s position and authority and subordinates have little freedom of expression and no opportunity to enhance their talents. Moreover, this hegemonic ethos within Krom Silapakorn enforces a consensus that art and culture need preserving as national heritage, and that this is the duty that Krom Silapakorn as an organisation must perform (Kaewthep and Hinwimarn 187). This nurtures a deep desire for respecting and protecting tradition, by glorifying the past and preserving the ancient art forms, in that they are a part of Thai national identity.

The second half of this chapter focuses on lakhon phanthang within educational institutions. I will discuss how lakhon phanthang is transmitted to the new generations through the educational system by drawing on my personal experience of learning and subsequently teaching lakhon phanthang in the
Performing Arts Department (PAD) of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. My experience is representative of the way Thai dance is taught in institutions. Education is generally understood to be a process of knowledge acquisition at a personal and social level. Mortimore states that education is a vehicle designed and overseen by the powerful in society - to influence and control the younger generation by passing down prescribed knowledge and national culture. However education – through its capacity to develop independent thinking – is also a means to free the individual from these very influences (3). Education is also perceived as ‘an agent of cultural transmission’ passing cultural values and practices from one generation to the other (Kumar). In this section, I will discuss how lakhon phanthang is perceived by teachers and students whose views seem to point to a notion of preservation rather than development potential. Learning and teaching this dance-drama form are perceived as a set routine rather than a creative opportunity. Dance teaching in today’s educational system does not encourage the development of traditional forms but is seen primarily as a means of preserving them.

Ram and Rabam: Dance in Phanthang Style

Lakhon phanthang is frozen in the conservative processes of the National Theatre and the educational system. New lakhon phanthang is not created and presented to Thai audiences. Most lakhon phanthang productions are repeated from the old of Krom Silapakorn. However, mixed programmes show some creative development in lakhon phanthang in the form of short dances or ram and rabam in phanthang style. Before giving a critical account of lakhon phanthang of today, I would like to explain the details of dance in phanthang style, to help understand the difference.
In Thai traditional theatre, the terms *ram* and *rabam* are typically used to denote short dance pieces in which performers dance with music either with or without lyrics. Graceful movements are choreographed according to the essence of Thai dance. The length of performance is short and they serve various purposes. Dancers may perform to give people blessings or express some form of communal belief. In addition, dance can be performed as an overture or a part of a play to enhance entertainment. Virulrak states that ‘starting from 1946, when King Bhumibol (King Rama IX, r.1946- present) came to the throne, to 1999, hundreds of new types of *rabam* were created to serve a variety of purposes, reflecting the diversification of Thai society’ (*Nattasilp 571*).

*Ram* and *rabam* in phanthang style or what I would like to call ‘Thai traditional hybrid dance’ are typically characterised by dance elements mixing Thai and non-Thai dance styles. This dance form shares such hybrid characteristics with *lakhon phanthang* performance. A major feature of *ram* and *rabam* in phanthang style is the portrayal of characters of foreign nationality using Burmese, Laotian, Mon and Chinese dance movements within the Thai dance style. Thus, the basic dance form and dance gestures are still Thai dance but present something different from regular Thai dance. The Otherness of this performance lends an exotic taste to Thai traditional performances.

The hybridity in the dance form can be explained in two ways. *Ram* and *rabam* can be hybridised intentionally by merging two or more dance movements from other styles with Thai dance movements. This approach generates a new dance, which is ‘Other but Thai’. For example, *rabam Pama-Mon* (Burmese and Mons Dance) is a Thai traditional hybrid dance displaying Burmese and Mons dance movement styles but still using Thai traditional dance elements in the performance.
Costumes imitate the Burmese ones but they are simplified. The music is based on Thai-Burmese tonalities and Thai-Mons music accents but it is played by a Thai musical ensemble on Thai instruments. The second way is when *ram and rabam* in *Phanthang* style are created through a collage or pastiche of dance elements. This is not a blending of the different dance forms as in the first process. Rather, two or more different dance elements are combined and presented in the new form so that the original element can easily be detected by the audience. *Ram and rabam* in *phanthang* style created this way are described as *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn*.

The Royal Institute dictionary uses terms such as ‘incompatibility’, ‘inharmonious way’ and ‘intermingling lacking aesthetics’ to gloss the phrase *Hua Mongku Tai Mangkorn*. It literally means form or character of something, presented in incompatibile and inharmonious ways. The words *Mongku* and *Mangkorn* refer to two distinctive kinds of mythological creatures in the lore of ancient Thailand, seen on the head of the Thai royal barge. This phrase is originally found in the paw and is used with reference to the royal barge, whose head represents the *Mongku* (Thai myth creature) form but whose bottom represents the *Mongkorn* (Chinese dragon). At present, this phrase is distorted as *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn*, where *Mongkut* means a Thai traditional crown, or headdress and *Mongkorn* means Chinese dragon. However, the meaning is still the same.

*Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn* can be compared to what Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher and literary theorist, called ‘organic hybridity’, by which he meant ‘unintentional, unconscious hybridisation’ (Bakhtin 358). *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn* differs from the general *Phanthang* process. The accepted process of making *Phanthang* is the blending of different theatrical elements together to create the new form, but *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn* is about a collage of contrasting
elements which remain distinct. *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn* is a hybrid process, but Phanthangness in Thai traditional theatre needs a kind of unity. Thus, the process of hybridising *lakhon phanthang* refers to the merging and the making of the new dance into a unity. The phrase *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn* does not really convey this sense.

**Lakhon Productions of Krom Sialapakorn in the 2000s: An Overview**

In the 2000s, the dance-drama and traditional theatre productions of Krom Silapakorn under the Ministry of Culture were presented on the National Theatre stage and on special occasions according to ministerial decree. At present, the four performance programmes of Krom Silapakorn—*Sri Sook Ka Nattakam* (variety performance), *Don-Tri Thai Rai Ros Lue* (Thai classical music performance), *Silapakorn Concert* (musical concert) and *Natakam Sang Keet* (Thai dance-drama and theatre) have been presented regularly on the indoor stage of the National Theatre.\(^1\) All programmes adhere to the policy and mission of Krom Silapakorn of preserving, promoting and propagating the performing arts of the country through the administration of the Office of Performing Arts, the *Sam-Nak Kan Sang Keet*.\(^2\) There are two programmes, *Sri Sook Ka Nattakam* and *Natakam Sang Keet*, which present Thai traditional dance and theatre. The first programme, *Sri Sook Ka Nattakam*, consists of variety performances, as per the intention of the pioneer of the programme, Seri Wangnaitham. The programme is made up of 3 to 5 performances of traditional dance and a short episode of *lakhon* or *khon*. The other programme *Natakam Sang Keet*, presents a full dance-drama or a *khon* episode. The performances of each programme are selected and scheduled by the board of the Office of Performing Arts, after considering current trends and popularity of each
item (Muangboon interview). All traditional dance and theatre genres, however, are presented on the National Theatre stage, in rotation. Lakhon phanthang productions are part of both programmes.

Wantanee Muangboon, the director and senior dance-drama scholar of Krom Silapakorn states that

The mission of *Sam-Nak Karn Sangkit* (the Office of Performing Arts Division) Krom Silapakorn is mainly that of preserving traditional performances as national heritage. So the development of contemporary dance is not our mission. There are already other organisations taking responsibility in developing this kind of performance. However, we [*Sam-Nak Karn Sangkit*] also invented creative dance to serve a new generation of audiences but within a traditional frame (Muangboon interview).

On one hand Krom Silapakorn is duty-bound to protect and preserve the traditional theatre of the nation. On the other, there is an awareness of the changing mores of society which impact on the taste and needs of the urban audiences of the present. Therefore, the productions of Krom Silapakorn are presented as ‘the coin’ of Thai identity –‘traditional on one side and modern on the other,’ as said by Pornrat Damrhung (‘From Phra Lor’ 111). However, modern here is not meant as Western, and thus it does not refer to modern dance or Western contemporary dance. It refers to the technical theatrical elements which are inserted in traditional theatre to make traditional productions more attractive and more easily accessible to modern
audiences. *Lakhon phanthang* repertoires have been brought into the present but they have been simplified and adapted for new audiences.

**Young Dance Artists, Institutional Conservatism and the Pressures of Modern Society**

At the start of the twenty-first century, *lakhon phanthang* productions of Krom Silapakorn began to move in a new direction engaging with contemporary theatrical elements. The cause for the changes in the productions of Krom Silapakorn was the new generation of artists, employed by the Sam-Nak Karn Sangkit of Krom Silapakorn. New young dance artists, both male and female, with ages ranging from 25 to 35, were recruited by Krom Silapakorn. Most of them were trained at and graduated from Wittayalai Natasilpa and Bunditpatanasilpa Institute, the conservatoires of Thailand. Their youth and their outlook and experience encouraged them to experiment with new dance techniques, applying them to traditional theatre.

Anucha Sumaman, a young *khon* dancer of Sam-Nak Karn Sangkit, Krom Silapakorn, is a good example. He began training in *khon* dance at the age of twelve and completed his bachelor degree in Thai dance at Rajamangala University of Technology. Because of his outstanding classical dance skills, as a student he received the HRH Prince Narisaranuwatiwongse scholarship, awarded to excellent Thai classical dance students. In addition, he received an Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship to study in Surakarta, Indonesia from 2nd August to 31st October 2008. At present, he is not only a leading traditional dancer of Krom Silapakorn but also a dancer of contemporary dance companies in Thailand such as Jitti Chompee contemporary dance troupe and Patravadi theatre troupe. Anucha Samaman says, ‘As a dancer, I am positive that each kind of artwork has its own charm and you do not
have to understand everything. Nowadays, we [Krom Silapakorn] have a bunch of stuff that’s easy on the eyes, so why not try something different’ (Sumaman quoted in Sang-ou-thai). His view is that, the ‘Fine Art Department should commission modern choreography’ and collaborations of contemporary dance choreographers with traditional dance artists should be fostered within the conservative organisation’, such as Krom Silapakorn (‘Anucha Sumaman’).

The new experiences and training in other dance styles on the part of the young traditional dance artists have influenced lakhon phanthang and other traditional theatre productions of Krom Silapakorn. A case in point is that of Sumaman, who returned to Krom Silapakorn from Indonesia with his skills in Javanese and Balinese dance. His artistic experiences in other theatrical art forms brought him opportunities to perform beyond what routinely offered by Krom Silapakorn. For example, he was assigned to perform rabam and ram in phanthang style a role based on Indonesian theatrical style. Additionally, Sumaman was admired for choreographing some new dances, which are mostly a mixed form of Thai and other dance styles, presented on the National Theatre stage. He states that his performing abilities in foreign forms lend an exotic ambience to the Krom Silapakorn’s productions; however, it sometimes has a negative impact on his traditional dance skills (Sumaman interview). It seems that the new skills and experiences of young traditional dancers like Anucha Samaman are beneficial to the development of lakhon phanthang and dance in phanthang style of Krom Silapakorn.

Anucha Sumaman is only an example out of the whole new generation of traditional dancers, of someone who has experience in both traditional and contemporary performance receiving praise and admiration from the senior dance artists. Another example is that of Pimrat Navasiri, a female dancer, who graduated
in Thai dance from Chulalongkorn University. She was trained on the basis of a
dance curriculum which gives students the opportunity of experiencing both
traditional and contemporary dance. Navasiri says that the major problem for young
dancers is the system of seniority, which is very firmly established in Krom
Silapakorn. Young dancers are always under the control and supervision of senior
artists, therefore, the chances to demonstrate their real ability will depend on official
permission from powerful senior artists (Navasiri interview). Thus, young dance
artists of Sam-Nak Karn Sangkit, Krom Silapakorn can be an asset in performing and
developing traditional theatre and bring a degree of authenticity to Krom Silapakorn
productions. However, the seniority system and the conservative attitude of the
organisation are still powerful and influence the further development of the theatre.

*Lakhon Phanthang of Krom Silapakorn Today*

Over the past few years *lakhon phanthang* productions of Krom Silapakorn
seem to present an ossified traditional theatre form by using the old *lakhon
phanthang* literatures, preserving the original dance movements and the strict rules of
Thai dance customs. However, Theppayasuwon suggests that Thai performing arts,
particularly Thai traditional theatre, needs to be adapted or changed to suit
contemporary society and avoid the state of ‘nam ning’ or still water, which risks
becoming ‘nam nao’ or polluted water and which will endanger the future of Thai
performing arts (129). Many factors, following the Seri Wangnaitham’s period, such
as audiences, young artists and social changes, drive Krom Silapakorn into being
proactive in avoiding the development of *nam ning* and *nam nao* circumstances.
With reference to *lakhon phanthang* productions, they have been modernised and
adapted but have remained fundamentally traditional without causing any
antagonism among artists, young and old or among audiences of different generations.

Contemporary *lakhon phanthang* productions are mainly based on traditional *lakhon phanthang* repertoires such as *Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat*.³ Both stories are well-known in Thai literary circles, particularly *Phra Lor*,⁴ praised as a best Thai classical verse form or *lilit* during the time of the King Vajiravudh (1910-1925) (Ruengraklikit 1). *Phra Lor* is a tragic love story enveloped in fantasy and superstitions. The story of *Phra Lor* is derived from a folk tale of the northern part of Thailand; however, it was embellished with the addition of elements from *lilit* and is thus known as *Lilit Phra Lor* (Damrhung, ‘From Phra Lor’ 111; Diamond 367). *Rachathirat*⁵ is a story about the hostility between the Mons and the Burmese, therefore its theme and plot are focused on strategies of fighting and acts of bravery. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both repertoires gained popularity and were successful with royal audiences and among commoners (Rutnin *Dance, Drama* 117). Both repertoires were passed on to Krom Silapakorn by the private dance troupes of the nineteenth centuries through the dance masters and dancers of these troupes employed by Krom Silapakorn. The dance teachers brought their knowledge and experience and taught younger artists who went on to perform on the National Theatre stage. These repertoires were standardised and became part of the Thai dance academic curriculum across the country. Despite the changes of modern society, *Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat* are still popular and have become the two main stories of *lakhon phanthang* productions at Krom Silapakorn.

The *lakhon phanthang* productions of Krom Silapakorn can be described as follows.
First, the existing old *lak hon phanthang* plays are always selected for performance on the Krom Silapakorn stage in simplified versions, rather than creating new plays. As mentioned, the two *lak hon phanthang* stories *Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat*, both very popular, were standardised and considered to be traditional theatre already in the 1940s and continue to be performed. Seri Wangnaitham and the team of playwrights at Krom Silapakorn have simplified the plays in line with social changes. They made the story more succinct, to ensure modern audiences could find the old plays more accessible. For example, the *Phra Lor* repertoire 6 was simplified by Seri Wangnaitham in 2002 following the *Phra Lor* version of Prince Narathip Phraphanpong (Thongkumsuk 248). *Phra Lor* was a famous tragic romance play of Prince Narathip Phraphanphong’s dance troupe under the direct supervision of King Chulalongkorn (Rutnin, *Dance Drama* 120). This version was divided into three parts and each part contained five to seven scenes 7. Each part of the *Phra Lor* play of Prince Narathip required some nine hours of performance time (*Dararatsami* 29).

The new version of *Phra Lor* by Krom Silapakorn maintained the main plotline and the beautiful language of the story of the original but superfluous scenes have been cut to streamline the story and repeated dialogues have been eliminated. In August 2010, a *lak hon phanthang* episode based on the story of *Phra Lor*, *Jak Mansuang Tung Mung Srong* (From Mansuang to Muang Srong), which is Wangnaitham’s version, was performed on the National Theatre stage.

The episode begins with story of two princesses of Mung Srong, Phra Phun and Phra Pang, who fall in love with Phra Lor and want to meet him after hearing the *Kab Sor Chom Chom Phra Lor* (a folk chanted tale), in which Phra Lor, the prince of Mansuang was extolled. Their maids of honour, Nang Ruen and Nang Roi, contrived to arrange the meeting and sent *Kon Kab Sor* (a singer storyteller) to Mansuang to
sing the praises of both princesses to Phra Lor. In addition, the black magic spells and a magic cock are used to induce Phra Lor to leave Mansuang. Phra Lor travelled to Mung Srong to meet two princesses and while journeying he went to Ka Long River to wash. Before washing he worshipped the mother of the river and he learnt he would die if he entered Mung Srong. However, he cannot resist the power of black magic and his passion for the two princesses. Also, he is a king and thus he cannot retract his word just because he is frightened of death. He goes on to meet the two princesses. The episode ends with Phra Lor meeting Phra Phun and Phra Pang and living together happily ever after in the bedchamber of the two princesses. In this version, the *Phra Lor* story has been presented compressed in 3 hours and in six separate scenes.

The above synopsis is utilised when Krom Silapakorn presents the full story of *Phra Lor* but sometimes only a selection of scenes is presented. The full play is mostly performed in the *Natakam Sangkeet* programme, whereas selected scenes are presented at *Sri Sook Ka Nattakam* and *Don-Tri Thai Rai Ros Lue* programmes.

The new script can be performed in two to two and a half hours, which seems to suit modern audiences. Nevertheless, Krom Silapakorn has been criticised for watering down the story and this has been regarded as a weakness. Rutnin states that the traditional plays of Krom Silapakorn are dramatised and interpreted with disregard for preserving the authenticity of the story. In the *Phra Lor* story, the inner conflicts of *Phra Lor* concerning passion and death have been glossed over. Therefore, the element of tragedy has disappeared from the *Phra Lor* production of Krom Silapakorn (‘Karn Lakhon’ 166-167). Brandon states that ‘most Southeast Asian drama fits none of the West’s usual drama types: it is not pure tragedy, comedy, farce, or melodrama. Tragedy has never been known in Southeast Asia ’
(Theatre 116). However, Brandon is describing the Southeast Asian theatre of old, where indeed comedy often mixes with tragedy. The contemporary lakhon phanthang productions of Krom Silapakorn do not conform to Brandon’s description. In the past, the Phra Lor story was a real tragedy. Especially the final scene of the play, which shows the death of Phra Lor, the two princesses and their servants, was the poignant culmination of a tragic romance (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 115). However, the views of modern people and artists on how traditional theatre and lakhon phanthang can be modernised do differ. A modern version of Phra Lor needs to be a unified production. Krom Silapakorn’s productions are much more uniform than they were in the past. The modernisation of lakhon phanthang is more multi-dimensional.

Nonetheless, Brandon’s statement can be applied to the dramatic plays of Krom Silapakorn and does reflect the cultural expectations of Thai audiences. Phra Lor is a well known and cherished work of literature with which Krom Silapakorn’s audiences are familiar. Although the Phra Lor version by Seri Wangnaitham may not display pure tragedy and show a lack of Western dramatic interpretation, this is not a major problem. The audience’s expectations, when they see Phra Lor are not about how tragedy is conveyed, they are there for the beautiful dance movements, music and singing, for the famous dancers and to have the feeling of being part of live performance (Nadgratok).

Furthermore, new short prelude dance pieces in the form of ram and rabam are inserted in lakhon phanthang productions of which they are now a crucial component. They are presented as a prelude and interlude dance. I will presently discuss the short dance inserted by Krom Silapakorn in the lakhon phanthang.
Boek Rong is in form of rabam and is performed by two or more dancers. In the past, Boek Rong signalled that the performance was about to begin, and sometimes it was used to invoke blessings on the audience. Therefore, Boek Rong can greatly differ from the main style of the production. Boek Rong of lakhon phanthang is currently presented differently. The purpose of Boek Rong of lakhon phanthang is not only for blessing the audience or a sign of the start of a performance, but it also makes audiences feel part of the ambience.

The new ‘Rabam Boek Rong Pama’ (Burmese prelude dance) (see fig. 21) was choreographed by Ratchana Pongprayoung, the 73-year-old senior dancer and National Artist of Sam-Nak Karn Sangkit, Krom Silapakorn. This performance was first presented as a prelude dance of the lakhon phanthang episode Saming Phra Ram Ar Sa (Saming Phra Ram is volunteering to fight) from the Rachathirat story at the National Theatre from November to December 2012. This dance was based on lakhon phanthang and was announced as a Burmese dance created by one of the major senior dance figures of Krom Silapakorn. When talking to the performer I found out that this dance was based on videoclips he found on YouTube. I referred to the dance as collaboration with the senior artist but the performer disagreed.

Anucha Sumaman, the choreographer and dancer of this piece, stated in a phone interview with me on 12th December 2013 that video clips on YouTube were his resources for the Burmese dance movements. The Burmese dance costume style was sourced through Googling. He attempted to create a new Burmese dance, different from the old Burmese dance style of Krom Silapakorn wishing to present an indigenous Burmese dance.

