

ADAPTATION OF THAI TRADITIONAL PLAYS

IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Practice,
February 2012.**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the process of adaptation of a Thai traditional play in a contemporary context. The study is based on two practical projects in which two Thai traditional plays, *Sang Thong* and *Tao San Pom*, are adapted and presented on stage. The approaches used in the practices of adaptation are gathered from a range of research in diverse areas, including studies of traditional Thai theatre and plays, the analysis of adaptations of contemporary Thai artists and adaptation theories. With this exploration, I attempt to create original contemporary plays for the modern Thai theatre which, I believe, are able to communicate with a modern Thai audience better than translated or adapted Western plays.

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter provides background information regarding the history and development of Thai theatre; the characteristics of traditional theatre and literary works are discussed in the second chapter. The third chapter explores the selected adaptations of well-known Thai artists. The fourth chapter then address the significant approaches that will be further explored in my script adaptations. The commentaries on my two practical projects are presented in my fifth and sixth chapters.

This thesis is accompanied by two DVDs, which feature the record of two performances of my practical projects, the script adaptations of Thai traditional plays, *Sang Thong* and *Tao San Pom*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis would not have been complete without assistance and support from many people. First of all, I would like to make a deep gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Graham Ley for his excellent guidance and valuable comments. His encouragement, patience and caring helped me greatly throughout my study.

I would also like to thanks all actors who participated in both of my projects, Peera Phanlukthao, Claudia Cisneros-Perez, Kristofor Darby, Sukanya Sompiboon, Henry Boyd, Grisana Punpeng, Maria Papadakis and Ying Ni Ma. My appreciation extends to all friends who came to help with the rehearsal, Paveena Chamchoy, Aqeel Abdulla, I-Lien Ho, Hui-Yen Chen and Hu Tzu-Yun. I am also grateful to JP for his technical supports. My research would not have been possible without all their helps.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. Jill Cadorath and Gareth Butt for their time and help in correcting my English.

I also wish to thanks all my friends whose help and encouragement came in many ways. Thank you Rasha, Ioannis, Pang and Tzu for always being there cheering me up and stood by me from the beginning to the end of this long journey. Thank you all my Thai friends, Pele, Pik, Bua, Bac, Tim, Took, Pui, Joyce, Imm, Prae, Num, P'Oh, P'boy, P'Tang, P'Num, P'Pim and P'Jay who always listen and encourage me to finish this study. My special thanks go to Teerawat who always understand and believe in me.

I would also like to express my very great appreciation to all my drama teachers who introduce me to the world of theatre and all Thai artists whose works are the great inspiration for me to do this research.

Finally, my special thanks are given to my family. Thank you for always understand and support me in every ways.

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List of accompanying materials

The accompanying DVDs are affixed to the inside of the back cover of this thesis.

DVD 1 The record of production of *Sang Thong*, staged at Roborough Studio on 30th January 2009.

DVD 2 The record of the second project, *Tao San Pom*, staged at Roborough Studio on 24th June 2010.

Introduction

In Thailand, traditional theatre, sometimes so-called classical theatre¹, and modern theatre are categorized separately from each other. While traditional theatre is still performed in traditional ways in which dance and music are used as the main elements to tell a story, the term ‘modern theatre’ or *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai* refers to theatre which is performed in Western theatre’s realistic style. Thai theatre has been influenced by Westernization since the late nineteenth century; however, the dominant separation of these two kinds of Thai theatre happened in the mid-1960s. Nowadays, traditional theatre and modern theatre have become explicitly separated, not only in terms of the form but also the aesthetic concept, scholars and the path of their developments. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the differences between these two kinds of Thai theatre and the nature of their separation, it is necessary to look into the history of the development of Thai theatre.

Thai theatre has developed along with changes in society. Initially, indigenous Thai theatre appeared in the form of dance-drama. Later, with the impact of Westernization, which began in the late nineteenth century, and changes in Thai society, one of the outcomes was the emergence of new theatre genres, such as *Lakhon Phanthang*, *Lakhon Dukkamban* and *Lakhon Rong*.² These new forms applied Western theatrical techniques in order to enhance their performance in an attempt to attract a new

¹ Notably some traditional theatre genres are occasionally referred to as classical theatre. However, the term ‘Thai classical theatre’ is commonly used to refer to court performances, such as *Khon* and *Lakorn Nai*, rather than to folk theatre.

² These new theatrical genres originated at the late nineteenth century as result of Westernization in Thai society. They applied Western theatrical elements in their performances, mostly concerned with the use of spoken prose and minimized the dance movement. For further details of each form’s conventions, see Rutnin, Mattani. (1993) *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand: The Process of Development and Modernization*. Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, The Toyo Bunko; and Rutnin, Mattani. (1978) *The Modernization of Thai Dance-Drama, with Special Reference to the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London.

group of audiences from the middle-classes. New theatre genres established during this period of ‘modern transformations of Thai dance-drama’ (Rutnin, 1993:108) had been developed towards the Western style, in which realism and everyday dialogue and movement were increasingly replaced dances and chorus. However, the dominant separation of traditional and modern theatre occurred in the later period when Western-style drama was re-introduced into Thai universities during the mid- 1960s.

After the political Revolution in 1932, the patronage of theatre transferred from the court to a new government authority, the Fine Arts Department or FAD. As a result of this transmission, theatre flourished for commoners; however, this was limited to some new theatrical genres, especially *Lakhon Rong* or the singing-drama that became a popular theatrical form during the 1930s-1950s (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001:50). Traditional court dance drama, on other hand, was under the control of FAD, which was assigned responsibility for all national cultural activities. FAD established the school of music and dance known as the Rongrian Nattaduriyangkhasat³ in 1934, offering courses in traditional dance-drama. Later under the national cultural policy during the Phibun period (1938-1944 and 1948-1957), theatre was used as political propaganda for which Patriotic theatre known as *Lakhon Luang Wichit* was invented; these plays were called after their creator, Luang Wichitwadakan, the first Director-General of the Fine Arts Department and also General Phibun's right-hand man. The plays, based on Thai historical background, were written solely to inspire nationalistic sentiments. With enormous competition from new media, namely television and film, theatre declined in its popularity among Thai people in the late 1950s. This resulted in the closure of

³ The school is now changed to Witthayalai Nattasin and offers courses including a Bachelor's degree programme in the National Arts of Drama and Music. For details in a biographical directory of dance artists and their transmission of dance knowledge from the early day to the Department of Fine Arts, see Suntharanont, Rojana. (2006) *Directory of Dance Artists: Transmission of Dance to the Department of Fine Arts*. BA thesis, Chulalongkorn University.

commercial theatres, leaving only the folk theatre and productions by FAD in Thai society. With the main aim of preservation, theatre during this period changed from entertainment to be regarded as a representation of the nation (Witayasakpan, 1992). Theatre was revived among Thai people later in the mid-1960s when Chulalongkorn University, under the supervision of Sodsai Pantoomkomol, opened the first theatre department offering course in Western theatre in 1970, followed by other major universities such as Thammasat and Silpakorn University. The term *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai*, literally ‘modern stage play’, has been used to refer to this Western-style spoken drama to distinguish it from the previous forms of Thai theatre; at this point the separation of these two kinds of Thai theatre became explicit. As the courses offered in these education institutes are mainly based on Western theatre theory and *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai*, they have developed accordingly from this concept; therefore, it could be said that traditional and modern Thai theatre are explicitly separated, not only in terms of the form but also of the aesthetic concept elaborated by scholars and the path of their developments.

Nowadays, traditional dance-drama tends to be highly regarded as the national heritage, its preservation appears to be given the main attention and any innovation is considered a threat to its impeccability. Also due to strict traditional customs and rules, particularly in the court forms, namely *Khon* and *Lakhon Nai*, any alteration within traditional theatre circles has become almost impossible. As a result, the traditional style of performance has become less relevant to the contemporary social context: this has widened the gap between traditional theatre and modern audiences, which has led to the unpopularity of the indigenous form of traditional dance-drama among Thai people.

Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai, or literary modern stage drama, is derived from Western-style spoken theatre. Western-style drama was re-introduced to Thai society during the mid-1960s as part of the curriculum in universities⁴. Later, it expanded to the public from graduates who founded small theatre troupes such as the Phra Can Siaw Group. This was followed by the establishment of commercial theatres such as the Monthienthong Theatre (1984), the Patravadi theatre (1992) and the Bangkok playhouse (1993). At the beginning, most of the modern plays were either translated or adapted from Western masterpieces. Gradually, as the plays became popular with larger numbers of audiences, the playwrights began to develop their own scripts; however, these plays were still written in the form of Western-style spoken drama. Therefore, it can be said that the development of modern Thai theatre, in some way, still relies on the style of the Western theatre. Yet, one remarkable problem regularly cited by the modern Thai theatre practitioners and scholars is the lack of native Thai play scripts (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2002b). Many productions, especially within educational institutes, based their scripts on the translations and adaptations of Western plays. This is also due to the fact that there are few professional Thai playwrights who continuously create original scripts for modern Thai theatre.