The costume and dance movements were almost entirely copied from Burmese dance, although music and singing were accompanied by a pi phat Mon
ensemble. Ten young dancers performed the fast dance movement style accompanied by the beating of a drum with Burmese accents and tunes. Natt, an audience member who saw this performance, mentioned in her blog that

‘Rabam Boek Rong Pama at this time made me feel excited and was enjoyable. Audiences were stimulated by the lively music and the Burmese dance movement style, which made the dancers look like Burmese marionettes. At the end, audiences gave dancers a rapturous applause. It lingered in my mind after I returned home; I searched on YouTube looking for Burmese dance, feeling a hint of nostalgia for Rabam Boek Rong Pama by the Krom Silapakorn dancers’. (‘Pai Chom Saming Phra Ram Arsa Part I: Rabam Boek Rong Pama (Going to See Saming Phra Ram Voluteering to Fight Part I: Burmese Prelude Dance)’)

This new prelude dance demonstrates that under the supervision of a National Artist whose background is traditional theatre, a dancer trained in both traditional and contemporary dance styles can bring about a balance between the old and the new, creating a performance which is more realistic in flavour and more attuned to current expectations. In addition, this collaboration also reflects that the admiration powerful traditional dance artists have for the younger artists, acknowledged as the new blood of Thai traditional dance and able to modernise creatively traditional theatre productions, yet crucially maintaining the authenticity of the dance style
within the play. Nattee Nadgratok, a 42-year-old regular audience member of Krom Silapakorn’s productions states that

‘This performance (*Rabam Boek Rong Pama*) makes me feel that the old traditional dance masters are more open-minded than in the past. Traditional dances are no longer *bo-ran* or old-fashioned dance, and I think audiences are able to appreciate the creativity of an expert in traditional dance. In addition, this dance conveys a Burmese atmosphere, which is the setting of the story. My mother, though she is a real fan of Krom Silapakorn’s productions of the Seri Wangnaitham period, also loved this new performance’.

![Anucha Sumaman in a seated pose in *Rabam Boek Rong Pama*. Courtesy of Kittipak Somboondee](image-url)
The other dance added to *lakhon phanthang* productions of Krom Silapakorn is *ram* or a short dance piece inserted as an interlude within the main story. This is a new creative dance, just like *Boek Rong*, but it is different in purpose. In the past, the descriptive passages in the play were presented through singing without any dancing. But in present times, in contrast, the new *ram* is accompanied with singing and is used in scenes to describe either a character or a place in the play. *Yor Yod Phra Lor* (The Praise of Phra Lor) is a solo dance, created and inserted in the first scene of the *Phra Lor* production of Krom Silapakorn in 2010, performed and choreographed by Anucha Samaman. The first scene is set in the bedchamber of the two princesses of Muang Srong, as Phra Phun and Phra Pang are hearing the folk melody praising Phra Lor. The princesses fall in love with Phra Lor without ever having met him. *Yor Yod Phra Lor* by Sumaman showed Phra Lor on the basis of the chant. Sumaman states in the interview that

I was assigned the task of creating and performing a short dance piece as accompaniment to *Pleng Yor Yod Phra Lor* sung by Chinnakorn Krailas, a National Artist in Performing Arts and to be inserted in the *lakhon phanthang Phra Lor*. I choreographed it as a solo dance on the basis of my interpretation of the lyrics, which sung the praises of Phra Lor. I felt free to use the dance movements expressively to the best of my physical skills. Thus, parts of the dance look improvised rather than being a fixed choreography. I wanted to present something which retained the characteristics of *phanthangness*. 

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Thus *Yor Yod Phra Lor*, is a new hybrid dance based on the physicality, the dance skills and the creativity of the dancer. I would opine that the choreographer used his dance skills in both Thai traditional dance and Indonesian dance techniques in this performance. However, the different dance techniques have been intentionally merged to make a new dance style, which is neither traditional Thai, Thai-Laotian nor Indonesian, but is a hybrid. The dance style is unrecognisable and undefinable. For example, the body balance and leg movements seem to be those of Javanese and Neolanna dance styles\(^{10}\) whereas the hand gestures such as *wong* and *jeeb* are from Thai traditional dance. The costumes of this performance are also a mixed style moving away from the traditional costume of *Phra Lor* as seen in the regular production. The style of the dance movements is unlike the Laotian dance seen in *lakhon phanthang* but it not detrimental to the overall aesthetics of the play. Audiences appreciate the dance interlude and regard it as an innovative dance of *lakhon phanthang*.

All these new dance pieces have been the work of a young artist of Krom Silapakorn. But the new dances have not been warmly received by some senior traditional dance masters. I interviewed a powerful senior artist of Krom Silapakorn and she commented that *Yor Yod Phra Lor* by Sumamam was *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn*.\(^{11}\) I found out that the phrase *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn* as uttered by this senior dancer not only refers to the dance techniques but also the costume, which was presented as a collage of different pieces rather than creating it by seamlessly merging different costumes. The performer wore the Thai dance cloth pattern as can be seen in traditional *khon* and *lakhon*. The long piece of cloth was attached to his hips and trailed on the ground. Jewellery was traditional but the headdress was created with a collage of hairpins from the northern folk dance styles with a hybrid
traditional dance headdress (see fig. 22). The phrase *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn* was used derogatorily to say that the dance was so mixed that it could no longer be fitted into existing dance genres. It is in full contrast with the mongrel denotation of the *phanthang* term. But the meaning and form of *lakhon phanthang* as a hybrid dance allows the young dancer to create a new dance piece without seriously concerning himself with ancient dance customs. The new dance reflects the young traditional dancer’s perspective that Phanthangness at present should not be limited only to traditional *phanthang* dance forms. As Sumaman (2013) states ‘the hybridity in *phanthang* style should be presented, although the new *phanthang* dance may not be allowed for long on the traditional stage and may not be acknowledged as traditional *phanthang*’.

Another new feature of *lakhon phanthang* at present, concerns the comic scenes in the play. Basically, the Thai comic style can be categorised in three groups: *Lakho’n Yo’i*, *Talok Salachak* and *Talok Naman* (see Polachan 2014). In traditional dance theatre, there are two kinds of comic genres in a production. *Talok Salachak* is a short humorous comic scene based on the main plotline. The jokes or *Jam Uat* relate to the characters in the story. *Talok Naman* occurs during changes of sets to reduce the intensity of the play, so joking is possibly separate from the play’s vicissitudes. The main purpose of both comic interludes is to give a humorous account to the audience and to use the jokes to narrate the story or the situation, which will occur in the future.
In the *lakhon phanthang* productions of Krom Silapakorn, *Talok Salachak* is an interesting scene. The jokes and the comic style in the production are influenced by Wangnaitham’s style. The *Jam Uat* or the comedian is usually a role taken by a senior artist of Krom Silapakorn, trained to be *Jam Uat* by Seri Wangnaitham. Prasart Thongaram, a senior *khon* artist, and an outstanding disciple of Seri Wangnaitham, usually takes the major *Jam Uat* role in *lakhon phanthang* and other traditional performances. He stated that ‘after the death of Wangnaitham, he [Thongaram] would keep doing traditional work as Wangnaitham had done before he died. He is ready to follow in Wangnaitham’s footprint’ (Thongaram quoted in *Phoenix*).
The humour is based on daily life and whatever is popular at a particular moment in time. For example, a political issue was satirised in Talok Salachak of Rachathirat, episode Saming Phra Ram Ar Sa, scene II, which is set in front of a prison. In this scene the story of Saming Phra Ram, a former soldier of King Rachathirat of Hanthawaddy (ancient Mon kingdom) and main character of the scene, is jailed as a captive at the prison of the City of Ava (ancient Burmese Kingdom). He hears the royal proclamation that the king is looking for a volunteer, well skilled in lance fighting to challenge Kamani, a skilful warrior in the Chinese army. The proclamation states that the one who volunteers to fight and vanquishes Kamani will be rewarded by the king with the position of heir of Ava and the King will give the victor his beautiful daughter, princess of Ava, in marriage. Saming Phra Ram, volunteers to fight because he does not want the Mon Kingdom to be in trouble, should the Chinese army conquer the Burmese Kingdom (Silapakorn 27).

Talok Salachak in this scene begins with the two gaolers re-checking the prisoners at the entrance the jail of Ava. Five prisoners appear in the scene and they all have a different physical appearance, which will make audiences laugh upon seeing them: an overweight man, a tall man, a man with a big belly, a thin and small lady boy and an old man. The overweight man wears a white shirt on which the Thai letters น ป ช (Nor. Por. Chaw), can be seen (see fig. 23). Generally, the word Nor. Por. Chaw literally a red shirt, is understood to be a reference to supporters of the Neaw-ruam Prachathippatai Tor-tan Pa-det-karn Heng Chart (the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship). In contrast, the meaning of Nor. Por. Chaw in this show has been changed to Nak Thod Pra Harn Chai (a death row inmate). The conflict between red shirts and yellow shirts in Thailand is mentioned on stage. However, the audiences recognise the parody of a current political issue and laugh at
it (Nadgratok interview). Not only is there a reference to a political issue but in the same scene of the play, the Korean popular song ‘Gangnam Style’ is mentioned, as the five prisoners are asked by the gaolers to show Gangnam Style dance movements, which got a big laugh from the audiences.

Fig. 23. Talok Salachak of lakhon phanthang. Image courtesy of Nattee Nadgratok

Current lakhon phanthang performance has been modified for new audiences and a changing society. Nonetheless, the dance movements or Tha Rum are still derived from the ancient dances. In 1934, Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart (Dramatic Art School) was established under the authority of Krom Silapakorn. Former dancers and dance masters from the elite private dance troupes such as the ex-dancers of Chao Phraya Mahin were invited to teach at the school. Thus, the dance movements were standardised (Boonyachai interview). This however does not imply that the dance movements are unchangeable.
At present, *lakhon phanthang* performers are male and female and are selected on the basis of the character gender in the play. *Tua Phra* (male characters) role are interpreted by male dancers, whereas *Tua Nang* (female characters) roles are performed by female dancers. Contemporary *lakhon phanthang* casting differs from the past when *lakhon phanthang* characters were performed exclusively by female dancers. Therefore, *Tha Rum*, which was originally devised for female dancers, had to be modified to suit male dancers while maintaining the original dance choreography or choreographic design (Muangboon interview). The characteristics discussed above can not only be seen in productions at the National Theatre, under the supervision of Krom Silapakorn, but also outside Krom Silapakorn, as *lakhon phanthang* has been widely disseminated.

Today, *lakhon phanthang* is no longer performed as a popular theatre or for the entertainment of the royal family and nobility. But it is currently part of Thai traditional theatre education, and its form and style are always based on the *lakhon phanthang* productions of Krom Silapakorn, which reflect the modernisation of Thai traditional theatre in modern Thai society. However, though the *lakhon phanthang* productions of Krom Silapakorn present the traditional repertoires rather than modern or newer ones in order to preserve the art form as national heritage, the concept of preserving the art form does not mean that ‘nothing changes’ in performance. *Lakhon phanthang* as a traditional theatre always changes to serve the needs of society and its time, as Shils discusses. The modifications of *lakhon phanthang* and its hybrid dance are for the survival and continued existence of traditional theatre in modern society. This dance-drama form is based on the ancient *lakhon phanthang* of the past. The young dance artists of Krom Silapakorn especially those who have gained experience overseas of foreign dance forms, bringing back
their new knowledge, have developed and created the new hybrid dance forms to be seen in current lakhon phanthang productions. I would suggest that this could guarantee the survival of lakhon phanthang at present, just like it happened when Seri Wangnaitham went to Hawa’i and brought back his knowledge, modernising lakhon phanthang and making it popular. Furthermore, the new hybrid dance forms inserted in the main lakhon phanthang productions improve the aesthetics of these productions and allow modern audiences to participate in the performance process.

Lakhon Phanthang in the Academic Context: Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University originated from Rong Rian Sunandha Wittayalai in 1937, a court school educating Thai girls in general knowledge and training them in craft skills to become kunlasatri (a lady). The school changed its name and status many times. In 1958, it became Wittayalai Kru Suan Sunandha (The Suan Sunandha Teachers’ Training College) focused on teacher training. In 1995, the college changed its name and status to Sataban Rajabhat Suan Sunandha (Suan Sunandha Rajabhat Institution) expanding the range of departments and degrees offered. Since 2004 the name has been changed to Mahawitayalai Rajabhat Suan Sunandha (Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University).

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University was the first university teachers’ training college offering a Bachelor degree in Thai dance education in Thailand. In 1972, under its former name Wittayalai Kru Suan Sunandha, the university offered a two year diploma course which was expanded in 1976 finally becoming a four year bachelor degree course in Thai dance education in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in 1980. The aim of this course was to train the students to become a
teacher in both primary and secondary schools (Sophon 175). In 1988, the bachelor degree in Performing Arts was offered rather than Thai dance education. The aim of the course was to train Thai and Western dance practitioners rather than dance teachers. In 2005, the Performing Arts course was offered by the Performing Arts Department, in the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts. The educational management and the aims of the department are based on the recent philosophy and mission statement of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in accordance with the university’s philosophy and the the educational mission of the state. The new generation of graduates are expected to be experts in their chosen subject and honourable, socially responsible individuals. (Suan Sunandha Rajabhat 156).

The Performing Arts Department (PAD) consists of two majors; 1) Thai dance and theatre and 2) Theatre arts. The entire course is made up of 132 mandatory credits in a four-year programme. The department aims at producing graduates, who have a broad knowledge of both Thai and western theatrical arts. Graduates of this course are actors, performing art managers and theatre critics. In addition, they are expected to engage in research in both folk and classical performing arts.

Curriculum, Lessons and Evaluation

Lakhon phanthang is a compulsory subject in ‘The Classical Dance Theatre 2’ offered in the first semester of the third year students majoring in Thai dance. The module description is as follows: ‘[the module explores] the historical background, performance elements, and the dance techniques of lakhon phanthang based on episodes from the Phya Phanong, Phra Lor and Rachathirat stories, including lakhon se pa based on Khun Chang Khun Phan story or a selection of suitable episodes as per the instructors’ choice’ (Suan Sunandha Rajabhat 180). This is a
three credits module with theoretical and practical studies, including independent study. There are two Thai dance-drama forms in this description, however 75% of the module is devoted to lakhon phanthang.

During the 2009-2013 academic years, the three stories and selected episodes based on lakhon phanthang were as follows:

1) *Phra Lor* episode Phra Lor Chom Suan -Khlow Hong (Phra Lor Enters the Royal Garden – Entering the Princesses’ Room)
2) *Rachathirat* scene Saming Phra Ram Keaw Phraratchathida (Saming Phra Ram Courts a Princess)
3) *Phya Phanong* scene Kam Pin Kor Fon (Kam Pin is Praying for the Rainfall)

The Thai dance curriculum of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University demonstrates that the traditional lakhon phanthang of Krom Silapakorn, such as *Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat* are core material in the teaching at this level. An entire episode of *Phra Lor* is selected as an exemplary lakhon phanthang based on the Thai-Laotian dance style. Only a short scene from *Rachathirat* is selected, in contrast, and it is aimed at students wishing to learn duo dances in Thai- Burmese and Mon styles. *Phya Phanong* is selected by the instructor as an exemplar of solo female character dance of lakhon phanthang. Although *Phya Phanong* is based on a Thai-Laotian movement style like the rest of *Phra Lor*, this is the only lakhon phanthang story, with a solo dance by a female character (Muangsakorn and Vasinarom interview). Therefore, not only do the students learn about the process of making a lakhon phanthang through practising an episode, they are also learning the individual dances based on lakhon phanthang.
In a lakhon phanthang class, there are two dance teachers, one is for female characters and the second is for male characters, teaching an average of 28 to 30 students. This module is offered to third year students, who have previous experience in traditional dance. Therefore, the traditional exercises such as hand gestures and leg positions used for the warm up, which are a compulsory set of exercises for beginners, are not required by the teachers. Lessons begin formally with the students sitting properly in line on the floor, separating female characters and male characters, and greeting the teachers respectfully by holding their palms in a lotus shape then bowing, with the head down and with the hands placed on the floor. Then, the students begin to exercise reviewing the previously learnt dance section with the teachers. The section will be repeated several times until the teachers are confident that the students can remember the dance movements and the music properly. After that, the new dance section is taught and the dance is reviewed from the previous dance section to the end of the new section several times. The teaching of lakhon phanthang does not differ from that of any other kind of traditional dance in which the students learn by rote. The teachers dance at the front of the classroom and the students attempt to follow and imitate their teacher’s movements as much as they can. However, the teachers correct the dance positions and movements of the students while the students review the dance.

I have both observed and taught lakhon phanthang at PAD on several occasions. Students in class mostly memorise the dance movements pretty well although some parts are very difficult and require much practise. Soraya Nuansa-ard, a student of lakhon phanthang comments as follows

The new dance techniques have been introduced in this class.

They differ from the techniques of other Thai dance-drama
forms. Everyone practises swaying shoulders, which is an essential dance technique of lakhon phanthang style, and it is very difficult to reach the standards set for this technique. We [students] basically attempt to remember the whole dance movements then after class or in the evening we practise to improve the dance techniques.

In every class, students will memorise the play script in advance and they have to bring their script to class. The play scripts are photocopied from library books and are based on lakhon phanthang texts, published under the authority of Krom Silapakorn. Additionally, for some plays not available in print, students are required to transcribe from video clip. During the break, students spend their time taking notes in writing and in some informal dance notation, often with drawings, on their copy of the script to help them recall what they have learned and how their teachers move. Sometimes they may use a device such as a mobile phone to record dance movements (Nuansa-ard interview). The last 10 to 15 minutes before the end, the teachers will summarise what the student have learnt in class, sometimes the teachers may suggest ways to practise the dance at home and/or may assign the students some reading expecting them to memorise a new section of the scripts to be used in the next lesson. The class ends as it began with the students showing their respect to their teachers.

Lakhon phanthang repertoires particularly the Phra Lor and Rachathirat plays of PAD Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University are based on Krom Silapakorn’s lakhon phanthang versions which are set as standard by Krom Silapakorn the national arts agency under government support entrusted with the duty of preserving national tradition and culture. Therefore, several dance educational institutions,
including PAD of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University adhere to a dance technique and format formalised by Krom Silapakorn. Manissa Vasinarom, one of the dance teachers at PAD contributing to the teaching of ‘The Classical Dance Theatre 2’ comments that lakhon phanthang in her class is based on the Krom Silapakorn version but some dance movements are adapted to suit students and an educational purpose. Vasinarom graduated with a bachelor and master degree in Thai dance at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts of Chulalongkorn University. She also adds that her lakhon phanthang skills were imparted by the guest dance masters of Krom Silapakorn and she transmits this knowledge to her pupils at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University.

Thus even though the lakhon phanthang taught at PAD is based on the lakhon phanthang of Krom Silapakorn, it is also adapted and modified to suit the students. The modifications of lakhon phanthang as I taught it were based on my recalling of my lakhon phanthang dance knowledge, as I learned it in the past, combining it with the dance-drama techniques of Krom Silapakorn. The teaching of lakhon phanthang through traditional methods continues in modern society. Contemporary media such as VCD and YouTube videoclips, through which traditional lakhon phanthang productions by Krom Silapakorn are recorded, have been incorporated in the study of Thai traditional dance. Soraya Nuansa-ard, describes the typical way of reviewing a dance lesson:

We [Soraya Nuansa-ard and friends] spend 2-3 hours in the evening doing extra dance practice on campus. YouTube is the most important medium for me and my friends in reviewing dance movements. It acts as a reminder of the dance movements
and it shows ways to improve our dance skills even though some
dance movements in the clips are perhaps dissimilar to what we
have learned in class. In this case, we will double-check the
dance movements in the notes we have jotted down (see fig. 24).

(Nuansa-ard interview)

Thus at present the study of traditional dance study is linked with online
networks as can be seen from the above. Furthermore, cyber search engines such as
YouTube play an important role as material for self-study.

The final assignment of ‘The Classical Dance Theatre 2’ is a case in point. At
the end of the course on completion of their training students are required to present
a short scene or episode of lakhon phanthang, which differs from what learnt in
class. The story, dance scene or episode is selected by the students. They have to
study the dance movements and manage the production. The final project
presentation takes place in the classroom. Audiences are the class students and other
students of PAD. The most popular lakhon phanthang story which is selected for the
final project is Phra Lor (Vasinaram).