The origins of my research questions

The awareness of the dominance of the influence of Western theatre on Thai theatre has encouraged some Thai artists, such as Patravadi Mejudhon and Pornrat Damrhung, to look for native Thai material in order to create an identity for modern

⁴ The Department of Dramatic Arts was first established at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, in 1966 by Sodsai Phanthumkamon and later Mattani Rutnin found the Drama Department at Thammasat University in 1978.

Thai theatre. These artists claim that translated Western plays are inaccessible to Thai audiences due to cultural differences, and so turn to their own cultural theatre roots. These artists share a similar interest in Thai traditional theatre; they believe that traditional dramatic literature could better communicate with Thai audiences than Western plays (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001:8). Therefore, they adapt traditional literature to be performed on the modern stage: in addition to a text, some traditional theatrical elements are also applied in their performances⁵. According to Kerdarunsuksri (2001), this transformation of traditional literature into modern Thai stage drama was a popular trend in Thai theatre in the 1990s, especially during the period of *Pi Ronnarong Watthanatham Thai* or the Years of Thai Cultural Preservation (1994-1997)⁶. Unfortunately, after the end of the support of the government during that period, such productions have been decreasing.

Even though it seems that the adaptation of Thai traditional literature on the modern stage is not a mainstay of Thai theatre, there are some Thai artists who still continue to create such productions; these artists include Patravadi Mejudhon, the owner of Patravadi Theatre and Pornrat Damrhung, a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University. The fact that these artists are well-known and their works received positive feedback from both audiences and critics shows the possibility of this interesting area for exploration.

⁵ Some of these artists define their works as ‘Silapa Ruam Samai’, meaning literary contemporary arts, as their works are no longer mainly rely on the Western style like modern theatre, but are based on the contemporary social context. It is notable that these artists tend to come from the modern theatre circle rather than traditional theatre practitioners. Most of them have studied in the Western theatre and later developed their interests toward traditional theatre.

⁶ According to Kerdarunsuksri (2001), twenty productions of traditional literature adaptation were staged, and more than half of them were produced during 1994-1997 which were the Years of Thai Cultural Preservation. He stated “this officially designated period promoted the boom age of such transposition in the Thai theatre scene” (2001:7).

I share similar interests and beliefs with these artists. My personal interest in traditional theatre began when I was very young. I still remember the first time my mother took me to see a performance of *Khon*. It was performed at night, in the yard of the Sanam Chandra Palace campus of Silpakorn University, Nakhon Pathom. I remember the exciting feeling of seeing something so elegant. I was very impressed with the elaborate and splendid spectacles of dance, costumes and performance. Even though I was too young to understand what they were saying and singing, the performance was deeply imprinted in my memory; it was my first experience of theatre.

My interest in drama led me to continue my degree at the department of Dramatic Arts, Chulalongkorn University which is the first university that opened a modern drama undergraduate course in Thailand. I was fascinated with the new knowledge about Western theatre. I had the chance to learn many theories in various areas including directing, acting and playwriting. Most of these classes emphasized on Western theatre, with the exception of one class on the general history of Thai traditional theatre. My interest in traditional theatre was revived when I studied a Master's degree at the University of Exeter in 2001. I adapted a traditional Thai play, *Sang Thong*, in one of my projects. Even though that project was small, due to time limitations, this exploration deepened my interest in my own theatrical roots.

Apart from my personal interest in traditional theatre, another important motivation that encouraged me to carry out further research in the adaptation of traditional Thai plays is my awareness of a lack of creative ideas and guidelines for playwriting in contemporary Thai theatre. I was aware of this problem when I was a lecturer at Bangkok University in 2004 and responsible for the script-writing class. I noticed from my students that Western theories and plays sometimes appeared to be too difficult for them to understand; part of the problem comes from the fact that their plays

are not consonant with the context of Thai society. At that point, I began to ask whether it is time for us to find an inspiration from our own literary sources; is it easier to understand and develop our ideas from something more 'Thai'?

In fact, this problem is not a new topic among modern Thai artists and scholars. Rutnin (1996) stated that the lack of successful Thai playscripts in modern Thai theatre was due to the lack of experience and knowledge in playwriting of amateur playwrights. Jungwiwattanaporn (2002b) also examined this problem and stated that even though there were more original Thai scripts than translated Western plays staged during 1988- 1999, most of those scripts were staged only once and only a few were accepted in terms of quality; therefore, these scripts appeared to be unsuccessful and were rarely recognized.

I shall argue here that part of the problem in the development of the skills of Thai playwriting could come from the fact that these amateur playwrights and also the modern theatre curriculum rely too much on Western theatre resources. Western plays are generally used in Thai drama classes, such as directing, acting and play analysis. It greatly puzzled me to find out that the main textbooks I studied at university were still the same ones my mother learned when she was a student in the same faculty approximately thirty years ago. These plays include Shakespeare's plays, such as *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ibsen's *A Doll House*, John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, Eugene O'Neill's *Hairy Ape*, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Edward Albee's *The American Dream*. They still remain the main textbooks in several colleges of Liberal Arts with few updated contemporary plays added to the courses. Even though I realise that it is important to know these all classic

plays, I still believe that the differences in cultures and lack of up-to-date texts could be big barriers for Thai amateur playwrights to develop their own skills.

This inspired me to pursue my further research in the adaptations of Thai traditional plays with the aim of creating an original Thai playscript. As a practitioner, I aim to explore the alternative ways to adapt a traditional play in a contemporary context. My interest and experience in both traditional and modern theatre will help me to investigate this area more profoundly. My research could contribute to the development of Thai playwriting and, encourage Thai artists to deepen their interest in and understanding of our own cultural theatrical roots and identity.

Previous studies on Thai theatre

A lack of published references on Thai theatre, especially on Thai modern theatre, seems to be a prominent problem for Thai theatre researchers. As a matter of fact, most publications on traditional theatre appear to be repetitive, providing information about the history of Thai theatre and a description of the principal characteristics of each theatre genre. There have been very few critical studies of modern Thai theatre; most of them are unpublished theses and academic research reports.

While most published research on Thai theatre deals with the history and development of Thai theatre, in which the main characteristics of theatre genres are explained, some studies also analyse the cultural and social context behind the creation of each genre. In the area of traditional theatre, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab's *Tamnan Lakhon Inao* (1964) was one of the early studies of traditional Thai theatre. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab is one of the most influential Thai Theatre court scholars. One of

the significant aspects of his research is that it compiled valuable information that was passed down by old court dancers, and this combined with first-hand experience in traditional performances. In this book, first published in 1921, the characteristics of traditional theatre genres and some traditional literature were explained and analyzed within their historical and social context. Apart from this book, his other two important works are *Tamra Fon Ram* (1923), which gives the description of traditional dance movement patterns that are used in traditional theatre; and *Tamnam Lakhon Dukkambaan* (1924), which provides an explanation of the characteristics of the *Dukkambaan* theatre genre⁷.

Dhanit Yupho, the former Director-General of the Fine Arts Department (1956-1968), wrote significant sources both in Thai and English on traditional performances; his works include *The Khon and Lakon* (1963), *Khon* (1965) and *Sinlapa Lakhon Ram ru Khumu Nattasin Thai* (1988). His works explore traditional theatre with regard to the explanation of characteristics of each dance-drama genre, the training process and documentaries of their scripts and customs.

Important English-language studies of Thai theatre were written by James R. Brandon. His works examined theatres in South East Asia by considering their functions in society. Even though Thai theatre was explained through an overview of its characteristics, I have found his works reflect an interesting perspective of a Western researcher toward the characteristics of dance-drama in Thailand, especially in terms of the differences between Western and Southeast Asian theatrical performances.⁸

⁷ These three works are later published together under the name of *Lakhon Fon Ram* (2003).

⁸ His works include *Theatre in Southeast Asia* (1967) and *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (1993)

One of the most comprehensive and critical English-language publications on the development of Thai theatre was written by Mattani Rutnin, a modern Thai theatre practitioner and scholar. She is one of most important Thai artists whose works significantly contributed to the development of Thai theatre. Her book, *Dance, Drama and Theatre in Thailand: the Process of Development and Modernisation* (1993) gives insightful details into the history and characteristics of Thai theatre. Her study offers an analysis of its process of development in the Thai social context, from the origin of Thai dance in the pre-Sukothai period until the early period of *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai* or modern Thai theatre.