When I searched on YouTube by typing the Thai word lakhon phanthang, the
video clips that popped up the most were of Phra Lor as performed by Krom
Silapakorn artists. There are several scenes, episodes and versions, uploaded on the
Internet. Thus YouTube is definitely the first port of call for students and is
considered as an efficient resource for self-study. Sumate Fugtuen, a junior dance
student at PAD describes in the interview I did with him the process of putting on a
lakhon phanthang production for the final project assignment:
We search on YouTube for the *lakhon phanthang* productions by Krom Silapakorn. The *Phra Lor* productions by The National Theatre are the most uploaded video clips. We select a simple scene, such as Phra Lor La Mae [Phra Lor leaves his mother]. This scene has few characters and the complete scene takes only 30 minutes to perform. We imitate dance movements, and dialogues from the clip so YouTube is a very useful resource for us (Fugtuen interview).

Fig. 24. An example of hand-written dance notation of *lakhon phanthang* *Rachathirat* scene Saming Phra Ram Keaw Phraratchathida (Saming Phra Ram Courts a Princess). Image courtesy of Soraya Nuansa-ard.
This statement by a junior student reflects the current process of self-study of the traditional dance of *lakhon phanthang*. In contrast, the teaching process in class follows a very traditional method, attempting to emphasise the interaction between teachers and students. I am a dance teacher and have been trained in the traditional dance style. I can confirm that the learning of traditional dance is a very slow process in which teachers have to show accurately a dance movement and correct the wrong dance movements performed by students in a one-on-one situation. Learning to dance, particularly learning traditional dance, means learning by heart, technical difficulties in dancing are worked out through diligent repetition. Learning traditional dance with the help of a teacher is a prerequisite for becoming a good traditional dancer and a dancer of advanced level.

Undoubtedly a digital resource such as YouTube, is another way of helping traditional dance survive in modern society through this new study approach. It seems to encourage the younger generations to access traditional dance easily, everywhere and at all times. However, as a dance teacher, I can offer a different viewpoint. Traditional dance and drama, especially in Southeast Asia, are deeply rooted in society and relate to spirit and ritual, beliefs and cultural values; in a country such as Thailand dance and drama are related to the royal institution. YouTube changes the nature of the interaction between teachers and students. The form of traditional dance-drama possibly survives in a changing society but the values and the aesthetics of the art seem to have been blurred. In the case of *lakhon phanthang* at PAD, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, students do this kind of self-study without an awareness of background, values and meaning of *lakhon phanthang*. Piya Benjauakkarachochai, a junior student at PAD talks about the final assignment admitting that he and his friends did not know much about the *lakhon phanthang*
story but when they were assigned to present it they just searched on the Internet for the appropriate scene, which all members in the group would be able to perform. They cannot narrate the whole story of the selected lakhon phanthang play and know only the details of the selected scene. Imitation of dance movements and theatrical elements is the focus of their production.

The reproduction of lakhon phanthang by the students is reminiscent of the concept of ‘mechanical reproduction’ by Walter Benjamin (2008). Benjamin discusses shifts in perception and their effects in the wake of modernity in art works introducing the idea of ‘aura’, which denotes the originality and authenticity of a work of art that has not been reproduced mechanically in modern society. The aura concept by Benjamin also embraces the atmosphere, history and power attached to the original artwork. In this sense the new mechanical devices of the modern age such as YouTube and Google can help to reproduce traditional Thai dance. However, this reproduction of traditional dance-drama is devoid of aura. The dance movements are only imitated without soul, energy and are devoid of aesthetics. Traditional dance training is about learning by practising with the dance gurus, who correct the dance movements of students putting them in the right position. Every single dance movement taught by dance teachers is not only a movement pattern but also an encapsulation of an intersubjective relationship that can at times be harsh but which ensures the transmission of ‘the soul’ of dance.

The learning and teaching process as explained above place an emphasis on dance practice rather than theoretical learning. However, a theoretical study is also included at PAD and is carried out through written assignments. Teachers assign short reports on topics related to lakhon phanthang. The report topics are descriptive and frequently focused on the historical background of lakhon phanthang, and/or the
dance notation of the dance piece learnt in class. In addition, a brief discussion of the
dance principles and customs of lakhon phanthang, are sometimes given during
breaks or before the dance practice commences at the beginning of each class.
Theoretical knowledge of lakhon phanthang, emphasises the dance principles of the
form (Vasinarom interview). Students learn about the difference between the dance
movements in phanthang style and those of other Thai dance styles. Additionally, the
syllabus comes with a set bibliography consisting of master degree theses from
Chulalongkorn University focused on the study of historical and dance notation of
lakhon phanthang. Other textbooks are by Thai scholars such as Surapone Virulrak
and Danit Yupho, and they talk about Thai dance-drama in general with lakhon
phanthang explained in little detail, with only some information on the historical
background, and defining it as a mixed theatre form. The accounts include the name
of the plays in the extant repertoires.

The assessment should be mentioned, as it gives some scope for reflecting on
the instructors’ viewpoint on lakhon phanthang in the academic arena. The syllabus
of ‘The Classical Dance Theatre 2’ at PAD, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University
specifies that students will be able to perform lakhon phanthang at an advanced level.
Thus, 80% of the mark is for the dance practice and the dance production in the final
project. The other 20% will be given to class participation and the written report. An
examination will be arranged only once at the end of term, after the students have
learned and practised all the dance pieces taught. Students need to review and
remember all of them for the final exam. In the exam, students will perform the dance
movements as taught, based on three lakhon phanthang repertoires that have been
studied--Phra Lor, Rachathirat and Phya Phanong. Students have to perform the
dance movements and actions of the characters in the play as taught by the instructors in order to receive high marks (Vasinarom interview).

For the final examination, there are different approaches. For the *lakhon phanthang* production based on self-study, the theatrical elements of the production must convey the nationality traits of the character of the selected play; the dance movements are not the main concern. Students have freedom in their selection. Sakul Muangsakorn, an instructor at PAD states in an interview that students can either invent the dance movements or imitate them from a DVD recording. However, if students invent the dance movements, they have to choose them carefully by considering their meaningful relationship with the play. Therefore, the aesthetics of dance movements is not the main concern of the exam but the integration of *lakhon phanthang* principles and the management of the theatrical production are greatly emphasised.

**Production**

Since the establishment of the school in the 1950s, there have been annual dance-drama productions presented by teachers and students of the Rong Rain Sunandha Wittayalai (1950-1958). The purpose of the theatre project was to raise funds for school activities. In 1972, after the school changed its name to Wittayalai Kru Suan Sunandha (1958-1994) and the expansion of the curriculum from a two-year diploma to a bachelor degree in Thai dance education, the purpose of the annual dance-drama production was to showcase students’ skills rather than raise money for charity. In 1998, the annual dance-drama production of Suana Sunandha Rajabhat University became *Wipitassana* (Variety of performance) --this name was derived
from that of a dance taught in the curriculum—and the senior dance students took on the responsibility of managing and organising the event, supervised by their instructors.

*Wipitassana* by Performing Arts Department, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University since 1998 has been presented at Sunandhanusorn Hall aiming to promote Thai dance-drama to public audiences. Students have to consider the concept and theme of the event, and are in charge of the managing of the performances and the auditioning of the cast. They need to find a sponsor for the production and sell theatre tickets.*Wipitassana* is the major production of the year and one which allows PAD students to present their dance skill to the public. The performances in the event consist of one scene or episode of a selected Thai traditional dance-drama, several folk and classical dances, and a creative dance.

Fig. 25. A ticket of *Wipitassana* by PAD, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in 2013. This ticket portrays the major characters in the dance-drama production and the dancers in the folk dance style. Image courtesy of Tanasit Chomchid.
From 1998 to present times, *lakhon phanthang* has never been selected as a main traditional dance-drama production in Wipitassana. *Lakhon phanthang* and other dance-drama forms are set aside although they are all traditional dance-drama taught at PAD. In contrast, *lakhon nok*, the outer court dance-drama is often selected because it is deemed to be more accessible to audiences who are unfamiliar with traditional dance-drama (Muangsakorn interview). This is different from the theatre productions of the past at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University where the aim of the annual theatre production was a commemoration of the anniversary of the royal birthday of HM Queen Sunandha Kumariratana, wife of King Chulalongkorn and to raise funds to support the educational activities of the school. The annual theatre productions of Rong Rain Sunandha Wittayalai gained popularity and the school benefitted from the sale of theatre tickets. The School Hall, recently renamed *Hor Prachum Sunandhanusorn* (Sunandhanusorn Hall), was built from revenues from the annual theatre production (Muangsakorn 34-35).

In 1950 the first theatre production was *Shakuntala*, a Sanskrit play translated into Thai by King Vajiravudh was successfully presented at Rong Rain Sunandha Wittayalai. Other classical Sanskrit plays and Thai folk tales were subsequently chosen as annual productions of the school. These plays were all presented in *phanthang* style performed by amateur dancers, who were not majoring in Thai dance (Potiwetchakul, *Prototype 97*).

The annual dance-drama production of Rong Rain Sunandha Wittayalai became a famous event even though the performers were not professional artists. Tareeporn Sangkhamantorn, a former dance teacher (1972-2009) of PAD, whom I interviewed about the annual dance-drama productions says that ‘*phanthang* style was considered by the dance teachers as suitable to the amateur dancing of the time.
Most of the repertories—Thai folk tales and Sanskrit classical plays—were not typical of lakhon phanthang however we [dance teachers] adapted these plays and presented them in that form’ (Sangkhamantorn interview). The lakhon phanthang style by general scholarly consensus is seen as a flexible dance-drama form, with wide applications (Kijkhun interview). Dance movements, costumes and music were presented in a mixed style of Thai and non-Thai dance based on the national characters in the play. Sangkhamantorn also suggests that

In the past Thai traditional dance-drama was popular among Thai people. Television programmes showed Thai dance-drama on their channels. The National Theatre also presented traditional performances every month. In contrast, the lakhon of Suan Sunandha [Suan Sunandha dance-drama productions] presented something new and different from the Krom Silapakorn’s productions. Our dance-drama productions were creative and modern for the period. They attracted audiences. Traditional dance-dramas such as lakhon nai and lakhon nok required formal traditional costume styles. We [Suan Sunandha dance group] had a limited budget so we needed to avoid the high expenditure involved in hiring the traditional costumes. Therefore, the lakhon phanthang style was the best choice for us. We created new dance costumes on the budget we had. We trained amateur dancers [students] to perform in phanthang style, which did not require advanced dance skills.

Sangkhamantorn’s statement reflects how lakhon phanthang was perceived by teachers in the past. This perception of lakhon phanthang seems to have had a
positive effect. *Lakhon phanthang* or performance in *Phanthang* style allowed dance practitioners to invent a dance-drama based on a traditional dance form. *Lakhon phanthang* was recognised as a living traditional theatrical approach rather than just a frozen form of traditional dance-drama. It was used to develop several new dance-drama repertoires which could compete with the other traditional dance-drama productions broadcast by the media and produced by Krom Silapakorn. *Lakhon* of Suan Sunandha demonstrated that theatrical productions were very successful and gained in popularity although these productions were presented in the form of *lakhon phanthang* or *phanthang* style as theatre budgets and human resources were limited.

However, *Wipitassana*, currently the annual theatre production of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, as I mentioned earlier, is informed by a different ethos. *Lakhon phanthang* and performances in *phanthang* style are not perceived as in the past. *Lakhon phanthang* is seen as a traditional dance form, not accessible to modern audiences. The dance teachers at PAD recognise that *lakhon phanthang* is a traditional dance form, but it is thought that the style and repertoires do not attract young students, who make up the audience of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University’s theatre productions. As Sakul Muangsakorn states, the tickets of this theatre project are mainly sold to the students of Suan Sunadha Rajabhat University. Most of them are unfamiliar with Thai traditional dance. Therefore, *lakhon nok* is an appropriate choice to make the audience appreciate Thai dance within a short time. *Lakhon nok* from a dance teacher’s perspective is a dance form offering young audiences the opportunity to enjoy Thai traditional dance more than other forms. The repertoires present a melodramatic plot. The stories are presented by male dancers, most of whom are ladyboys (see fig. 26).
Ladyboys, in the dance teacher’s view, entertain audiences better than ordinary male and female dancers especially in the context of obscene scenes with rude language, and in the comic scenes, which can make audiences laugh at the jokes while enjoying the overall story. This is possibly the reason why lakhon phanthang is not selected for the annual dance-drama production. Although some story of lakhon phanthang such as Phra Lor are about love and passion it seems that the story is far removed from Thai people of today. The plot is more serious than the stories of lakhon nok, mostly based on Thai folk tales. Additionally, lakhon phanthang is performed by both male and female dancers. The cast is selected on the basis of the gender of each character in the play. Thus, some extremely obscene jokes and rude language must be avoided (see fig. 27).

There are other reasons for the lakhon phanthang unpopularity and for deeming it inappropriate for presentation as an annual dance-drama production at PAD. These are the limited show time of each production and the lack of skillful dancers in lakhon phanthang style. All these factors make lakhon phanthang live only in the curriculum as a traditional dance form, which dance students have to know about in theory and in practice. Lakhon phanthang as a dance production is fading. Meanwhile, lakhon nok, also a traditional dance form is well-liked and deemed to entertain modern audiences better than lakhon phanthang.
Fig. 26. *Lakhon nok* production of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in 2011 performed by ladyboys. Image courtesy of Patipat Muktawee.

Fig. 27. Obscene joke in *lakhon nok* at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Image courtesy of Patipat Muktawee.
Lakhon Phanthang: Survival and Development in the Academic Context

The teaching of *lakhon phanthang* in PAD, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, reflects a picture of *lakhon phanthang* on the preservation track. The traditional *lakhon phanthang* plays *Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat*, by Krom Silapakorn are in the dance curriculum and are transmitted to the students. In turn, the popular *lakhon phanthang* *Phuchanasibtid* by Seri Wangnaitham, is not even mentioned in the curriculum. The preservation of Thai traditional dance has both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, the ancient dance movements and dance-drama forms still exist in modern society and will be transmitted to the new generation as national heritage through the educational system. On the other hand, the traditional forms, choreographic patterns and qualities have been frozen in the preservation process as Pornrat Dumrhung states in an interview given on 4th April, 2013

The performing arts education in Thailand especially Thai dance studies is designed primarily to exaggerate the preservation campaign mounted for traditional dance and theatre. It lacks development. Thai traditional dance in the future will possibly run into difficulties. The traditional theatre forms not only *lakhon phanthang*, but all of them will be museum arts, of which Thai people perhaps, will know only the name (Dumrhung interview).

In theory, it seems that the study of traditional dance and theatre in Thailand encourages the younger generations to realise that traditional arts are an essential part of the knowledge of the process of dance making in modern society. Pramate
Boonyachai, a senior Thai classical dance-drama and Khon master at Bunditpatanasilpa Institute remarked in an interview about lakhon phanthang and the Thai dance educational system on 8th April 2013: ‘If we talk about theatrical education in Thailand, we could say that our [Thai dance] students should be strongest in the traditional styles. Then, they could use their knowledge in further developing and modifying the theatrical arts’. Pramate Boonyachai’s statement seems to place emphasis on the idea that traditional knowledge is a fundamental prerequisite for further developing and modernising the Thai performing arts and his point is quite valid. There are several universities in Thailand such as Bunditpatanasilpa Institute, the university based art school--and Chulalongkorn University, that adhere to this notion (Chansuwan interview; Archayuthakarn interview). Thus, the teaching of lakhon phanthang is based on Phra Lor and Rachathirat, inherited from the past.

In practice, however, using traditional knowledge for new creative dance forms sounds unrealistic. In the case of PAD, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, although students have a chance to work on Lakhon phanthang in their final project, they do not invent anything new. The final assignment imitates existing lakhon phanthang clips found on YouTube. Teachers wish to see students integrating their dance knowledge into the final assignment but the process of creating must be based on traditional dance-drama (Muangsakorn interview).

During my field research in February 2012, I held a focus group discussion for the third year students of PAD. All 30 students had studied lakhon phanthang in theory, and some of them had experience of Lakhon phanthang as performers in a short scene or a minor role. In the focus group, I encouraged students to discuss their experiences and how they perceive and recognise traditional theatre, particularly
lakhon phanthang. The answers pointed that the students spent classroom time to practise dance movements of lakhon phanthang as per the choice of their dance teachers. They thought about how to follow, imitate and remember the dance movements shown by their teachers. A student explained that in learning traditional dance-drama, not only lakhon phanthang, the learners have a duty to repeat and protect the form and the aesthetics of the dance movements rather than that of developing a new form based on tradition. The current methods of teaching traditional dance do not encourage learners to think outside this frame. This might prevent students from creatively experimenting with the lakhon phanthang form.

In the students’ perception, the term lakhon phanthang refers to a Thai traditional dance form, which integrates Thai traditional dance with other dance forms in the Southeast Asian region, such as Burmese, Laotian, Mons, Khake (Malay and India) and Chinese, teaching them to differentiate between Thai traditional dance and other non-Thai forms. However, a study of lakhon phanthang does not motivate them to have an interest in the primary dance styles of each nationality and the relationship between Thai dance and that of other ethnic groups, learning to share the culture and art forms of the South East Asian region. Lakhon phanthang is recognised by dance teachers, students and artists as a Thai traditional dance form in which the form is a hybrid one obtained by combining Thai with non-Thai dance movements. The aim of this hybridised style is to convey a sense of the Other in the Thai production. Lakhon phanthang does not aim to present the original styles of other forms (Jongda interview). The concept of lakhon phanthang, as cultivated in Thai dance, reflects the notion and the expression of Thainess. Thai people can draw from non-Thai art and cultures, making them Thai: this is the Thai way (see Philip Cornwel-Smith 2005). Therefore, it is unsurprising that lakhon phanthang
does not excite an interest in original non-Thai dance styles: it is always perceived as being Thai.

As I mentioned earlier, the assessment of *lakhon phanthang* is not about inventing a new *lakhon phanthang* but about duplicating the traditional forms. Thus, the roots of non-Thai dance styles in *lakhon phanthang* are not evident to the students. Furthermore, *lakhon phanthang* seems less admired than other traditional dance styles among the students. From 2009 to 2013, the Thai solo dance project has been an important compulsory examination of the senior students at PAD. For this examination, students are expected to present their expertise in traditional dance and they have to demonstrate that their dance skills are advanced. Interestingly, the dances and episodes based on *lakhon phanthang* have been selected only by an average 15% of the examinees. In contrast, the performances of *lakhon Nai* and *lakhon Nok* were selected, on average, by over 25%. These figures show the students’ view of *lakhon phanthang*. Chommanard Kijkhun, a Professor at PAD states in the interview that because of its dance movements, *lakhon phanthang* represents unsophistication and is not linked to Thai dance customs. Vasinarom proposes that *lakhon phanthang* is less a solo or duo dance than other traditional dance genres (interview). Both statements seem to indicate that the characteristics and form of *lakhon phanthang* are the reason why it is an unpopular choice for the solo dance examination. However, Whutthichai Khathawi, a former dance student at PAD who selected a short episode from *Rachathirat* repertoire for the Thai solo dance project in 2009 (see fig. 28) states that

Each Thai dancer has their individual dance style.

Someone may be better suited to dance very well in *lakhon nai*.

In the case of *lakhon phanthang*, in my opinion, this genre has
different dance movement styles from other Thai dance forms.

*Lakhon phangthang* has special dance techniques, which are difficult to master to reach the aesthetic standards of *lakhon phanthang*. To perform *lakhon phanthang* well, the dancers need to practise hard not only the dance movements but also their acting. (Kathawi interview).

Kathawi’s statement provides a different viewpoint on *lakhon phanthang*. His perspective reflects on the issue that the *lakhon phanthang* style is not suited to all dancers. *Lakhon phangthang* is regarded as a Thai traditional theatre but its characteristics of hybridity make it less traditional form. From the viewpoint of dance aesthetics, however, traditional *lakhon phanthang* plays such as *Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat* are framed by ancient customs and rules. The dance movement style requires a special skill in representing the ethnicity of the characters in the play, for example, the swaying shoulders and torso and the off-body balance techniques. All these techniques are rather dissimilar from those of other traditions of Thai dance such as *lakhon nai* and *lakhon nok*, which the students have more chances to practice. These are the reasons why *lakhon phanthang* is not a popular selection of traditional dance in qualification exams.

Thai traditional dance studies at PAD enables the traditional *lakhon phanthang* form to survive without distorting it, maintaining the standard and the high quality of the traditional art form. However, whether this traditional form will be developed in the modern world is definitely a challenging proposition. The problem of performing arts studies in Thailand is mainly a lack of development in the teaching methods, which can encourage students to develop traditional theatre in
a changing society. As Rutnin states, traditional teaching methods limit the creativity of the students. The study of theatre in Thailand needs collaboration and a sharing of the professional experiences of both traditional dance teachers and modern dramatists (‘The Development’ 16-18).

![image](image_url)

Fig. 28. *Lakhon phanthang Rachathirat* in a solo dance examination of a senior student of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in 2009. Image courtesy of Whutthichai Khathawi.

On the basis of my personal experience in teaching Thai traditional dance, I concur that the development of traditional theatre through the educational system in Thailand does not enable students, realistically, to innovate. For example at the *Wipitassana* event the aim is to promote the aesthetics of Thai dance and theatre among the general public and to encourage students to experience the process of managing a theatre production. The theatrical productions of PAD, are mostly presentations of *lakhon nok* because of the aesthetic expectations of audiences and the dance skills of students (Muangsakorn, Vasinarom, and Pothivetchakul...
It seems that \textit{lakhon phanthang} has survived in Thai society in the academic context but \textit{lakhon phanthang} is running into difficulty, as it seems to be stagnating. Lack of freedom under the supervision of dance teachers, the restrictions of curriculum and a traditional teaching method impede the future development of \textit{lakhon phantang}.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Pichet Klunchun, a well-known Thai contemporary artist, posted on his Facebook page on 3\textsuperscript{rd} March 2014: ‘Do not let the old norms limit the opportunity to learn new things. New things derive [develop] from the old knowledge, however we won’t know new things if we are only learning by repetition…The most important thing is not to allow yourself and those around you to lose a chance to learn new things.’ Pichet’s statement reminds me of a quote by Damrhung that ‘dance, whether traditional or modern, can be beautiful, but it risks dying if dancers just copy and repeat what they know without trying something new’ (‘From Phra Lor’ 116). Thai traditional theatre today is transmitted in Thai society by the repetition of the old dance choreographic patterns through the performances at the Thai National Theatre and the dance curriculum in the Thai educational system. By considering the survival and development of \textit{lakhon phanthang}, the resulting picture reveals the existence of other forms of Thai traditional dance-drama and theatre.

Nowadays, preservation is the major framework for ensuring traditional theatre’s survival in Thai changing society. Traditional dance and theatre are regarded as representative of Thai national identity which Thai artists have a duty to protect and preserve. Consequently, traditional dance-drama and theatre are narrow and rigid, the duty is to ‘preserve but not develop’ (Jungwiwattanaporn interview).
Productions are typically re-produced and dance movements are repeated without awareness of how Thai traditional dance and theatre can serve the aesthetic needs of new audiences. Krom Silapakorn has modified some theatrical elements such as costume, comic scenes and the prelude dances, but the repertoire, performance structure and dance customs are still similar to the dance forms of the twentieth century. The traditional dance-drama and theatre of Krom Silapakorn are embedded as a standard among Thai audiences and traditional dance practitioners’ perceptions.

The educational system allows a transmission of the form and concept of Thai traditional dance-drama and theatre to a new generation of Thais. The learning and teaching of lakhon phanthang in higher education is informed by the customary way of practising Thai traditional theatre forms. The dance choreographic patterns, music, singing, costumes and other theatrical elements devised and fixed by Krom Silapakorn are in the dance curriculum. Most Thai traditional dance teachers in universities have been trained in Thai dance at conservatoires run by Krom Silapakorn, which are located across country. Additionally, there are sometimes artists from Krom Silapakorn who are invited to teach in universities. There is perhaps an answer to why Thai traditional dance and theatre are still conservative and repetitive. In the perception of dance teachers traditional dance, especially traditional dance inherited from the royal court, is seen as fundamental to developing the dance knowledge of students. Hence the new traditional theatre that has been modernised to serve popular needs has been largely ignored by the dance educational system.
Notes

1. The *Don-Tri Thai Rai Ros Lue* runs on the second or the third Friday, and *Sri Sook Ka Nattakam* runs on the last Friday of every month. *Silapakorn Concert* shows are on the second Saturday and *Natakam Sang Keet* is performed on the first and second Sunday of every month.

2. The Office of Performing Arts, Krom Silapakorn or *Sam-Nak Karn Sangkit*, was established in 1933 under the name *Panaeng Lakhon Lea Sangkit* (The Division of Dance-Drama and Music). The division had the duty of continuing and promoting Thai performing arts as national arts. Staff and members of the division were the dance artists, trained in royal dance troupes and in private dance troupes. After the first school of dance-drama and music in Thailand, *Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart*, was founded in 1934, the dance artists of *Panaeng Lakhon Lea Sangkit* additionally functioned as dance teachers in the school. Since then, the students and members of dance-drama and music division have performed together. After the expansion of the educational system, which impacted upon the structure and development of *Rong Rian Nataduriyangkhasart*, *Panaeng Lakhon Lea Sangkit* was separated from the administration of school in 1942. Both organisations had their own productions. *Panaeng Lakhon Lea Sangkit* changed name many times until at present *Sam-Nak Karn Sangkit*. (Rutnin, Dance Drama 171-178; Rutnin, ‘The Development’ 11-15 and Ungsvanonda 15-16)

3. The term ‘traditional repertoires’ of *lakhon phanthang* in this sense refer to dramatic stories of *lakhon phanthang*, with characteristics and theatrical elements transferred from the royal court and ancient dance troupes of the nineteenth century to Krom Silapakorn. Dance choreographic patterns, music and singing, play scripts and costumes were standardised and taught to students at Bunditpatanasilpa Institution, Krom Silapakorn. The traditional *lakhon phanthang* has been widely disseminated to performing arts curricula of higher educational institutions in Thailand.

4. *Phra Lor* story was dramatised in 1908 by Prince Narathip Phraphanpong, a younger brother of King Chulalongkorn, who was the owner of a private dance
troupe under royal patronage and invented a new hybrid genre of Thai dance-drama and named it *lakhon phanthang* (see chapter 1).

5. *Rachathirat* was introduced among Thai literary circles by Chao Phraya Phra Klang (Hon) under the royal order of King Buddha Yodfa Chulalok. It was first translated from the Mon chronicles into Thai prose. Some Thai scholars argue that *Rachathirat* was not only for entertainment purposes but also political ones as it exalted the nobility and the king, as protector of the realm (Sartraproong 3). In the midnineteenth centuries, *Rachathirat* was dramatised by Thim Sukyang (Luang Phatthanaphongphakdi), a playwright of Chao Phraya Mahintharasakdithamrong dance troupe, and was performed by the members of the troupe at Siamese Theatre and Prince Theatre of Chao Phraya Mahin.

6. In Thailand, there are three *Phra Lor* versions. The first one is *Phra Lor Norraluk* composed by Krom Pharratchawang Bavorn Mahasak Polseap, the second king of the reign of King Nangklao. The second one is *Phra Lor* by Chao Phraya Thewet Wongwiwat composed in the reign of King Chulalongkorn and the third one is *Phra Lor* by Prince Narathip Phraphanphong, which was composed in 1908 under the King Chulalongkorn’s advice (see Silapakorn 1970). In 1948, the first *Phra Lor* production of Krom Silapakorn based on the *Phra Lor* play script of Prince Narathip was presented at Silapakorn Theatre rehearsed by Mom (Khunying) Phaeo Sanitwongseni or Mom Achan, a head dance master of Krom Silapakorn at that time. However, the production of that time presented only a selection of three scenes, namely Scene 4: Tam Kai Pu Chao, Scene 5: Kaw Suan Mung Song from the middle part, and Scene 2: Phra Lor Kaw Hong Phra Phuen Phra Pang from the final part (Manissa 61).

7. **Torn Ton** or Beginning Part:
   - Scene I: Pu Chao Khow Wang
   - Scene II: Pu Chao Yok Luk Lom Lae Thon Sarm Chai
   - Scene III: Phra Lor Tong Sanae
   - Scene IV: Chao Pu Tang Tab Pi
   - Scene V: Tab Pi Pu Chao Plon Mansuang
Scene VI: Phra Lor Klang Jon Jak Mansuang
Scene VII: Phra Lor Jak Mansuang

_Torn Klang_ or Middle Part:
Scene I: Phra Lor Kam Maenam Kalong
Scene II: Long Srong Seang Nam
Scene III: Phra Phuen Phra Pang Cham Haruethai
Scene IV: Tam Kai Pu Chao
Scene V: Kaw Suan Mung Song

_Torn Tai_ or Final Part:
Scene I: Phra Phuen Phra Pang Toon La Phra Chao Ya
Scene II: Phra Lor Kaw Hong Phra Phuen Phra Pang
Scene III: Phra Lor Kaw Su Prasart Mung Song
Scene IV: Phra Chao Ya Yu Tao Pichai Pisanukorn Hai Lang Phra lor
Scene V: Phra Chao Ya Tang Plon
Scene VI: Pikat Phra Lor

8. The scenes are as follows
Scene I: The bed-chamber of Princess Muang Srong
Scene II: The bed-chamber of Pra Law
Scene III: Ka Long River
Scene IV: Into the forest
Scene V: The royal garden of Muang Srong
   Part I: The arrival of Phra Law
   Part II: Nang Ruen and Nang Roi meet Nai Keaw and Nai Kwan
          (Phra Law’s servants)
Scene VI: The bed-chamber of Princess Muang Srong

9. Pi Phat Mon ensemble is a group of musical instrument consisting of _ranat_ (wooden xylophone) Mon oboe.

10. Neolanna dance style is a combination of ancient Thai northern dance and fine art styles and contemporary dance expression. This dance form was developed by the members of the Department of Thai Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiangmai
University, Thailand. The major dance characteristic is the off-balance of the torso and the ‘S shape’ body position. Music and costumes are based on ancient Lanna styles however the choreographer has freedom in creating movement and also the music. Thus the dancers perhaps perform different dance movements each time. (See Rojjanasoksombon 2006)

11. *Hua Mongkut Tai Mangkorn* is a phrase used in a negative sense. It implies starting with something but ending with another thing.

12. In mid July 2012, the South Korean popular music piece Gangnam Style was released and gained popularity over Asia, Europe and America within six months. It was the most viewed video on YouTube in 2012 (Bairner 87).

13. At present, there are 23 universities based teacher training colleges located in provinces across the country offering a bachelor Degree in Thai Dance and Performing Arts.

14. *Phya Phanong*, is a new *lakhon phanthang* play composed by Montri Tramote and other Krom Silapakorn staffs in 1958 after the traditional dance and art school was first setting in Thailand (see chapter 2).
Chapter 6: Lakhon Phanthang: Survival in Death

Introduction

This chapter will focus on lakhon phanthang in the context of Thai ritual funerals. I will discuss how traditional dance-drama and theatre speak to local communities and how such forms might develop in a community context. In this chapter, I reflect upon my experience as performer of lakhon phanthang and dance in phanthang style. I locate myself as a dancer to provide a sense of how lakhon phanthang and dance in phanthang style engage with the death ritual. In Thailand, performances at a funeral aim to bring people out of their state of sorrow by providing humour with what we refer to in Thai as sanuk-sanan (see Polachan 2013). Lakhon phanthang does not provide comedy but it generates the same sense of fun as sanuk-sanan through its novelty. I would like to suggest that lakhon phanthang offers something new and creative when performed at funerals.

Krom Silapakorn and academic institutions have their own way to preserve lakhon phanthang. The dance form is not being currently developed, unlike the 1980s with the Phuchanasibtid productions of Seri Wangnaitham. Lakhon phanthang, as a national art, is among the ‘fixed traditions embedded in cultural institutions within the state apparatus’ (‘From Phra Lor’ 110). ‘Most Thai people have learned that all these forms [e.g., khon, lakhon nai, lakhon nok] exist in society but they never use them so the arts are preserved but not developed’ (Jungwiwattanaporn interview). Here, I would like to explore this issue from a different angle, looking at how lakhon phanthang is continuously being reinvented through social events, especially in connection with death rituals. The death ritual is a rite of passage, which involves the transition from one phase of life to another. Arnold Van Gennep
describes rites of passage as having three phases: separation, liminality and aggregation. Funerals separate the dead from the world and human society but aggregation occurs at the end of the ritual process to reinstate normal social life into the community of the living (see Gennep 1960). Lakhon phanthang and dance in phanthang style in the funeral ceremonies relate to this phase of aggregation.

*Lakhon phanthang* and dance in phanthang style are attached to funeral ceremonies to alleviate the sadness of separation. These events acknowledge the sorrowful ambience of separation but the entertainment provide a sense of joy and happiness which brings mourners back to the community. I see the conflict between sadness and joy in the death ritual as creatively productive. From my practical experience, I have learned that *lakhon phanthang* or dance in phanthang style are allowed to develop formally in this ritual while maintaining their own characteristics and aesthetics. Generally, the death ritual denotes a separation or ending. But for *lakhon phanthang* and phanthang dance style, the funeral event marks the beginning of a new phase of development and creativity.

**Ending but Beginning**

In 2011, I returned to Thailand to do field work. I went home to Bangkok, happy and enthusiastic, to collect data. I did interviews with Thai dance scholars, friends, Thai dance artists, and my pupils at PAD of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University as well as at Krom Silapakorn. The time in Bangkok in 2011, for my study, was very bright and clear even though at that time Thailand was afflicted by major floods. On 10th November 2011, I received the very sad news that a friend’s mother had died from heart disease. Two months later, on 10th January 2012, a close friend died from blood infection. For the family members and close friends of the
deceased, these funeral events signified the departing from this life of a beloved relative or friend. One might assume their funeral was a very sad event. However, Wong presents a different viewpoint in her study about music and performance in Thai death ritual, suggesting that

Funerals are not mournful events but are traditionally quite upbeat, with emphasis on sanuk sanaan, or fun. Buddhism teaches that death is a release from suffering and a gateway to the next life. Entertainment generates an atmosphere of gaiety. At another level, music and dance are intended not for the living guests but for the deceased (104).

The typical Thai Buddhist funeral is in two parts, the funeral proper and the cremation. After people die, the dead body is taken for the bathing rite, in which family and friends pour water over one hand of the deceased. It may be arranged at the temple or at the house of the dead person. Then, the dead body will be placed in a coffin and brought to the temple or wat for a funeral event, ending with a cremation. The funeral, which takes three to seven days for ordinary people and sometimes a hundred days for high-ranking, wealthy, elite people and for the royal family, will start in the evening of the day when the body is brought to the temple. The coffin will be placed in the centre of one corner or one side of the hall with pictures of the deceased and a shrine with some lit candles and burning incense and decorations of flowers and wreaths. Every day from around 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. guests come to the wat where the funeral is being held and pay their last respects to the deceased by performing krab, bowing their heads and placing their bare palms on the floor, and
then, sitting in and outside the hall, listening to the monks chanting. A snack box or even a full meal will be provided to the guests after the chanting is over. The cremation event will be held after the funeral proper. The coffin will be moved to the crematorium. It is carried outside and placed on an ornate cart. A procession takes place to the crematorium led by a few family members carrying the picture of the deceased and an incense pot and behind them there are the monks holding a white thread, which is attached to the coffin while walking to the crematorium. The procession circumambulates the crematorium three times in a clockwise direction. Then the coffin is placed in the crematorium waiting for the cremation.

As for my mother’s friend and my friend’s funerals, my colleagues and I, including the students at the Performing Arts Department, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, performed at for these funerals. The performances aimed to honour the deceased and entertain guests. Thai custom dictates using music and dances in major rituals and at social events (Myers-Moro 219). During the three days of these funeral events, family members and guests came to the temple before the cremation to listen to the chanting by the monks. Each night from 6 to 8 p.m., there were three to five performances during intervals between the chanting and recitation by the monks. The performers were dance teachers and students of PAD of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The event was like other funeral cremations, the sala suad sop (prayer hall) was decorated with flowers and wreaths from the mourners sent as a last regard for the dead person. The coffin was placed at one side of the hall and at the front of the coffin there was a space for guests who showed their last respects to the deceased and which was a stage for the performers. Guests sat on plastic chairs, set in a line facing the coffin in the sala suad sop, waiting for the monks to end their chanting and for the performances to begin.
What Performance and Why?

Generally, there are no Thai dance customs specifying the performances at a death ritual, however in this context the selected performance piece and/ or music and singing should be related to death or separation. In fact, the most popular performance at funerals is *khon*, however it is mostly performed only on the day of cremation due the high cost of hiring *khon* performers for the funeral. Therefore in the days prior to the cremation, short dance pieces based on *lakhon* are mostly selected to entertain guests rather than *khon*, to offset funeral costs

The funeral for Sompis Nimithut, my mother’s friend and for Komsorn Tanathammatee, my close friend, took place at Wat Tritosatheap (Tritosatheap Temple) located in central Bangkok, near my work place. Over the three days before the cremation, there was a performance-intensive funeral due to the fact that the deceased were a Thai traditional dancer and a dance teacher at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University respectively. My colleagues and I were responsible for selecting, rehearsing and performing the dances for the events. Most of the selected performances were based on *lakhon phanthang* repertoires and dance in *phanthang* style. On both these occasions *lakhon phanthang* repertoires and dance in *phanthang* style were chosen because they were the deceased favourite styles and the deceased were themselves adept at performing them. In other words, these theatrical dance forms were chosen to commemorate their passion rather than out of financial considerations

The performance of *lakhon phanthang* and *phanthang* dance style in the context of a death ritual is not an unusual activity as music and dance are an extra component in the death ritual of middle-class and wealthy people. The most popular and well-known music instrument ensemble for death ritual is *pi phat Mon* (Mon
A Mon instrumental ensemble is first mentioned in connection with a Thai funeral in 1862 for the Thai royal funeral of Queen Thepsirin, one of the wives of King Mongkut and the mother of King Chulalongkorn, who was a Mon. The correspondence between Prince Damrongrachanubhâb, and Prince Narissaranuwatiwong, the younger brother of King Chulalongkorn, states that *pi phat Mon* at funerals became a ‘fashion’ as a result. It was first used for a royal funeral, and then commoners imitated the royal funeral pattern. People assumed that at a funeral there must be a *pi phat Mon* so it was a must at the event of a ‘*sop phu dee*’ (high-class deceased) (Damrongrachanubhâb, and Narissaranuwatiwong 249). In Thai Buddhist funerals today, a *pi phat Mon* will be hired to perform mostly at the funeral of high- and middle-class people and of those people whose career or life was related to music and the arts.

*Pi phat Mon* is a music ensemble providing a non-Thai music accent or sound, so-called *samniang*. The different *samniang* songs or in Thai the *phleng ok phassa* contain twelve different music accents that constitute the main music and singing for the funeral accompanied by *pi phat Mon* (Wong 123). As mentioned in a previous chapter, one main characteristic of *lakhon phanthang* is the *phleng ok phassa*, the non-Thai music accent that accompanies it and which is obtained by mixing Thai musical instrument with non-Thai ones. In short, *phleng ok phassa* accompanied by *pi phat Mon* fundamentally links *lakhon phanthang* and the *phanthang* dance style to a Thai funeral.

The funerals, on the one hand, may be a very sad event for the family members of the deceased. On the other, the atmosphere of fun or *sanuk sanan* is retained through the entertainment at the event. The music and singing accompanied by *pi phat Mon* are a good form of entertainment at the funeral and Wong states that
Its performance at any funeral is always a high point: its virtuosity and gradual build up in tempo is simply thrilling. Although the medley can take up to forty-five minutes to perform, it is still a crowd pleaser: it is accessible and exciting, and it tends to transport funeral participants from somberness to gaiety. In short, *Phleng Sipsaung Phaasaa* [the twelve different music accents] is fun, and its mood and character is fundamentally linked to its association with Otherness, the non-Thai, the exotic (123).

*Lakhon phanthang* and *panthang* dance style are similar in the way they entertain. Komsorn Thanathammatee, a former dance teacher at PAD Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University gave me an interview before he died and said that *Lakhon phanthang* repertoires are similar to a soap opera but this is presented in the form of traditional dance. The plot and theme are pure melodrama, which contains happiness, sadness, joyfulness and sometimes exaggerated sexual passion. Thus, when the audiences in the funeral watch *lakhon phanthang*, it seems like they taste various food flavours. They will not be bored and go deep into the sadness caused by the death of their beloved friends or family.

*Phra Lor* and *Rachathirat*, the traditional *lakhon phanthang* repertoires, are popular at death rituals. The scenes and episodes selected for the funeral rite mainly
relate to the poignancy of separation. *Phra Lor* is the most popular, especially the scenes ‘Phra Lor La Mae’ (Phra Lor Leaves His Mother), ‘Phar Lor Siang Nam’ (Phra Lor Crosses the River) and ‘Phra Lor Long Suan’ (Phra Lor Enters the Royal Garden).

Fig. 29. The scene ‘Phra Lor La Mae’ (Phra Lor Leaves his Mother) in *lakhon phanthang Phra Lor* as performed at the funeral of Komsorn Tanathammatee, Wat Tri Tossthep, 12 January 2012. With Whutthichai Khathawi (as Phra Lor, right) and Dr. Kusuma Thepparak (as Phra Lor’s mother, left). Photograph by Phakamas Jirajarupat.