In relation to Thai playscripts, research into traditional literature mainly deals with the interpretation of stories or studies in the writing style of particular authors and their works. It appears that Thai people are familiar with their traditional dramatic literature mostly in the form of textbooks that were taught in school rather than plays that are performed on stage. One of the most recent works in the area of Thai drama script is Jackkrit Duangpattra's study into the forms of Thai playscripts in both traditional and modern theatre. His book, *Wannakhadi Kan Sadaeng* (2001), examines the Thai dramatic literature that is used in each theatre genre, the form of the script in each period and how scripts is adjusted when performed in traditional theatre. However, the scripts for the modern theatre are not mentioned in this study; instead, Duangpattra examines the programmes of plays and scripts for television and radio. This may be due to the fact that published scripts are rare, and there are only small numbers of professional playwrights in modern theatre circles.

Research into modern Thai theatre mostly appears in the form of unpublished theses and academic articles. However, none of these offer a comprehensive study of the development of Thai theatre; most of the theses only

provide an overview of modern Thai theatre as part of their introduction to their research into another topic. For example, Kultida Maneerat gives a brief historical overview of the development of modern Thai theatre in the second chapter of her thesis, *Lending Their Strength: The Survival of Professional Lakhon Phut Samai Mai in Bangkok through Strong Female Characters* (2008), in order to lead to her study in female characters in two professional modern theatre troupes in Thailand.

There are few studies into the fascinating relationship between traditional and modern Thai theatre; among this small number, one has developed into the most important analytical resource of my research. Kerdarunsuksri's *The Transposition of Traditional Thai Literature into the Modern Stage* (2001) serves as a foundation for this current research. He examines the adaptations of Thai traditional literature that were staged during the 1990s. His study provides a description of ten productions created by well-known Thai artists, and an analysis of the methods used by these artists in order to transform traditional stories to be performed on the modern stage. He classified these adaptations into two types: modern and revisionist mythmaking. While the first kind tries to modernize an original story to suit the modern social context, the second aims to present contemporary issues by deconstructing traditional stories. His research offers a considerable description of productions, including examples of adapted texts and a depiction of performance presentations. However, his thesis did not provide an adequate critical analysis of the approaches that each artist applies in their reinventions of traditional literary texts, or evaluations of each production. Rather, this work offers an overview of such productions that were created during a particular period of time.

Pornrat Damrhung, a female-artist, a theatrical practitioner, teacher and academic researcher, has written many academic reports and articles on Thai

contemporary performances, including her own adaptations⁹. These written works focus on the process of creating a theatrical piece. Being a researcher and an artist herself, her written works provide a deep analysis of performances and the analytical thinking behind those creations.

Apart from these studies, there are a number of academic reports and theses that focus on works of specific artists, in which the analysis covers not only traditional literary adaptations but also all the works of these artists. These sources include, for example, *Performing Praxis, Community Culture, and Neo-Traditionalism: A Study of Thailand's Makhampom Theatre Group* (2007) by Richard Baber. His research on the development of the Makhampom Theatre Group was based on their development of their creative ideas, including the group's adaptation of Thai traditional plays. His study aims to analyse the methods that this group applied in their works. *The Presentation of Thai Literature in the Hybrid Performance of Patravadi Theatre* (2001), a research report paper, written by Suwanna Udomphon, describes the works created by Patravadi Mejudhon in relation to the differences of her adaptations to the original works. This research points out the importance she gave to maintain the original concept of beauty in her works and also the way she adapted this traditional play by comparing it to the original version. Unfortunately her study does not go beyond an analysis of the efficiency of Patravadi's method of adaptation.

⁹ These works include *Ngan Lakhon Ruamsamai Nai Phrathet Thai [Contemporary Theatre in Thailand], Research Report* (2007); and *Path to Tomorrow's Professional Thai Theatre* (1995); and *The Legend Retold 4 Sita: The Honour of Ram* (2006).

Research methodology

My research is based on performance practice, in which I explore ways to adapt two traditional Thai plays in two practical projects. The approaches used in these practices of adaptation are gathered and developed from a range of research in diverse areas such as studies in traditional theatre and literary works, the analysis of productions of contemporary Thai artists, and adaptation theories.