For the *Rachathirat* story, the short scene ‘Saming Phra Ram Rob Kamani’ (Saming Phra Ram Fights Kamani) from the episode ‘Saming Phra Ram Arsa’ (Saming Phra Ram Volunteers to Fight) is a popular scene of traditional *lakhon phanthang* performed at a funeral ritual, especially on cremation day. The fighting between Saming Phra Ram, a Mon soldier, and Kamani, a Chinese army leader, does not seem to be directly relevant to the death ritual, although at the end of the scene
Kamani dies in battle. However, the Mon and Chinese music accents, the exotic Mon and Chinese costumes and the lively dance movements attract the audience’s interest. Traditional lakhon phanthang such as Phra Lor, Rachathirat and Phya Phanong are well-known repertoires among Thai audiences. The popularity of these repertoires provides the audiences at the funeral with scenes and a dancing style that are easily understood and recognised within a short time (Tanathammatee interview). In addition, some music, songs and stories from lakhon phanthang have been presented in other media such as radio, TV and film. Therefore, audiences are familiar with the traditional lakhon phanthang stories.

**Lakhon Phanthang in the Death Ritual**

Traditional theatre forms like lakhon phanthang, which normally convey a sense of national culture and identity, are brought into the Thai way of life through their inclusion in ritual events. Music and dance in the Thai Buddhist ritual is a sign of wealth and mark the social status of the deceased and his/her family, and offer entertainment for the guests, though some of these arts are of interest to only a few people (Wong 115). Lakhon phanthang is introduced together with other activities as entertainment, bringing the mourner out of the sadness of separation. Lakhon phanthang at a Thai funeral may not increase a Thai audience’s interest in traditional theatre. However, it is a way to make traditional music and dance continue to exist in society. Additionally, such rituals allow choreographers to create new performances based on traditional theatre that have the potential of enriching theatrical arts.

I was a dancer at both the funeral for Sompis Nimithut on 12-14 November 2011, and Komsorn Tanathammatee on 11-13 January 2012. On each night of the funeral days, the monks chanted for four rounds with an 8 to 10 minutes interval at
the end of each round. There were 3 to 5 short performances during the intervals of each chanting round. There was no live music accompaniment on the funeral days so a digital recorder was used. The performances were based on *lakhon phanthang* and *rabam* in *phanthang* style. *Rabam* in Thai-Laotian style and Thai-Burmese style and a short scene from the *Phra Lor* and *Phra Ya Panong* repertoires were selected for presentation.

The *rabam* in *phanthang* style that was performed at these events should be discussed. *Lao Arlai* (Laotian Lament) and *Pama Arlai* (Burmese Lament), the short *rabam* in *phanthang* style composed with new lyrics by Komsorn Tanathammatee before he died, were both performed. These dance pieces used the same lyrics. I do translate the lyric:

*The Candle is melting but the light shines to the sky.*

*It is likely to be the deceased, whose virtue is still alive in the world.*

*Alas, fate separates us, my heart is full of yearning and dread.*

*Sadness and mourning are habitual occurrences when the world is without you.*
My dearest, your death brings tears and sadness to me.

I wish you slept in peace at the golden divine castle.

Your virtue will lead you to the magnificent heaven.

You will stay in the glorious heaven and rest eternally in empyrean heaven and nirvana.

These lyrics do not represent any Burmese and Laotian characteristics. This feature allowed the lyrics to be accompanied in contrasting music styles. Lao Arlai used Thai-Laotian music accents whereas Pama Arlai used Thai-Burmese music accents. The phanthangness of these two performances was derived from the music accents of phleng ok phasa pama (Thai music in Burmese accents) and phleng ok phasa Lao (Thai music in Laotian accents).

The dance movements were created in phanthang dance style by mixing Thai-Laotian and Thai-Burmese dance movements. Lao Arlai was choreographed by Sakul Muangsakorn, a dance lecturer at PAD Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The choreographer intended to use the theatrical elements of lakhon phanthang in making sense of the Otherness in traditional dance in combination with daily life actions (Muangsakorn interview). As I was a dancer in this piece, I can state without a shade of doubt that the dance movements of Lao Arlai were primarily based on Thai traditional dance movements. The leg gesturing of traditional dance was present in little measure in comparison with the hand gestures. There were a few dance movements where dancers lifted up their legs, which in Thai traditional dance is an attitude called kra dok tao. This is a leg position in which the dancers stand on one leg with a bent knee while the other leg is raised with the knee. Muangsakorn states in the interview that
Generally the Laotian dance style as seen in the folk dance forms of the northern part of Thailand does not involve leg gesturing. Thus, Lao Arlai was created in the same way. I [Muangsakorn] wanted to maintain the characteristics of Laotian dance. The different music accents and tunes and the dance movements in phanthang style which represent a non-Thai ethnicity provide the audiences with a different ambience and an exotic dance style but still expresses Thai-ness’.

_Lao Arlai_ in this funeral, as per my experience, was a very easy number to learn. I can remember its dance movements more easily than those of _Pama Arlai_. This is because the dance movements are cast in a very Thai traditional form. The hand positions and leg gesturing are similar to those of Thai dance. There are only a few different technical details, such as the swaying shoulders, which are used in _Lao Arlai_.

Fig 30. _Lao Arlai_ (Laotian Lament) in the funeral for Sompis Nimithut performed by Manissa Vasinaron (left), Phakamas Jirajarupat (center) and Chanitsiree Ruanglertrakool (right). Image courtesy of Sakul Muangsakorn
In the item *Pama Arlai* (see fig. 31), the dance movements were created through a collaboration between Komsorn Tanathammatee and the dancers in the group. I also took part in the collaboration. *Pama Arlai* was created by combining Burmese and Thai dance movements. We devised dance movements to match the meaning of the lyrics. It was interesting that when we danced with lyrics the movements were interpreted and expressed in a Thai dance idiom. In contrast, during melodic and rhythmic sections we made an effort to imitate Burmese dance movements. The jumping, over-bending of the torso and the off-balancing of the body were applied to *Pama Arlai*. We used Burmese dance elements from other Thai-Burmese dance styles of Krom Silpakorn and we also used those movements we saw when watching Burmese dance from Internet video clips. My feeling of being involved in choreographing and performing *Pama Arlai* was one of excitement and I felt freedom when we devised this performance. The term ‘*phanthang*’, which I have used to refer to the style of *Pama Arlai*, released my team and I from the traditional dance frame and expanded our creative framework, allowing us to choreograph the dance as we desired without the constraints of traditional dance customs. The dance movements were newly invented although some parts of the music already had a dance choreographic pattern created by Krom Silpakorn. As the dance was presented at a funeral event, the atmosphere was more informal than in a stage performance.

The costumes of these two dance pieces were newly created without any concern for the traditional Thai-Laotian dance costumes and Burmese dance costumes as set by Krom Silapakorn. Female dancers of *Lao Arlai* wrapped their upper bodies with long cloth and wore the long traditional skirt. This pattern was a mix between Thai middle and northern style.
Male dancers wore a long sleeve shirt and pants, with a pattern imitating the traditional lakhon costumes. The symbolic references to Thai-Laotian costume were a long cloth placed on the shirt over the shoulder of the male dancers and their heads wrapped with a piece of cloth. The costumes were colourful (see fig. 32). However, the costume of Pama Arlai was different in concept. Female dancers’ costumes imitated the Burmese dance costume: it was not exactly the same, but it showed the effort of making the costume match the characteristics of the dance form. The female dancers wore a long hair wig the same as Burmese female dancers and as seen from female characters of Burmese puppets. The skirt was very long and the shirt was translucent (see fig. 33). Male dancers’ costumes followed the pattern of the costume of Burmese characters in Thai lakhon phanthang.
Fig. 32. The male dancers of *Lao Arlai* at the funeral for Sompis Nimithut. Dancers (from left to right): Whutthichai Khathawi and Chanitsiree Ruanglerttrakool. Photo courtesy of Sakul Muangsakorn.

Fig. 33. Female dancers after a performance of *Pama Arlai* (Burmese Lament) for the funeral of Sompis Nimithut. Wat Tri Tossthep, 12 November 2011. Dancers: Phakamas Jirajarupat (left) and Manisa Vasinarom. Photograph by Cheerawat Wanta.
The death funeral was an unexpected event for my colleagues and I, we learnt of the death of Sompis Nimithut and Komsorn Tanathammattee in the morning and we prepared performances with urgency. For Lao Arlai and Pama Arlai, I spent 2 to 3 hours in rehearsal before performing in the evening of the funeral day. In fact, I could not remember the entire dance movements that I had just learned only a few hours previously but it was not a major obstacle to my performance. I realised that as I had been trained in Thai traditional dance for over 10 years, my body could easily connect to the sound, and dance movements would flow even though these were a mix of Thai and non-Thai dance styles. It reminded me that phanthang dance style and lakhon phanthang are a mixed form of Thai and non-Thai dance, they are exotic but Thai. I did not perform Laotian or Burmese dance, I performed Thai dance in Laotian and Burmese style.

There were also many short scenes based on lakhon phanthang that were performed at these events. The scene ‘Phra Lor Khao Suan’ (Phra Lor Enters the Royal Garden), a solo dance titled Long Song Mon (Dance for Dressing Up in Mon Style), a solo dance based on lakhon phanthang Rachathirat and the short scene ‘Kam Pin Kor Fon’ (Kam Pin Makes a Vow for Rain) from lakhon phanthang Phya Phanong were selected for these events. All these lakhon phanthang scenes imitated dance patterns and songs from the lakhon phanthang of Krom Silapakorn but the costumes were modified, with new patterns and colours. The scenes were indirectly related to the death, depicting separation and hopelessness. Lakhon phanthang performances at the death rituals were informed by novelty but the traditional lakhon phanthang by Krom Silapakorn still had an influence over the participating Thai dance artists and played a part in the selection of performances.
Despite this fact, *lakhon phanthang* in the context of a funeral is more flexible than *lakhon phanthang* performed on the National Theatre stage, as can be seen by its costume, music, and dance movements. *Lakhon phanthang* in a funeral context is adapted to suit the event. The performances presented at a funeral need to be short but the aesthetics of the dance movements has to remain and a story should be simultaneously told (Muangsakorn interview).

![Image of Lakhon Phanthang at a funeral](image)

*Fig. 34. Lakhon phanthang Phya Phanong at a funeral. The costumes and props are different from those of performances at the National Theatre by Krom Silapakorn. The god Varuna (the god of rain) performed by Kittikon Boonmee is dressed in the style of Khon and his supplicant Nang Kampin (performed by Jutatip Sangkao) and her maid Kamyuang (performed by the cross-dressed Thanarit Rodthadsana) are in folk-style costumes. Photograph by Phakamas Jirajarupat.*

It is not an overstatement that *lakhon phanthang* and *phanthang* dance style can not only survive but have also great potential to be developed in performances held at death rituals. As mentioned earlier, the *phanthang* dance style could be adapted or changed depending on each funeral. Thus, choreographers have to develop
or work with the dance pieces to make each dance or scene appropriate to each funeral.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Fig. 35. Lakhon phanthang Phra Lor** at a funeral. Phra Lor is performed by Komsorn Tanathammatee. Photograph by Phakamas Jirajaruapat.

*Lakhon phanthang* and *phanthang* dance style in the funeral ritual are more flexible and connect more directly with the people than performances at the National Theatre by Krom Silapakorn. The audience at a funeral event may not be a group of people who are interested in traditional dance and they do not generally attend a funeral explicitly to see a traditional performance; however they learn that these traditional dance forms can be entertainment. In addition, and with good commercial sense, *lakhon phanthang* and *phanthang* dance style can be requested and hired to perform at further ritual events, thus providing employment for young graduates of performing arts courses.
Conclusion

The space occupied by *lakhon phanthang* today greatly differs from that of the past, especially when this dance form emerged in the twentieth century. *Lakhon phanthang* used to be a popular theatre serving the needs of audiences in Siamese society at the time of its encounter with modernity. This theatre style was a dynamic form which had the potential to change and be adapted to make it contemporary and lively. *Lakhon phanthang* today has become a traditional theatre form. The hybridity that characterises it has been distorted and frozen. *Lakhon phanthang* productions presented by Krom Silapkorn on the Thai National Theatre stage are fixed and surrounded with the aura of museum pieces. However, *lakhon phanthang* performed at ritual events demonstrates a different viewpoint. By changing the space and conditions of performance, *lakhon phanthang* in the context of a ritual event, especially a death ritual, is alive with creativity and novelty. Social events allow dance artists to reinvent traditional theatre without concerns about dance customs or preservation. *Lakhon phanthang* and other traditional dance and theatre forms in the context of death rituals aim to bring people out of their sorrow and return them to the community. The purpose of dance in ritual is different from that of dance as representative of national identity. Outside of official national frameworks, there is more space for creativity, agency and personal meaning. Ritual occurrences provide an opportunity for different forms and meanings to come together in dialogue. The funeral of Komsorn, or ‘Hall’ as I called him, was not simply a re-enactment of a set dance, it involved me dancing to a song of Hall’s own composition. In fact, before Hall died he was at work on an experimental *lakhon phanthang* at my instigation. Hall did not finish the play before his untimely death, and thus our joint plan to innovate *lakhon phanthang* in collaboration went unrealised. I cite him here out of
respect for his talents. He will always be in my heart and memory and I can only hope that his talent and work in *lakhon phanthang* and *phanthang* dance style will live forever.
**Conclusion**

While living in the UK for my studies, I was often questioned by my foreign friends about the place I came from, Thailand. They wanted me to tell them about remarkable places to visit such as beaches, temples, bars and nightclubs. They wished to know what they should and should not do when they visited Thailand. One thing I never failed to mention was Thai food. For Thai people, food is not only something to eat but a way of life, belief and culture. My friends asked me to suggest the Thai food they should try in Thailand, which is quite different from the most popular Thai dishes available abroad like *pad Thai* (Thai stir fried noodle), *kang keaw wan* (green curry) and *tom yam* (spicy and sour soup). I did not hesitate to respond that they should try Isan food, a spicy food from the north-eastern part of Thailand. When visiting the country, should they wish to try food that can give a real feel for Thailand, not only in taste but also in culture, Isan cuisine is the answer.

I cannot tell them that Isan is an original Thai cuisine because it is not. The ingredients are local Thai vegetables and herbs, but the recipes and cooking styles are derived from Laos. Thai people improved on the recipes of the Laotians and on the cooking to suit the Thai kitchen and Thai taste, and this is how it becomes Thai food. Isan food, such as *som tam* (papaya spicy salad), *kai yang* (grilled marinated chicken), *larb* and *nam-tok* (spicy mince / grilled meat salad) and *kaw neaw* (sticky rice) provide the typical Thai food taste, salty, sweet, sour and spicy: sometimes it has a strong smell. However, the typical flavour, especially the spices, Thai chillies and herbs and the way of eating, the food being better savoured if eaten with bare hands rather than using fork and spoon, can give one the feel of something really
Thai. The ambience while having Isan food is more informal, as it is not served in luxury restaurants but often at simple outdoor eating places.

Thinking of Isan and its food culture allows me to reflect on *lakhon phanthang*. Beginning as a hybrid dance-drama form in the nineteenth century, it was developed and modernised and it became the *lakhon phanthang* of today, a Thai traditional theatre form of Krom Silapakorn. However, *lakhon phanthang* is different from other traditional theatres such as *khon* and *lakhon nai*. It has a kind of informality about it that is unusual in a traditional theatre. To use a culinary analogy, *lakhon phanthang* is like eating Isan food. *Lakhon phanthang* is very Thai but informal, allowing room for jokes and humour and providing a playful flavour, which other Thai traditional theatres cannot accommodate. *Lakhon phanthang* has Thai dance elements and other national theatrical elements as its main ingredients. It is ‘cooked’ by merging or blending the different elements until a new form appears, which is neither purely Thai nor foreign.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I am a Thai woman with a conservative Chinese family background. The mix between Thai and Chinese traditions and customs as effected by my family allowed me as a Thai to experience Otherness through the Chinese customs of my family. There is a parallel with the *lakhon phanthang* I discuss in this thesis. *Lakhon phanthang* reflects the perspectives of Thai artists over other national theatre styles. This theatre form reflects Otherness as found in Thai traditional theatre forms. Thai identity and Thai multiculturalism are presented via this theatre form. In short, *lakhon phanthang* enables Thai people to look at Otherness.

This thesis, ‘*Lakhon Phanthang*: Thai Traditional Theatre in the Modern World,’ reflects on the contribution of Thai traditional theatre in a changing society.
The thesis charts the traditionalisation of *lakhon phanthang* in its transition from the commercial to the traditional theatre as national art heritage. The route followed by this theatre form is very long and it interacts with social, political and economic developments. The historical development of *lakhon phanthang* began as a commercial theatre form patronised by the court in the nineteenth century, reformalised as a traditional dance genre in the 1940s by the Fine Arts Department. The changing Thai society of the 1980s forced the Fine Arts Departments to modernise *lakhon phanthang* and use this theatre form to convince Thai audiences to return to patronise traditional theatre. Today *lakhon phanthang* is taught in the dance academies in Thailand. The research in this thesis presents the juxtapositions and aesthetic shifts of the form over time with a focus on the revival and survival of *lakhon phanthang* from the past to the present.

In chapter 1, my main focus was on the historical background of *lakhon phanthang* and the emergence of the new theatre form. In the late nineteenth century, the hybrid dance and theatre forms were seen in the commercial theatre named Siamese Theatre (changed to the Prince’s Theatre in 1882) of Chao Phraya Mahintherasakdithamrong. *Lakhon phanthang* was a new theatrical form in Siam and a cultural product of its time. The hybrid dance and theatre form of this period reflected the multicultural society of Siam and the changes in royal policies as also the commercial transformations of urban Bangkok in the nineteenth century. The key factor in the emergence of this hybrid dance and theatre form were the multi-ethnic communities of Chinese, Burmese, Laotians and Mons in urban Bangkok and the need for novelty in the period of Siam’s encounter with the West. The new hybrid dance and theatre forms of the commercial theatre accelerated the transformation of patronage from being royal-centred to involving the patronage of a general public.
However, these dance and theatre forms returned to the patronage of the royal court through the *lakhon* of Prince Narathip Phraphanpong. The royal court patronised this dance troupe as a royal company directly supported by the King. I caution that the hybrid dance and theatre forms of this period had not yet been classified or named *lakhon phanthang*.

The birth of *lakhon phanthang* as a named form was in the 1940s after the revolutionary period. In chapter 2, I discussed the transformation of dance and theatre from court entertainment and commercial theatre form to dance and theatre for the nation, and mapped out the aesthetic shifts occurring in this period of great political changes. The political and cultural policies of the country encouraged the formalisation and the standardisation of all art forms for the new Thai state. Therefore, the hybrid dance and theatre forms were revived and developed as the traditional art of the nation. One of the key factors in standardising and formalising was the establishment of a School of Music and Dance under the authority of Krom Silapakorn in 1934. The form, context and content of theatre and dance became an important part of education programmes. The formalisation and standardisation of *lakhon phanthang* was carried out under the notion of Thainess, which intersected with nationalism. The definition of *lakhon phanthang* in this period demonstrated that the Otherness in *lakhon phanthang* did not only refer to other nationalities or races outside Thailand but it included the small Thai ethnic groups and the provincial towns outside Bangkok. *Lakhon phanthang* after its formalisation and standardisation reflects how Thais looked at themselves and the world and their interaction with the world beyond Thailand.

A characteristic of *lakhon phanthang* in the 1940s was the revival of the old plays and dance movement styles of the *Lakhon* of Chao Phraya Mahin and *Lakhon
of Prince Narathip by the artists and teachers of Krom Silapakorn, who had trained in these dance styles in their youth. There were five older repertoires revived to performance standard in the lakhon phanthang style. The most famous among them were Phra Lor and Rachathirat. In the 1950s, Phya Phanong, a new lakhon phanthang play, was created by the staff of Krom Silapakorn. The costumes, music and song, and the dance movements presented a mix between Thai traditional theatre elements and other national theatre styles. The cast of lakhon phanthang in this period was made up of female dancers, even when characters were male.

Lakhon phanthang was modernised in the Seri Wangnaitham’s Phuchanasibtid production of Krom Silapkorn in the 1980s, the main focus of chapters 3 and 4. Lakhon phanthang was chosen as a performance style that could be modernised to reinstate the popularity of Thai traditional theatre. The fact that this theatre form is more informal than other traditional theatre forms allowed artists to insert new material and adapt the form to suit new modern audiences’ taste; Phuchanasibtid demonstrated that lakhon phanthang was more accessible to Thai audiences than other traditional theatre forms. This production bridged the gap between old Thai traditional dance-drama and modern theatre. The modernised lakhon phanthang Phuchanasibtid was achieved by adapting a well-known modern narrative to traditional performance, using new methods based on Western theatrical techniques such as individualised characterisation and inner motivation shown in the acting, inventing a new costume design pattern without adhering to the traditional costume codes of Thai theatre, and using a mixed gender cast in the performance. A new phenomenon was generated by this production, namely the mae yok who supported Krom Silapakorn and became fans of Krom Silapakorn dancers. Phuchanasibtid showed that the modernisation of Thai traditional theatre could
encourage Thai people to understand, appreciate and cherish tradition and the value of the arts as national heritage, based on the notion that Thai arts belong to all Thai people. Chapter 3 discusses and contextualises the historical background, as noted above, whereas chapter 4 provides a translation of the lakhon phanthang Phuchanasibtid play, in particular the episode Mae Tup Kon Mai (The new general) adapted by Seri Wangnaitham from the modern novel Yakhob to Thai traditional theatre plays.

Chapter 5 is focused on two areas, discussing lakhon phanthang of Krom Silapakorn at present and lakhon phanthang in the academic context. The focus of this chapter is the survival of lakhon phanthang in Thai society as a traditional theatre in a modern and globalised world. The development of lakhon phanthang in this period differed from the modernisation of lakhon phanthang during the Seri Wangnaitham’s period. The lakhon phanthang productions of Krom Silapakorn are currently based on the traditional lakhon phanthang productions from the 1940s and seem to be frozen in time. Lakhon phanthang is based on old repertoires such as Phra Lor and Rachathirat and Phya Phanong but new lakhon phanthang repertoires are absent.

The notion of traditional art has become narrow and is all about preserving the dance form as a national art. The traditional lakhon phanthang productions have been modified for new audiences by abridging the plays, creating new prelude phanthang dance forms, and inserting a contemporary comedic dialogue, going no further. Krom Silapakorn at present has many young artists trained in modern theatre techniques and other dance styles from overseas. They can be a valuable human resource for this conservative art organisation as they have the potential to develop the dance and theatre of Krom Silapakorn. But due to the hierarchical structure of the
organisation the young artists can do nothing without obtaining permission from the senior dance artists and this stifles their creativity.

The lakhon phanthang of Krom Silapakorn today has become a traditional dance choreographic pattern to be used in the traditional dance curriculum of the dance academies in Thailand which is the second focus of chapter 5. Lakhon phanthang in the academic arena is dominated by the transmission of lakhon phanthang from Krom Silapakorn to other institutions. Lakhon phanthang in chapter 5 is analysed on the basis of my experiences in teaching lakhon phanthang at the Performing Arts Department (PAD) at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The analysis demonstrates that lakhon phanthang in the dance educational system is a frozen form even though ‘education’ would imply development and growth. This dance form has been taught in a traditional style by using the lakhon phanthang of Krom Silapakorn as a model. In addition, social media and the Internet, especially YouTube and Google, have become major resources for students in reviewing their dance lessons and searching for other dance repertoires they can copy. The students learn the dance movement style based on three traditional lakhon phanthang repertoires: Phra Lor, Rachathirat and Phya Phanong. A modern lakhon phanthang such as Phuchanasibtid is neither mentioned nor taught in class. The transmission of lakhon phanthang in a university context does not encourage students to learn about the roots and routes of a hybrid dance theatre before it became fixed as lakhon phanthang. The multi-ethnic society, commercial theatre and modernisation of this dance form are not discussed in class. Lakhon phanthang is perceived by the students as a kind of Thai traditional dance form, which is informal and requires knowledge of specific dance techniques to perform.
The lakhon phanthang in the context of rites of passage is the main focus of my chapter 6. Lakhon phanthang acts as a form of entertainment in the funeral ritual, bringing people out of the sadness surrounding the funeral events to the stage of aggregation in this rite of passage. The lakhon phanthang discussed in this section demonstrates the creative freedom of artists in modifying the traditional dance form, without concerning themselves with specified dance customs, in order to communicate with people and the local community. It reintroduces novelty through the agency of the artists who come to entertain guests at the funeral with lakhon phanthang and phanthang in dance style. The characteristics of lakhon phanthang and phanthang in dance style performances at a funeral event are the conciseness of the presentation within the timeframe of the event. The content and context of the dance and theatre forms relate to the death and commemoration of the dead person. The costume and the dance movement styles can be modified from those of the traditional form. In addition, lakhon phanthang and phanthang in dance style at each funeral event may be presented in different versions even though the same repertoires are performed. Lakhon phanthang in the context of rites of passage reflects the survival and development of the theatre form through the patronage of ordinary people just like the hybrid dance and theatre forms of popular theatre in the nineteenth century. This theatre form has been modified and recreated in many ways as its name ‘the theatre in the thousand ways’ denotes. The label traditional theatre should not be seen as an obstacle in modernising and developing lakhon phanthang in Thai society today.

The long historical development and the route taken by lakhon phanthang, as presented in this thesis, reflect the notion of ‘very Thai’. Thai people are sometimes seen as very considerate and at other times very serious and strict. The phrase mai
pen rai (do not worry, it is okay), which Thai people always use represents the ambiguous feelings of Thai people (Chaimanee 41). A tourist visiting Thailand who does something which should not be done in Thailand will hear the words mai pen rai from Thai people but will never know how they really feel. They may be angry or they may be thinking something quite different from what they are saying. This is the notion of ‘very Thai’. Everything appears to be easy and laid back, but it is not quite that way.

All things can be Thai if presented and adapted to suit the Thai way of life. The stir-fry Vietnamese noodles of the Ayutthaya period were adapted to pad Thai after the revolutionary period and became a signature Thai dish for tourists. I mentioned the notion of ‘very Thai’ here because a study of lakhon phanthang in this thesis demonstrates its application to this theatre form. Thai artists borrowed other theatrical elements and mixed them with Thai traditional theatrical elements and then claimed that the new hybrid form is traditional Thai theatre, with the words mai pen rai appended as they appropriated something from the Other. In this way the illusion of ‘very Thai’ can be sustained even while artists actively appropriate and translate non-Thai culture into a national idiom.

The result, as this thesis demonstrates, is that lakhon phanthang is a gateway to Thai traditional theatre, allowing Thai dance practitioners to work in a traditional theatre mode beyond the limitations of older conventions. The one limitation of this theatre form is the presentation of Thai traditional dance movements: however, there is no rule or measurement for the dance movements to be seen in performance. Thus, lakhon phanthang has the requirement of presenting Thai traditional dance movements but the directors or choreographers have the right to determine how much Thai dance movement will be shown in a production. This is the special
feature of *lakhon phanthang*, which is not present in other traditional theatres. The informality of *lakhon phanthang* makes this dance form accessible to audiences and easier to the eye than other traditional dance and theatre forms. I would like to propose that *lakhon phanthang* within the traditional theatre genres reflects the quality of being a popular theatre, which I would call ‘a popular theatre of the nation’. This theatre form is modern, adapted and modified to serve the needs of an audience of today even though it is a national art form that was patronised by the king in the past and by the government at present.

The value of this thesis is not only in the contribution of new and critical perspective on the study of Thai traditional theatre, it also offers the scope for further research on the latter. I was trained in Thai traditional dancing for over fifteen years and I am a traditional dance practitioner and lecturer: my experiences tell me that learning and teaching Thai traditional dance is restrictive. I did not have the courage to step out of the traditional frame and critique Thai traditional dance in Thailand.

There are few textbooks in Thai discussing Thai traditional theatre and its relationship with world performance or explaining the relationship between Thai traditional theatre and other Southeast Asian dance and theatre forms. Most Thai traditional theatre forms are studied and researched as individual art objects which have no relationship with other traditional forms and are dissociated from the socio-political reality. Thus, Thai research papers and postgraduate theses are mostly presented on topics such as historical study, dance movement notation and the choreography of Thai dances. However, this thesis ‘*Lakhon Phanthang*: Thai Traditional Theatre in the Modern World’ aims to provide something different. It analyses Thai traditional theatre through a new perspective. I have examined *lakhon phanthang* as an art form which exists in interaction with society. *Lakhon phanthang*,


in my view, is a living art, which will either develop or die depending on whether it reflects societal changes.

In 2015 Thailand will be part of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) under the notion of ‘one vision, one identity, one community.’ I would suggest that it is crucial to be aware that the arts and cultures of the Southeast Asian region are shared and exchanged all the time. Thai traditional theatre is a national art heritage, but it has interacted with other forms from the region from time immemorial. This thesis offers a case study to shift the understanding of Thai traditional theatre as one art among others in the region. Additionally, this thesis will help Thai traditional dance artists and scholars develop a deeper knowledge of the similarities as well as differences of the world’s theatre. This development will encourage Thai artists and scholars to have greater understanding of the integration between Thai traditions and the international evolution of theatre, which can lead to the further development of Thai theatre arts.
Glossary

Inao Tang Java, dance-drama based on Inao story. Javanese costume is applied in the performance. The music and song sometime accompany by gamelan ensemble. The script, verse and dance movement are presented in Thai style.

Khon, masked dance-drama based on the Rammakien, the Thai version of the Ramayana.

Lakhon, dance-drama

Lakhon Dukdamban is a new Thai dance-drama operetta created in the nineteenth century by Prince Narisaranuwattiwong and Chao Phraya Thewetwongwiiwat. Performances imitated the Western opera style. The performers of this dance-drama form are required to sing and dance by themselves. The dance movement styles, music and song and costume as elaborate as lakhon nai.

Lakhon Nai is a court dance-drama that focuses on elaborate, elegant theatrical characteristics. The dance movements are presented in the traditional style, with graceful, sophisticated movements. The action and emotional expression of characters are very delicate and reflect the sophisticated manner of the court customs (Rutnin, Dance, Drama 11). The music and songs are played by the Thai orchestra. The costumes represent the rich embroidery and elegant style of the ancient performance costumes. The stories used for lakhon nai are Inao, Ramakien, Unaruth (tales of Krishna’s grandson), and Dalang. The dancers are all female. The story recitations are very refined.

Lakhon Nok or the dance-drama performed outside the court is less elaborate than lakhon nai. Lakhon nok presents stories from Thai literature and Buddhist Jataka tales (Rutnin 12). The dance movements are based on traditional Thai dance figures but they do not require, graceful, sophisticated movements. The expression of feeling and emotion is via broad farce and direct expression (Montrisart 114). Lakhon nok is the entertainment of ordinary people, so the material of the costumes might be simpler than that of lakhon nai. Lakhon
nok dancers are mostly male dancers, playing both female and male characters.

**Lakhon Phuying** is a kind of court dance-drama performed by female court dancers (*phuying* means female). From Ayutthaya (1351-1767) to the early Rattanakosin period (1782 to present), *lakhon phuying* was a king’s entertainment performed only in the royal court in honour of the king. The commoners were not allowed to practice or perform *lakhon phuying* in public. During the reign of King Nangkloa (King Rama III, r.1824-1851), however, *lakhon phuying* and several court entertainments were banned in the royal court because of the king’s interest in religion and in creating a balanced national budget.

**Lakhon Phut** is a Thai spoken dance-drama emerged in the nineteenth century.

**Lakhon Rong** is a Thai traditional singing dance-drama.

**Likay** is a Thai popular dance-drama which some scholars believed developed from Islamic chanting. Performance mainly serves a middle class audience and the local people. *Likay* generally presents stories based on recent or contemporary situations.

**Ram** and **Rabam**, dance in Thai traditional style.

**Phleng Ok Phasa** is a kind of Thai musical genre in which the tune and accent of the music represent the national music accents and tunes of Others. Sometime it is called *sib song phasa*, which means music of twelve accents. The nationalities in *phleng ok phasa* presented to the communities in Bangkok include Indian, Chinese, Cambodian, Burmese, Mon, Laotian, Malay, Nguei (Tai hill tribe), Japanese, *farang* (Western), Yuan (Vietnamese) and Kha (a hill tribe) (Virulrak, *Likay* 22). In each, the *phleng ok phasa*’s title indicates the nationality of the song, such as *phleng jeen keb bubpha* (Jeen means Chinese in Thai), *phleng mon du dao* (Mon nationality) or *phleng burma dern* (Burmese nationality) (Sukvipat 139-140). Thai musicians compose *phleng ok phasa* by using different kinds of drums that create new rhythms in song.
These kinds of songs accompany many dramatic and dance performances, including *lakhon phanthang* and *likay*.

**Yun Khrung** refers to the style, form and design of Thai traditional *lakhon* and *khon* costumes.
บทละครพันทางเรื่อง ผู้ชนะศิบิศ ของยาขอบ
ตอน แม่ทัพคนใหม่
เสรี หวังในธรรม ออกความเป็นกลอนบทละคร

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- เปิดฉาก -
(สมมติเป็นฉากห้องพระโรงเมืองตองอู เสนามณี ชูนิว ต้องหุ้นยี แนบมา นัยโทรศัพท์ เสนายูจิตำมที่มังตรายอดกับพระทัยราชา)

มังตรา - องค์พระยา เจริญศิริชัยต้องอู แสดงว่า ทรงพระบาง พระทรงน่า พร้อมหมายถึง มังตรา ลั่นบ้าน บัลลังชัย
(จะต้องออกแล้วด่านข้าเห็นถ้าบวกของยอยไม่สะดวกจะทำ)

เห็นจะเด็ด ชูนิว จ้าวตะลึง คิดไม่ถึง ซึ่งหน้า ประหม่าไหว สะดุ้งจิต คิดฉงน ใจที่ เอื้อดิน โยกส้า มากทาน

มังงาย - ฝ่ายขุนวัง ฝ่ายง่าย ภูษาสวรรค์ ศิริราช ทุกข์กับ กลับมาสู่ ตัวผิดจิต คิดนั้น กบฏกับ ระลึกในพระจุล ยุทธภูมิ
ขอยิดยา พระคุณ อันยู่เกล้า ได้จินตนาการ ข้าพเจ้า จาลัย
จะร้องเนื้อ บัลลังชัย พระทรงธรรม ไม่เคลื่อนตกลง หลวงวัน อันตราย

มังตรา - พระเอนสิ่ง นิ่งนั้น พึ่งคว้า ยังประมาท หลวงวัน มีเคราะ
แต่นะ จอมขยับรัย ระมัดกาย ซึมให้คลาย วางลง ไม่คงนาน
ค่อยยายตา หาคน ระบายเคือง เพื่อเริ่มเรื่อง เศรษฐแล่น แสนไพศาล
ข้าพเจ้าต้อง ต้องหุ้นยี มีทันนาน พระเริ่มพาล ค่อนแคะ เรื่องเห็น

มังตรา - ท่านเป็นชุมพลเมืองต้องอู
ก็จะเจริญรัตติวี้รินฐานของใจพลันธ์ยินดีชูต้องอู้ย ณ
สมภูมิให้กลับพลังใจแปลงให้ทรงหนัก ทุกครั้งที่พลบทามี่ใด
ก็จะได้ยินแต่เดี่ยวไม่ต้องใจหยุด ละเสียงร้องเท่าการงานแห่งลั่น
ก็แล้วท่านชุมพลต้องหุ้นยีล่า มีเคยได้เป็นชื่นดีบ้างแล้วหรือ
ต้องหุ้นยี่- ต้องหุ้นยี่ฟังเต้ารัดสิริรักษ์ ถ้าค่ายบ ปั่นป่วน คิดด่วนถ้าวิสัย ตรงสุด ยุติธรรม ไม่เอาถ้า- พระราชานุสรณ์สมัย หรูหรี้หรือแบ่งเดิน ลากสิ่ง ตรงเสี้ยว ไม่เยี่ยงบ่อย ข้าพเจ้าฟังตรัส ค้ำรับรู้ ปั่นป่วน ข้าพเจ้าฟังตรัส ถ้าข้าพเจ้าทุกความ ตามสัจจัง
หรือข้าพเจ้าทุกความ เลือกพลัง จึงพลัดพลัง แห่งกล่อม แต่เป็นตัว แม่ทัพ นั้นสัมบูรณ์ ท่อนก กลศาสตร์ ประมาณเหลือต้องตายแผ่แย่ยับทัพบกเรือ ใช้คิดครวญคร่า วิสัยคงตรงสุด ยุติธรรมไม่อาจอําพรางเข้าด้วยเจ้าปัญญาประนมกรเหนือเกล้าเฝ้าประณตแล้วกล่าวพจน์ตรงเที่ยงไม่เบี่ยงเบี่ยงซึ่งทรงถามได้รับบรรยายขอถวายทูลความตามสัจจังอันพลไพร่ไปตายในกองพลย์หรืออ่อนล้าเหลวไหลไร้พลังจึงพลัดพลังแห่งกล่อม แต่เป็นตัวแม่ทัพนั้นสัมบูรณ์ท่อนก กลศาสตร์ประมาณเหลือก็เพราะเรื่องแม่ทัพจึงยับเยินมังตรา- บังอาจนักถามอย่างตอบอย่างนี้หรือขุนพลผู้เฒ่าเจ้าปัญญาอายุยิ่งชราลงแทนที่จะไว้วางใจได้ความกล้าในตัวกลับตกอยู่ด้วยคณาคดีเมื่อวาระล่าข้ามก็ยิ่งที่นี้แล้วจะยิ่งปล่อยให้ฝุ่นคุณยายเป็นอิสระอยู่ดังนั้นเป็นการควรแก่ต้นแห่งและฐานะและตำแหน่งผู้ว่าราชการทหารของท่านแล้วหรือมังตรา- ข้าพเจ้าขอเดชะข้าพเจ้าต้องหุ้นยี่ที่จะได้ดีในรัชกาลแห่งตะเบงชะเวตี้ก็หาไม่หากแต่เป็นขุนพลผู้เกียจก็คงกล่าวถึงแต่เห็นด้วยอีกอย่างผู้ทรงศิลปะบรรลุเมื่อวาระการใดควรแก่หน้าที่การนั้นต้องหุ้นยี่ย่อมรู้จักยิ่งแก่ชราใช้จะเพิ่มด้วยความแค้นเสียแต่ชั่วความแก่นั้นเป็นเหตุให้เพิ่มเฉพาะความกล้าในอย่างที่จะกระทับสิ่งที่มีดีมังตรา- ถ้าเช่นนั้นกู....ตะเบงชะเวตี้ขอออกคำสั่งให้จับกุมตัวจะเด็ดเดี๋ยวนี้
ต้องหุ่นยี -  จะเด็ด คักล้างหาของพระเจ้าอุยหัวบันเจริญอยู่หรือ ทำเจริญเห็นเอ่งหนึ่งกว่าไม่อาจด้านความจริง ข้าพเจ้าก็แน่จะเป็นผู้เชื่อ แต่ก็เชื่อในความสุจริตแห่งท่านอยู่ โดนท่านถามที่จริงชม 서로ยอมรับความผิดเช่นนี้

มังกราย - เกิดเป็นชาวต้องอูชีตัวหนึ่ง แสนชำชิ่งช้างแสนน่าสรรเสริญ จะดื้อต่อข้าหรือเจริญ กินเห็นกิน เรียกร้อง สิ่งต้องใจ ข้าพเจ้าเป็น ของชา เจ้าขีด ให้ถูก หรือผิด ก็ยอมได้ จะทานนัด ขัดคำ ไปทำไม่ถูกอยู่ไป เหมือนกับ ดับชีว่า เข้าคนแนะความผิดนั้นก็ยิ่ง ชื่นชื่อ น้อยอย่า เพาะก้าว ได้เกิด ด้วยก้าวความรักกับตัว ไม่มีดี เกิดจากก้าว ดูจริง และยิ่งดูดี ถ้านั้นต้อง บังคับ หรือจับจุ้น มันก่อปุ๋ย วัตถุไม่ มิใช่คน

มังตรา - ขิชา ตูป ใช้จะเด็ด กองใด ยากบาง ดูดัง เมืองต้องอู แหล่งน้ำลายปาก ทำกี่ ยังมาสอน ทุกข์เข้าชีติ ทรพพล ได้คนดัก มีนตั้ง ทะเลต่อ น้ำลายปาก ปากประกาศยิ่ง ใจคต ทรพทธ อย่าเยี่ยงเยี่ยงมีคนดักบางรี่ เหลือเหล่าก็ต่างนัก เนื้อร่างต้อง อาญา หมายว่ายา แย่ทุ่มร้า ยักษ์ยักษ์ ช่วยช่วยนะ หมายถ้าเป็น เช่ินเสริญ ดูจริง ที่ฟักปุ๋ย ชาทิ่ม เหล่เขี้ยน ถูกใครที่ชื่น คุณควร กว้างน่า เพราะใจลำ ลำลำลำ นรคุณ