A study of the history and characteristics of traditional Thai theatre is employed to clarify the background of my research, and is then applied as part of the approaches that I have used in my practice of adaptation. The application of traditional theatrical elements is explored in my script adaptation, in researching appropriate modes for this kind of Thai contemporary performance. My research in this area is drawn from various sources written by both Thai and non-Thai scholars. The study also includes an analysis of the form and interpretations of the traditional texts collected from published books, theses and academic articles about Thai theatre.

Former theatrical adaptations of traditional literature are also examined in this thesis. The works of selected well-known Thai artists are analyzed in order to provide an overview of previous adaptations. Not only are these artists renowned in this area, but they also have their own individual style of adapting traditional literature. The analysis of their works serves as the foundation of my research, since some of the methods used by these artists are further developed and explored in my own pieces. My study of these adaptation works is based on various sources, including scripts, reviews by critics and my experience of seeing some performances, together with articles and academic reports and theses that have investigated these productions and the works of each artist/troupe.

Adaptation theories are also employed as to widen my perspective, especially in terms of the relationship between the original source and its adaptations. Due to traditional belief and aesthetics, I found that the issue of fidelity is significant in traditional Thai theatre; therefore, this issue should not be overlooked in my investigation. My study draws on adaptation scholars' theories such as Sarah Cardwell (2002), Julie Sanders (2006) and Linda Hutcheon (2006).

A chance to present the adaptation script on stage gives a great opportunity for my practical research to go beyond the individual practice of script adaptation, and become collaborative works with talented actors who participated in both projects. The fact that the cast consists of both Thai and non-Thai actors has given me a range of inspiring ideas that helped my script development, especially in my second project, in which the rehearsals proved to be the most important method in my research, as the last part of the script was written along with a collaborative exploration of these actors. With distinct but related aims and research questions, different approaches were explored and used in each project. My thesis, at the end, examines the process of this creation of adaptation in order to depict the significant methods that are explored in each research project, and provides an evaluation that could lead to other investigations in the future.

The overview of my thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter gives background information regarding the history and development of Thai theatre by emphasising on the impact of Westernization, which has performed an important function of the separation of traditional and modern theatre in Thailand.

In the second chapter, the characteristics of traditional theatre are analyzed. The term ‘traditional theatre’ and ‘modern theatre’ in the Thai context are defined. Some information on the history of Thai theatre is referred to in this section in order to explain the division of these two kinds of Thai theatre. The significant characteristics of traditional theatre are also explained. A critical analysis of Thai theatre and its literary works is provided in order to illustrate the specific characteristics of traditional Thai performance. This information will later be applied in relation to my performance practices.

Previous theatrical adaptations of Thai traditional plays are analysed in the third chapter. Adaptations of four well-known Thai artists are selected for study in this thesis. These artists have created many productions that are based on traditional literature and their works are appreciated by both audiences and critics. The analysis of these adaptations aims to illustrate the various methods of adaptation that Thai artists have used to re-present traditional literature on the modern stage. These artists are Patravadi Mejudhon, Pornrat Damrhung, Makhampom troupe and Dangkamon Na-Pombejra.

In the fourth chapter, I aim to explain the approaches that I explored in my own practice of adaptation. These approaches are developed based on the analysis of former adaptation works in the previous chapter and also on research into Thai theatre by other scholars. Adaptation theory is also discussed in this section, in connection with approaches that I will explore in my script adaptation.

The fifth and sixth chapters are commentaries on my first and second projects. Both projects were presented at the Roborough Studio, at the University of Exeter. In the first practical project, I adapted *Sang Thong*, a well-known traditional

play written by King Rama II, into a forty-minute performance. Four actors participated in this project. For the second project, I chose to adapt *Tao San Pom*, a traditional play based on a familiar Thai folktale. In each commentary, I provide a critical description of the performance and of the methods that I used to create the piece. The aims of my practical project are stated at the beginning, and the intentions of my research exploration in each sequence of the script are clarified in the commentary. The process of rehearsal and script development are also treated. Finally, an evaluation of each piece is given at the end of each commentary. At the beginning of the sixth chapter, which is the commentary on my second project, I refer to the evaluation of the first practical project in order to show how ideas are further developed in my second piece, and what I aim to explore differently in that adaptation. The adapted scripts are presented at the end of each commentary. Finally, I have attached two DVD recordings of each project. The first DVD is the record of production of *Sang Thong*, staged at Roborough Studio on 30th January 2009. The second project, *Tao San Pom*, is on the second DVD. This adaptation was presented at the same place on 24th June 2010.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THAI THEATRE