มังกราย - มังตรา ขอทำนั้งกล่าวแต่ซื่องเหตุชั้นเม็ดเด็ด อย่าก้าวร้าวเสียดี ให้มากกินไปเลย

มังตรา - ทำไม มิจะทำไมภัย ใช้จะเด็ด

มังกราย - หากข้าพเจ้าสามีนักอุมมักตั้งตอบระดับเจริญแล้ว ทำไมข้าพเจ้าจิตต้องภูเขาชั้น เมื่อทุกหนึ่งทัพ แต่กันนั้น ทัพแน่นบางสีสีของก็เป็นลักษณะ ว่าข้าพเจ้าได้ส่งข้ามว่าสุขใจ เข้าทัพเก็บและทัพเชื่อน้อยเรือให้ไว้ห่างกัน กับหากคิดตั้งคำยิ่งในที่นั้นแล้ว จะเพื่อตั้งแพร่ประดิษฐ์ คำข้าพเจ้า ทัพแน่นบางและสีสัน ได้บอกได้ลำ แต่มีการทำของต่างหาก ตัดเอาต่อต่อตัด ทัพของบุญในปัจจุบันได้ประคับอย่างชายชาติทหาร แล้วท่านกลับจะมาพาเอากับข้าพเจ้า อย่างนี้จะมีเรียกกว่าบ้างความดีต่ำหรือ
มังตรา - ออกไป เอาให้จะเด็ดออกไป เอาผู้ไปฆ่าเสียเดี๋ยวนี้
(เสนอหนึ่งนี้ตลอดออกถ้าเกิดขึ้นว่ายังมีลูก)

เสนา - ขอพระยาถามถึงพันแก่ส้า บัตรให้พระยาถึงก็ถึง
มายาข้าฝ่ายเป็นการตัว พระเจ้าข้า

มังตรา - ข้าไม่ว่าง จะมากวนใจอะไรกันเวลานี้
(เลือกตันขึ้นขึ้นทางด้านขวามือ มหาเถรออกไปทางด้านขวางมือ)

มหาเถร - มังตราข้า เพราะความเป็นระเบียบระดับ
ท่านถึงกับทอดทิ้งความมั่นคงและเดินย้ายแก่เรื่องที่จงใจเสียหวั่น

มังตรา - มหาเถรข้าพเจ้าย้าดินย้วยที่นั่น ข้าพเจ้าอยู่ธรรมดา

มหาเถร - ใช้ ถูกต้อง แน่นอน พระองค์ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า

มังตรา - ข้าพเจ้ายังจะเด็ดอยู่ ว่าจะเด็ดนั้นเป็นศิษย์หัวจงหัวใคร
ข้าพเจ้าจึงมีมอบหมายพระคุณเจ้าในยามนี้

มหาเถร - ก็ยังดีอยู่ ข้าพเจ้ายอมใจ ที่พระองค์ยังทรงความวีระกล้า
กล้าที่จะพูดคำตรงกับข้าพเจ้า จะนั่งนิ่งข้าพเจ้าไปยังไปอย่างไร
อันนี้มาประโยชน์อันใดพระองค์มิได้แล้ว ซึ่งจะขอสิ่งจากคำตรงบาง

มังตรา - ข้าพเจ้าหวานกับ พระมหาเถรจะพอสมมิตร ด้วยศิษย์เอกของพระคุณพ่อ
โดยเหตุผลทางสมกันไม่

มังตรา - อันคนคดตรองแต่เดิมนั้น ไม่ควรผู้ทรงคือจะเกื้อกูล
ช่วยคนบาป ที่ไหน ได้บุญ เมื่อคนเดินสูนุน
หาคนบ่อย ปากปาก รักต้องอุ แล้วอันนั้น กริยาภูมิ
แล้วไหน ไม่คิด พิจารณา มาปากปาก รักษา คนตาล

มหาเถร - มหาเถร นั่งนิ่ง พิจมังตรา ข้าพเจ้า ร้องไห้ ดังใจ
แล้วนี้ว่า ถ้ามัน อยู่ข้างนี่ ก็เห็นที่ มังตรา ได้ไง
จึงลงกล่าวว่า ต้องเอาอันนี้ทำพิธี เมื่อเห็นยีนราคากรรณาอันใด
แม่แต่ศิษย์ เยขอน มาแก้กินข้ารี่

มหาเถร - ถามหน้าไม่สมควร ใช้ชุมนวังพระพุทธเจ้า
เจ้าเห็นใจคนอย่างข้าพเจ้าบางแง ข้าพเจ้าอยู่ในนี้

มหาเถร - ฉันยังนั่งนิ่ง ใช้ชุมนวังพระพุทธเจ้า
เจ้าเห็นใจคนอย่างข้าพเจ้าบางแง ข้าพเจ้าอยู่ในนี้

มหาเถร - ฉันยังนั่งนิ่ง ใช้ชุมนวังพระพุทธเจ้า
เจ้าเห็นใจคนอย่างข้าพเจ้าบางแง ข้าพเจ้าอยู่ในนี้
เมื่อก่อนที่มือทั้งสองจะมาถือตาละปัตร์ก็ด้ามทวนมาแรมปีเจ้าช่วยบอกผู้เป็นใหญ่ในแผ่นดินเขาด้วยเถอะว่าก่อนที่ต้องอูจะรุ่งเรืองและสุขสงบจนทะเบนเดือนที่ช่วยไม่ได้พูดก็จะเด็ด มันเกิดเพราะฝีมือของมังสินธูผู้นี้ฉะนั้นใครอย่ามาพูดให้หมิ่นน้ําใจกูเป็นอันขาดว่าอาถรรพิเศษซึ่งด้านหน้ามาพูดแทนจะเด็ดมันนั้นก็โดยได้พิจารณาแล้วว่ามังสินธูเคยทำประโยชน์อย่างใดแก่มงตราผู้บุตรเมงกะยินโยก็อยากจะให้จะเด็ดศิษย์มังสินธูที่ประกาศให้แก่มังตราผู้บุตรมองลงมาเป็นโทษที่ปรารถนา

มหาเถร - ช้า...ใช้ทะกะยอดินนี้ถือสายยื่นคำถูกหรือเวลาเนรมทุกภัยโดยเหตุโดยผล

มหาเถร - พูดได้สมมุติประโยชน์ของข้าพเจ้าพยายามสมบัตินันจะส่งการอันใดพระมหาเถรท่านก็รับทำและปฏิบัติต่อมาคือแม่พระบิดาของข้าพเจ้าเสวยราชสมบัตินั้นจะสั่งการอันใดพระมหาเถรท่านก็รับทำและปฏิบัติโดยดีก็แล้วจะเด็ดเล่าข้าพเจ้าสู่ว้างไข่ไปให้ทำกันอันใดที่ด้วยครั้งคั่นให้ทำส่งท่าทางท่านเต่านบัตร상담ผู้คนรับรายการนั้นสิ้นสุดข้าพเจ้าไปทำศิลป์ด้วยทันทีพวกพวกที่เป็นประโยชน์เท่าไรพระอาจารย์ก็จักอยู่เห็นอยู่และรู้ดียังจะมาพาที่ขออภัยพลไพร่ตายดื่นเป็นหมื่นแสนจะทดแทนเขาบ้างอย่างไรหรือจะให้ตายแล้วก็แกล้วไปก็จะใคร่ขอถามแต่ตามตรง

มหาเถร - มหาเถรจึงว่ามหาบพิตรทุกชีวิตยับยุ่ยเป็นผุยผงฆ่าจะเด็ดชดใช้ให้ตายลงใช่จะฟื้นคืนคงจงใจชาวตองอูตายแผ่เพราะแปรฆ่าต้องตั้งหน้าฆ่าแปรเพื่อกำาไรจะมาฆ่าพวกกันด้วยอันใดขอจงได้ยับยั้งฟังอาถรรพิเศษจึงกล่าวจะเด็ดเป็นคนคดหรือกบฏก็ยังต้องกังขาไยพระองค์ไม่คิดพิจารณาให้.OrderBy ถ้าแม้แต่ไม่ได้จึงให้ตาย
มังตรา - ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่นที่มาขอโทษ ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้ เหล่าพระอาจารย์ ที่ตั้งใจมาขอโทษ ก็ขอโทษให้ได้ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้ มีอยู่เนื้อใจอยู่ค่ะ จึงจะขอโทษผู้ที่จะมาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้ ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น เพื่อให้ผู้ที่จะมาขอโทษให้ได้ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

มหาเถร - มังตราอย่างนี้ท่านจะบอกว่าผู้ที่มาขอโทษ หรือเป็นผู้ที่จะมาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้ มาตราอย่างนี้ท่านจะบอกว่าผู้ที่มาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

มังตรา - ก็แล้วถ้ามันกลับไปแล้ว ปฏิบัติต่อผู้ที่มาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

มหาเถร - ถ้ากระนั้น ข้าพเจ้าจะอุทิศ ปฏิบัติต่อผู้ที่มาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

มหาเถร - พอพระทัยพอใจแล้ว ข้าพเจ้ารู้ว่าพ่อแม่ ท่านจะอยู่อย่างนี้ที่มาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

มหาเถร - พอพระทัยพอใจแล้ว ข้าพเจ้ารู้ว่าพ่อแม่ ท่านจะอยู่อย่างนี้ที่มาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

มหาเถร - พอพระทัยพอใจแล้ว ข้าพเจ้ารู้ว่าพ่อแม่ ท่านจะอยู่อย่างนี้ที่มาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

มหาเถร - พอพระทัยพอใจแล้ว ข้าพเจ้ารู้ว่าพ่อแม่ ท่านจะอยู่อย่างนี้ที่มาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

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มหาเถร - พอพระทัยพอใจแล้ว ข้าพเจ้ารู้ว่าพ่อแม่ ท่านจะอยู่อย่างนี้ที่มาขอโทษ แต่ถ้าเป็นผู้อื่น ข้าพเจ้าจะขอโทษให้ได้

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มังตาลุกสะบัดหน้าเเดินเข้าโรงไปเฉยๆ มหาเถรขอบใจต้องหวุ่นยี และขอโทษขุนวัง จากนั้นมหาเถรแจ้งแก่ขุนวังและต้องหวุ่นยีว่า จะขอปรึกษาด้วยการเตรียมทัพให้จะเด็ด แล้วส่งกำชับให้จะเด็ดกลับไปวัดก่อน

- การแสดงหน้าม่าน -
(จากเล่ยนออกดินเรียบ จะเด็ดตัดข้าว)

จากเล่ยน - มังตาล ยังใจ ยังใจ ท่านก็เด็ดพันออกมาแล้ว ข้าพเจ้าคิดว่าจะ เพราะเป็นห่วงอยู่

มังตาล - ท่านยังไม่ได้ตอบข้าพเจ้าว่าท่านจะมาบอกพระมหาเถร

จากเล่ยน - ใช่ ข้าพเจ้าแจ้ง แต่ที่ทำไปนั้นก็เพราะความเป็นห่วงท่านเป็นสำคัญ ข้าพเจ้าได้ปรึกษากับขุนวังและต้องหวุ่นยีก่อน จึงทำไป

มังตาล - ถ้าพระมหาเถรเข้าไปไม่ทัน ข้าพเจ้าก็คงจะตายไปแล้ว (มองหน้าจากเล่ยน) พี่ท่านใส่หน้า ที่เป็นคนน่าความมหาสนพระมหาเถร

จากเล่ยน - ช่างเด็ด มังตาล ยังใจ ยังใจ ท่านก็เด็ดพันออกมาแล้ว ข้าพเจ้าคิดว่าจะ เพราะเป็นห่วงอยู่

มังตาล - ท่านยังไม่ได้ตอบข้าพเจ้าว่าท่านจะมาบอกพระมหาเถร

จากเล่ยน - ใช่ ข้าพเจ้าแจ้ง แต่ที่ทำไปนั้นก็เพราะความเป็นห่วงท่านเป็นสำคัญ ข้าพเจ้าได้ปรึกษากับขุนวังและต้องหวุ่นยีก่อน จึงทำไป

มังตาล - ถ้าท่านยังไม่ได้ตอบข้าพเจ้าว่าท่านจะมาบอกพระมหาเถร

จากเล่ยน - ใช่ ข้าพเจ้าได้มั่นใจได้เป็นผู้ดีตามท่าน ไม่ได้มีดีย์กับขุนวังหรือ

มังตาล - ถ้าท่านยังไม่ได้ตอบข้าพเจ้าว่าท่านจะมาบอกพระมหาเถร

จากเล่ยน - ข้าพเจ้าได้มั่นใจได้เป็นผู้ดีตามท่าน ไม่ได้มีดีย์กับขุนวังหรือ

มังตาล - มาด้วยท่าน แต่ข้าพเจ้าจะแยกข้าวังแต่ล่าพัง ข้าพเจ้าจะ ป่านนี้จะไปเที่ยวชมเมือง เบื่อแล้วก็คงจะกลับมาบาง

(มหาเถรออก เรียkmังตาล ข้าพเจ้าไปนั้นแล้วว่า ข้าพเจ้าไปปรึกษาชุมนุมวัจจุมะระดับและต้องหวุ่นยีข้าพเจ้าล่า ต้องเห็นหน้าในเรื่องที่จึงจะเป็นแม่ทัพไปเด็ดเป็น จึงอยากจะถามว่าข้าพเจ้าได้คิดเห็นว่าอย่างไรบ้าง และจะเอาพลไปมากน้อยสักเท่าใด)

มังตาล - ถ้าท่านยังไม่ได้ตอบข้าพเจ้าว่าท่านจะมาบอกพระมหาเถร

จากเล่ยน - ใช่ ข้าพเจ้าได้มั่นใจได้เป็นผู้ดีตามท่าน ไม่ได้มีดีย์กับขุนวังหรือ

มังตาล - ถ้าท่านยังไม่ได้ตอบข้าพเจ้าว่าท่านจะมาบอกพระมหาเถร

จากเล่ยน - ข้าพเจ้าได้มั่นใจได้เป็นผู้ดีตามท่าน ไม่ได้มีดีย์กับขุนวังหรือ
ข้างทัพเริ่มนี้ยังไม่ต้องการเปลี่ยงทหาร เหล่าล้วนไม่ควรที่กลศึก แต่ยังต้องเร่งตีเป็นไม่มีสิ่งใดให้กังวล

มหาเถร - มหาเถร เดินสำรวจ คิ้วกลศึก ดูแลสั่ง ด้วยยุทธ แล้วนั่นนับ หลับตา พยากรณ์ ทุกขั้นตอน ให้เห็น อยู่เป็นครู่ก็จริง จึงรู้สึก บอกแจ้ง แห่งคดี...(มหาเถรแจ้งแก่มังฉงายว่าการศึกครั้งนี้ถึงข้าจะวางใจว่าเจ้าจะเอาชัยได้แต่ก็ยังต้องการความยุติต่อกำลังของเจ้าจะเป็นรองจึงอาจเพิ่มพลังแก่กลศึกเป็นแม่นยำและเจ้าเป็นคนที่จะต้องขยันขันชาญให้จงได้ หากไม่ยั่งยืนจะพ่ายแพ้ครั้งนี้กับการที่จะต้องอ้อมเป็นตัวประกันตามสัญญาที่ให้แก่มังตราแล้วข้างใดจะรบได้เห็นด้วยช่วยเหลือเจ้าในเมื่อทำเช่นนั้นไม่ได้แล้วก็ยิ่งดีที่จะต้องหาใคร สักคนหนึ่งไปด้วยเจ้า)

มังชา - พฤติสม มหาเถร เดินสำรวจ ใครเล่าเจ้าข้าพเจ้าควรจะไปพึ่งผู้นี้ ถือได้ว่ามหาเถร

มหาเถร - ข้าตรวจตรงมองเห็นเป็นเหมาะมั่นคนคนนั้น บั่นทด มหาเถร เศรษฐ เศรษฐภรรยา กับข้านี้ เยี่ยมยิ้ม ถือได้ เจ้าหญิง มีแม่เจ้าให้ ไปด้วย ช่วยเหลือเจ้า เป็นต้องเจ้า ช่วยเจ้า ได้ช่วยเจ้าแต่จะต้อง เชิญมา เพื่อหาเรื่องเจ้าจะเขียนหนังสือถือแทนกายเปิดม่าน ฉากอุทยาน(ตะละแม่จันทราออก)

จันทรา - จันทรา เจ้าจันทรา หาข้าพเจาหลับสู้คนเดียวเจ้าจันทราเจ้าลอยฟ้าคลาคลายคืนเดือนรุ่งเรือง เหนื่อยซ่อนดำ ยามเมฆเคลื่อนเดือนหงาย เผ่าเห็นข้าพเจาจันทรา เสียบห่วง มังชาแม่น้องน้อมขอเจ้ามองหน้า อยากเห็นเจ้าจันทรา คล้ายเห็นจันทรา(กันทิมา แต่งหญิงพม่า)ออกมาเฝ้าตะละแม่จันทรา

กันทิมา - ตะละแม่พิสอนเจ้าจะได้แก่ป้อมพื้นที่จะสุดมิตรก็ยิ่งให้ทำให้ฉันตรงกันมันกับจันทรา จันทราผิดโต ข้าพเจา ไม่ได้ที่จะให้เจ้าพิสูจน์ความภักดีก็เห็นที่จะบรรลุทางล่วงแล้วแต่พระพักตร์จะจันทราก็ยิ่งเจ้าข้าพเจาจันทรา จันทราหลับสู้คนเดียวจันทรา
จันทรำ - ข้าพเจ้ากังวลอยู่ด้วยเรื่องศึกถึงสองศึก
ศึกหนึ่งศึกที่จะต้องจะต้องยกไปตีแปร ศึกนั้นข้าพเจ้าไม่สู้กังวล
แต่ดับอันศึกภายในที่จะต้อง ณ เมืองแปรนั้น
เป็นอันศึกหนึ่งที่ข้าพเจ้าเป็นห่วงยิ่งนัก

กันทิมา - ข้าแต่ละขณะจะอยู่ ฉันจะศึกสงครามและความมั่นคงจะลดลงเรื่อยๆ ณ เมืองแปร
ข้าพเจ้ากังวลไม่ได้แม้แต่หนึ่งกิตติศัพท์ อย่างไรก็ตาม มีบางอย่างที่ต้องการให้ข้าพเจ้า
ในที่มีถูกต้องที่จะทำอยู่ ณ เมืองแปร แต่ในที่มีถูกต้องที่จะทำอยู่ ณ เมืองแปร

จันทรำ - แล้วเรื่องแปรเอ็มคุณดาพระพุทธบุตรนั้นแล้ว เจ้าไม่กังวลหรือไม่มีกังวล
จะทำให้เมืองถึงองค์พระบรมพุทธเจ้า

กันทิมา - ข้าแต่ละขณะจะอยู่
หากจะทำให้เมืองแปรสงครามของยิ่งใหญ่ในเรื่องความสัมพันธ์ระหว่าง
มีบางอย่างที่จะต้องมั่นคงแล้ว ข้าพเจ้าก็คงใช้กำลังอยู่ ณ เมืองแปร
เพราะที่ข้าพเจ้าเห็นและสืบเรื่องกัน
แต่ละขณะนั้นเมืองแปรนั้นจะมีความมั่นคงต่อกัน
แต่ยิ่งยิ่งเมื่อแปรสงครามที่จะทำให้พระเจ้าแปร
แต่บางมั่นคงนั้น
ข้าพเจ้าเสี่ยงใจให้เปล่าเห็นเป็นจริงจังไม่

จันทรำ - เก้านี้ถึงจึงได้เพียงใด

กันทิมา - ก่อนที่พระเจ้าจะตอบรับจะทรงตัดสินใจส่งจักรพรรดิสั่งจักรพรรดิสีกุดนั้น
ได้พยายามกล่าวโทษอยู่อีกครั้ง
ไม่ได้รับการตอบในการอยู่กับนั้น
เพื่อว่าจะทำให้เป็นศักดิ์ศรีหนึ่งที่จะต้องทำให้การมั่นคงใน
แต่ละครั้มที่จะทำให้ถูกต้องและยิ่งกลายเป็นมั่นคง

จันทรำ - นั้นเป็นความคิดและความพิจารณาอยู่

กันทิมา - ข้าพเจ้าแจ้งจึงจะไม่มีอาหาร
ร่างอยู่ใน จักรพรรดิ พระเจ้า
เป็นที่ตั้งอยู่ ที่จะแก้ไขเรื่องราว
ขอให้เน้น ลงสิ่งที่จะทำ
ขอให้เน้น ลงสิ่งที่จะทำ
ข้าพเจ้า ขอให้เน้น ลงสิ่งที่จะทำ
ขอให้เน้น ลงสิ่งที่จะทำ
ขอให้เน้น ลงสิ่งที่จะทำ
ข้าแกล้งถาม นามนาง กกลางหทัย ก็รับว่า มิใช่ใคร คือจันทรา

จันทรา อย่างกับพิศมี ไฟไม่วางเร็วจะมาบางลงบ้างแล้ว เจ้าอย่าคิดเข้ามามันมากระตือเข็ญเป็นอันขาด เจ้าถูกอยู่แล้ว มังตราพิโรธจะเด็ดนั้น เมื่อถูกไฟไม่ปาน ขึ้นไปหาเร็วนั้นที่จะเด็ดเข็ญว่า ความทราบถึงมังตราแล้ว อย่างกับจะเด็ดเลย แม้มีนำเจ้ารี_INCLUDEDผูกมันกับพิศมีจะมี ตั้งคำนี้ด้วยกันแล้วจ้าสินไปดำเนินก่อนเถอะ ถ้าสักครู่ข้าพเจ้าจะตามไป

มังตรา - ตระแนงจันทรา พิชัยครา
จันทรา -(หับป้อมเห็นจะเด็ด) จะเด็ด (ทันสุดนี้เข้าولادกกัน ครูหนึ่งจันทราพักจากต่างออกไปร้องให้)

มังตรา - ตระแนงเถื่อนง่าน เป็นเวลาสิ้นปีที่ข้าพเจ้าตรวจ

มังตรา - เมื่อปรารถนาจะให้มีเครื่องยุทธภัณฑ์

ข้าพเจ้าไม่ถึงแต่จะรู้ว่าในนั้นมีเครื่องมือแล้ว กลับด้วยมากับมวลเย็นจากบานปิดหน้าตระแนงจันทรา (ตระแนงจันทราจะเงียบ) ตระแนงจันทราอยู่ เตนิวนางของจ้าพเจ้านี้ แต่ก่อนกลับอยู่ทานเคยเปลี่ยนใจไว้ว่า ได้ต่อให้ในเครื่องแทนของข้าพเจ้าแล้ว ทุกข์มีการเด็ด wida้กิจไปยังนั้น ก็เลือกเกินนี้แล้ว ยิ่งตระแนงจ้าพเจ้าอันสลายกิจเย็นนั้น เดนิวนางของจ้าพเจ้าเป็นเรื่องไว้พร้อมทุกข์ว่าชื่อเกิดตระแนงจันทราตรงๆเด็ด ตระแนงจันทราเป็นทุกข์ด้วยอันใด

จันทรา - ยังขี้นั่งนั่ง ซื่อสั่งนั่งอยู่ คงจะได้นั่ง คุณบวก เลื่อนหน้า
ไม่มีปี ที่ผ่าน การละมุน ไม่มีเก่า กลับบาง ได้ยินนี้ ความเลื่อนมา ชื่อซื่อ ไม่มีเยี่ยงะ ผู้ติด แช่ขัด แสนยืดตื้น
จะถิงแอบ มั่นหน้า ก็ที่เป็น จะยินดี ข้าพเจ้า ก็อย่าใจ

มังตรา - ใช้อดอกแก้ว ของคุณจันทรา เพียงเห็นหน้า ยอดอนุพัน ก็มีมันได้ ข้าพเจ้าแฝง แสงตา กล้าเสี้ยงโยธำข้าพเจ้าที่นี้ ได้พยานนิ่ง นับประสา ว่าจะได้สุข กลับได้ผู้ดี ชอบข้า ด้วยคำย้าง
มังฉงาย - ตะละแม่จันทราผู้สูงศักดิ์
ขอตะละแม่ผู้สูงศักดิ์ทรงไม่ถามซักสักคำร่ำรำคางไม่แผกผิดคิดอย่างข้างมังตรามังฉงาย-
ตะละแม่จันทราผู้สูงศักดิ์ขอตะละแม่ท่านจงมองดูข้าพเจ้าให้เต็มตาอีกครั้งหนึ่งเถิด
(คุกเข่าลงต่อหน้านาง)แต่เดิมนั้นข้าพเจ้าเป็นเพียงชายผู้หาศักดิ์ตระกูลมิได้
ลำพังวัยจะเต็มเพียงลำพังที่ไหนจะหมายไปด้วยความวิริยะเพียงเพียง
จนอาจเรียนรู้จุ้นวิชาขีดเส้นความและพอกุญช tử้ดอยุคุณสมบัติ
ซึ่งจะเต็มเป็นได้ถึงเพียงนี้ให้ความปรานีแห่งตะละแม่เมืองเองอาจมิเป็นผู้มีส่วน
เชิดชูและปลุกปุ้มมาดอยุคุณสมบัติแล้วยอมตะละแม่มีส่วนสร้างคนผู้นี้ขึ้นมานั้นแล้ว
บัดนี้ถือใจกีกว่าคำเหมือนว่าจึงจะแก่ส่งทำมาให้ข้าพเจ้าไปตายเสีย
เมื่อจาก

จันทรา - ไป...จะเต็ม...(ใจเขาถึงดวงจะเต็มลูกยืนแล้วเข้าขอกอด)

จันทรา - ข้าพเจ้า แจ้งข่าว เขาล่าเขียว ยังไม่ได้ เชือกยืด เช่นคำว่า
แต่ชื่อท่าน มันหมาย ถูกมา จะไม่เกิด ตรอกตรา ได้อย่างไร
โปรดใจ จันทรา มาสู่ท่าน จะรู้ว่า ใครคนนั้นพียุกไหน
ให้นะรัก ในนะจุ้น ต้องใจ หัวใจใคร ในนะจุ้น ท่านจันทรา

มังฉงาย - นางเอก นางแก้ว สมควรแล้ว ที่เป็นนาง กลางใจข้า
ขอข้อความ ตามจิต เข้ามา ผู้เป็นญาติทะเล
ข้าคัดคิด รักอย่าง นางเป็นมิตร ไม่แก้จิต เช่นจันทรา ตะละแม่มี
noise ลักษณะ เบื้องแบน เป็นเพียงแค่ ไม่ชอบ ข้าข่าว แล้วลืมกัน

มังฉงาย - เวลาแห่งการพลัดพรากนั้น ย่อมมาถึงดวงเริ่มต่ำต่ำประทาน
(ดึงนางเข้ามากอด)ตะละแม่จันทราจงเก็บข้าพเจ้า
ขอจำนวนมากได้ดีข้อความที่มีดวงและโลหะกินครองไว้เลย จะเย็นสูง
ข้าพเจ้าจะจากนางไปนี้ คงจะมานั้น
มีใจจากนางแล้วขึ้นแล้วกลับมาสู่ในช่างเสร็จนั้นตก
แม่บั้นแม่นางก็จะยังขึ้นระดับ
จะเริ่มใจไปจักข้าพเจ้าเสมอเมื่อกอนได้สมหวัง แต่ยังจากไป
ข้าพเจ้าก็จะได้รับพยัคฆานะงามแม่ลึกเพียงคำนี้ยัง

จันทรา - ข้าพเจ้า สาวดวงอยู่ ผู้ยี่ตระเปิ้ล ความสัตย์ชื่น ใจรัก สมคลาย
ขอคิด พวกคุณ ผู้ที่ฟัง มาเป็นเกาะ คู่กัน สรรพกิจ
เจ็บป่วยกัน สงบผิดสีไม้หลัก
ให้เรา ศึกป่า แล้วศึกใจยังอยู่รักในใจในสงครามตามประทาน

ไม่ למาร์ก ล่าผ่าย ร่างคาง
มหาเถร - ภูผาออกจากร่าง ขอขอบใจสหายรักตะคะยีมาก จากนั้นมหาเถรเรียกลูกศิษย์ทั้งหมด จะเด็ด จาเลงกะโบ เนงบํา สีอ่อง มีต กอนม ออกมาสังคัตกรรม

มหาเถร - กูมอบให้ ตะคะยี ที่กล้าแก่น เป็นตัวแทน ของกู ผู้สมร ขจัด ทากหนุ่ม ในรายกรรณา แจ้งผู้มือ ปีกษา ขาดดาย ยันคำใด ออกจา ปากของครู นั้นก็คือ คํานี้ เป็นนั้นถึง จงทําตาม ทุกคํา ว่า พากพิค อย่าเกิดด้วย ต้องใจ จงพึ่ง

มหาเถรจึงสั่งทักบั้นแล้ว แจ้งแก่ตะคะยีและบรรดาศิษย์ว่า คืนนี้เป็นคืนเดือนพิษภูผาภูผาที่ติดกัน เรา ไปทางนี้กันเดี๋ยวนะจะทําพิษภูผาไม่เช้ามาไปให้ด้วยตามตัวราชภูผาภูผา ภูผาที่กูจัดให้อนุ่นคนเดียวให้แก่กระชับสิ้นสุดว่า เนื่องที่กูให้ไปติดต่อกันนั้นได้ความร้ายอย่างไร มีตบอกว่าในวังส่งข่าวมาแล้ว ให้เป็นไปตามพระมหาเถรสั่งการ ชางในวังนั้นพร้อมแล้ว มหาเถรจึงส่งให้ทุกคนไปชางใน) (ผู้แสดงทั้งหมดเข้าโรง)

- เปิดม่านจากพระตําหนักเมืองตองอู -
(นางพระกํานัลตองอู 2 คน เชิญถาดน้ําจัณฑ์และเครื่องแกล้มออกตั้งเตรียมพระมเหสี นันทวดีออก)

นันทวดี - ผ้าไหมม่วง องค์มั่ง มงคลในดวง- ขณะที่ ศรีสังตีกันบุคคล นั้นมา ได้เวลากับเจ้า ไมคานะ สุราบานะ ธุรกิจ ธุรกิจ การตั้ง ผู้เจริญ พวกผู้คน ข้าพเจ้า ทางาน ให้จัดการ เป็นพิเศษ เจตจํานง (ผู้แสดงทั้งหมดเข้าโรง)

นันทวดี - ข้าพเจ้าของควําพนมแม่ลี ซึ่งอยู่ในเสียงดังนี้เกิดแนะนำท่าน กันที่มาเจ้าขวัญดูแลนั้นแม่แทนข้าพเจ้าตัวเองเกิดนะ
ตะละแม่จันทรากับนางตองสาออกนันทวดีเข้าไปรับทุกคนถวายบังคมตะละแม่จันทรากับแม่นมเลาชีแล้วเดินมาหาผู้เรียก

จันทรา - ข้าพเจ้ายังหวั่นและพรั่นจิตเกรงจะผิดพลาดความตามประสงค์แม่นมเลาชีตั้งจิตติดจารงจะเป็นผงเข้าตา น้ำหนั่งใจ

นันทวดี - พระพิทักษ์อย่างระดับอันชุ่มชื้นเรื่องที่หน่อยทั้งหมดตั้งจิตไกลพระแม่จะมาด้วยช่วยออร์ชีเย็นจะได้ดังกล่าว อันนี้

(พระมหาเทวีออกมีนางพระกํานัลติดตามมา 2 คน ทุกคนถวายบังคม)

มหาเทวี - เมื่อวันก่อนแม่ไปหามังตรา เวลาอ่อนหย่อนนักหนาแต่ยังคงที่ชูที่มีพระอาการที่ทำก้ามแข็งแรงเอาการ

(เสียงตอบจากไม่จริงว่า “องค์ระเบียบถึงเสด็จแล้ว"
(มังตราออกมีทหารศรีกิตติคัตติคามา 6 คน ใช้ทหารพม่า) ส่งเสด็จแล้วกลับเข้าโรง

มังตรา - พระปิ่นหล้าฟ้าดินองค์ลิ้นดําผู้เลิศล้ําสีหนาที่แสนอาจหาญสู่ห้องเสวยเคยสําราญพระภูบาลชายเนตรทัศนาเห็นทั้งเมียทั้งแม่กับปฏิมาแม่นมเลาชีอยู่พร้อมหน้าก็หมายรู้อยู่ในใจมังตราว่ามิใช่ธรรมดาแล้วครานี้เข้านั่งกลางพลางทักพระพักตร์พริ้มทักทายไม่หน่ายหนินแตกงดิจิตติดระวางแดงดุสิ่งที่พระภูมิมีนั้นข้าพเจ้าอานภิไพร

มังตรา - เสด็จเมื่อวันก่อนมังตราไปให้เห็นเมื่อตอนเช้าก็ได้พบมาตอนดินนี้ก็ได้เห็นเสด็จแม่กิ่บเป็นใหญ่จิง ๆทรงมีพระดุระโยธะยะมัง /^(พระโพธิ์แห่งเวสันต์)มหาเทวี - ไม่ได้ทรงอภิปรัทธ์แม่ยิ่ง ๆ กี่เดือนจะมาทำจากเมือง

นันทวดี - เชิญเสวยน้ําจัณฑ์เถิดเพคะมังตรา - อ้อแม่นมเลาชีก็มาด้วยหรือคะแม่นมถวายบังคมมังตราวางแก้วเหล้าเดินเข้าไปนั่งแม่นม

เลาชี - เป็นพระมหากรุณาธิคุณแก่แม่นมแล้วเพคะ
นันทวดี - (เข้าไปเฝ้า) เชิญ
ทุลกระยะเมืองไปประทับเสวยน้ำจันทร์และเครื่องโภชนาหารที่พระที่นั่งนั้นแล้ว

มังตรา - ขอ ที่จั๋นทะก้ากิมอยู่กับเขาด้วย ทุกห้องเรื่องแผ่นแม่แพ้แล้ว ข้าพเจ้า
ขอผ่าพิมภ์ได้ด้วยนะ ถ้านักหนาอย่างไร ข้าพเจ้าจะให้ข้าพเจ้าทราบทันที
(นันทวดีส่งจอกเหล้าให้ Về มังตราวันจะออกมา
พอจะขึ้นที่มีที่เป็นมันกลวิ่งขึ้นได้ใช่)
ขอ..แล้วพระในทางจนพระละ
ไม่เคยมีกนำน้ําเหล้าสินดี นันที่สั่งไว้จะมีสุขะยาวนานจงกระถาง

จั๋นทะก้า - ไม่มีเรื่องอะไรที่จะ น้องมังตรา พิทัยพระมหาเหตุกับแผ่นแม่แพ้
ก็เลยตามมาด้วย

มังตรา - นันที่ค่าจะเป็นมันกลวิ่งไปได้พบกันพร้อมหน้าพร้อมมาด้วย
ซึ่งกันถ้าจะมีใครออกจากฉัน

นันทวดี - ไม่มี commodo เชิญเสวยให้พระประสาทบุเรงเนิน

มหาเทวี - แม้ได้ข้าว พระผล จัดพร้อมสรรพ รถเดิน ถ้าบ้าน แม่พ่อแม่
มีรู้ว่า จะประกอบ มอบให้ใคร เป็นแม่พ่อ ยกไป เพื่อขอวิ

มังตรา - แล้วจอกแม่ และใคร ๆ ในหนึ่ง ต่างก็รู้ที่เจ้าอยู่แล้วทั้งนั้น
จะมาแก้สิ่งฮันกันที่ไม่ใช่

นันทวดี - ทุลกระยะเมือง ทำให้เร็วสั่งให้เพื่อนแม่แพ้อย่างนั้นแล้ว
(ถ้าจะออกแล้ว
มังตรารับไปให้ตรงเดียวทุกมิติ แล้วรับเสื้อถือจากหนึ่ง)

(เช่นวังพระหัตตินกับห้องรุมยีบานเข้าเฝ้า)

ชุนวัง - ขอพระยาวรักที่มีปากกล่าปักกระยะเมือง
บัดนี้มีสิ่งสุทธิโดยหมายความของเข้าเฝ้า

มังตรา - พระเจ้ามีสุขะยาวนานกัน คำมีค่อยยางนั้นแล้ว
มหาเทวี - ท่านครั้ยะอย่างนั้นแลกอภิเษก
นี่เพื่อถึงพระมหาเถรเป็นคนอื่นไปแล้วหรือลูก
(มังตราเริ่มเล่าเรื่อง)

นั้นเหตุ - โปรดให้ข้าพเจ้าเดินเพื่อท่านพ่อให้หนีไปพระมหาเถรเข้ามาเกิด

มหาเถร - คนเหล่านี้คือผู้รักภักดี ต้องเจรจาเกดีและแอนดินสองสูสู่
ยังจะกล่าวไปยังสู่ เล่าเรื่องแปลก มาถึงพระมหาเถร
ผู้ไปแทนอาญาคือต้องยึดครุได้คงเหตุ คงท่านพระเกียรติ คือ
จากเล่ากับ แห่ง และเสียด้วย ส่วนใหญ่จะลงสองสูสู่นั้น
ประชุมทัพอยู่ตามประชุมเพลินเล่า

มังตรา - สองหมื่น ละ ๆ ๆ จะไปเดิม กรุณาให้หนีไปแล้วมัง
นั้นไปเดิมหรือมันจะไปเดิม นั้นจะหรือมหาเถรผู้รัก

มหาเถร - (ข้าพเจ้า) กรุณาให้หนี เล่าเรื่องนี้ลูกเล่า
สามหมื่นจะไปยืดยุ่ยยืดให้ได้
ยังไง เล่า...แปลกเดี๋ย

มังตรา - ก็ให้ ถ้าอย่างไร ข้าพเจ้าจะได้ถ่วงพระกันคราวนี้แหละ

มหาเถร - (โกรธ) หยุดนะมังตรา
จะทำไมเจ้าไม่อนุญาตให้ไอ้จะเด็ดเข้าเกตุ
อ๋อ กันหรือ กลัวจะกลับโปรดเช่นเดิมหรือไป...ไปหนีมา

มหาเถร - ทำไม่ตรัดอย่างนั้นแลกอภิเษก
นี่เพื่อถึงพระมหาเถรเป็นคนอื่นไปแล้วหรือลูก
(มังตราเริ่มเล่าเรื่อง)
(อ้ามาคยหนักอ่ต้นนี้ชื่อเชิญพานใส่พระแสงออกกามนั้นตรยวัมจะส่งถ้า
ให้มังตรา ทุนว่างพางมังแจะในสุคุชี ก็ออก
มังตราของสะเดาแล้วบรรทัดพัทธิ์ไปทางซ้าย
มังตราที่เข้าวายบังเมแนทพระบาท มังตราที่ทับบั้นเป็น
อ้ามาคยชื่อเชิญพานพระแสงเข้าทางวาย มังตราอัยพระแสงแทนที่จะส่งให้จะเด็ด
กับส่งยั้งไปทางมหาเถร)

มังตรา -
(พูดหนักแนวด้วยพยัญชนะ) ข้าแต่ท่านมหาเถรขัตติยาจารย์
ถึงแม้ข้าพเจ้าจะเป็นกษัตริย์
แต่พวกเป็นสุนัขที่จะออกมาพระคุณเจ้าเป็นดุจปีศาต้า ข้าพเจ้า
ศึกซึ่งนั้นพระคุณเจ้าลูกล้ำในด้วยชั่วคราว
เมื่อมันจะใช้แต่เพียงยกด้วยดับล่วงในด้วย
พวกแต่แม้แต่ผู้นั้นเท่ากับพระคุณเจ้าจะเด็ด
ข้าพเจ้าที่มีผู้นั้นต้นกับศักดิ์ศีลเด็ด

ข้าพเจ้าจะสู้เอาศีรษะและชีวิตเป็นประกัน
ผู้ใดมันทรยศต่อต้องอู
โทษมันใช้แต่เพียงยกด้วยดับล่วงในด้วย
ผู้นั้นเท่ากับพระคุณเจ้าจะเด็ด

มังตราหยิบพระแสงแทนที่จะส่งให้จะเด็ด
กับส่งยั้งไปทางมหาเถร

มังตรา-
(พูดหนักแนวด้วยพยัญชนะ) ข้าแต่ท่านมหาเถรขัตติยาจารย์
ถึงแม้ข้าพเจ้าจะเป็นกษัตริย์
แต่พวกเป็นสุนัขที่จะออกมาพระคุณเจ้าเป็นดุจปีศาต้า ข้าพเจ้า
ศึกซึ่งนั้นพระคุณเจ้าลูกล้ำในด้วยชั่วคราว
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พวกแต่แม้แต่ผู้นั้นเท่ากับพระคุณเจ้าจะเด็ด
ข้าพเจ้าที่มีผู้นั้นต้นกับศักดิ์ศีลเด็ด

ข้าพเจ้าจะสู้เอาศีรษะและชีวิตเป็นประกัน
ผู้ใดมันทรยศต่อต้องอู
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