Thai theatre is classified as Composition Art which combines literature, classical dance, music, and the visual arts (Duangpattra, 2001:3). There is a lack of evidence showing the exact time when drama originated in Thai society. However, it is believed that Thai performances emerged as a dramatic genre in the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767). During this time a French diplomat, Simon de La Loubère, who came to Siam, the former name of Thailand, in 1687, described three kinds of Thai performance in his account of the kingdom, *Du Royaume de Siam*: namely, *Khon* (a masked dance-drama), *Lakhon* (a dance-drama) and *Rabam* (dance).¹⁰

Khon is a type of performance in which actors wear masks and play characters using expressive gestures and without speaking lines themselves. Stories are taken from the *Ramakien*, a Thai version of the Indian epic *Ramayana*, which has traditionally been considered a part of the royal regalia. Whereas *Khon* was formed within the Thai court, *Lakhon* emerged from folk performances. In its early stages, *Lakhon* consisted of simple elements. The performers, all of whom were men, danced while singing their own parts. The dance movements were simple and the dialogue may also have included improvisation. In order to play a female character, a male actor would lay a loincloth over his shoulder to give the appearance of a shawl or just put a flower behind his ear (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001:22). *Lakhon* was adopted by the royal court during the reign of king Boromakot (1733-58). This led to a new distinction being made between ‘*Lakhon Nok*’ and ‘*Lakhon Nai*’, the former term describing performances for

¹⁰ For further details, see De La Loubère, Simon. (1969) *The Kingdom of Siam*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

common people and the latter describing performances within the royal court. As a form of royal entertainment, *Lakhon Nai* was intended to be high art. Male performers were entirely replaced by female dancers and costumes were adapted to suit the luxurious tastes of the ruling elite. Moreover, written texts of dramas were composed within the royal court. Finally, unlike the folk tradition, the court performances involved singers and choruses who spoke the dialogue and told the story of each drama in much the same way as *Khon*.

After the fall of *Ayutthaya* in 1767 and the rise of the new kingdom, *Thoburi*, in the following year, the new ruler of the *Thonburi* kingdom, King Taksin attempted to restore traditional performances of *Khon* and *Lakhon* in the royal court. This process continued up to the reign of King Rama I, the first monarch of the *Chakri* dynasty, who played a major role in preserving and developing classical Thai dance–drama, music and dramatic literature. During his reign (1736 – 1809), the whole story of the *Ramakien* was composed; this was the sole complete version in Thailand. He also tried to set new standards for the arts for the new dynasty by commissioning masters to revive dancing lessons that had been lost during the war of changing the dynasty.

“The golden era” of Thai dramatic literature and classical dance-drama came during the reign of King Rama II (1809-1824). This period set a standard which has lasted up to the present day for Thai classical dancers, teachers, choreographers and composers of dramatic texts, music and songs. With the king’s personal interests, traditional dramatic performances flourished at the royal court. Rama II himself wrote new plays and adapted many literary works for the stage. He composed scripts both for *Lakhon Nai* and *Lakhon Nok* which he intended to be performed. Each section of the script was rehearsed under the king’s direction and supervised by the chief choreographer, master teachers and leading court dancers.

In contrast to his father, Rama III (1824-1851) viewed these dramatic activities as wasteful luxuries. Furthermore, due to threats to Thailand during this time both from neighbouring countries and the West, there was a long period of restriction and suppression of dramatic activities within the royal court during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851). However, these circumstances gave rise to many private troupes, including female performers, outside the royal court to stage female dance-drama. Accordingly, dramatic performances involving women became more familiar to the general population and ordinary women began to train as dancers and performers more openly.

The threats to South East Asia posed by Western imperialism increased during the reign of King Mongkut (1851-1868). The king was determined to deal with the West 'not as an inferior but as an equal' (Rutnin, 1993:69). Therefore, Western-style education was introduced into the royal family. The influence of Western culture in Thailand increased further during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). Like his father, King Chulalongkorn continued with a policy of modernizing the kingdom in order to protect its independence. However, he also realized the importance of Thai traditions and thus attempted to revive traditional royal customs and ceremonies in order to exhibit the prestige and dignity of his country.

This process of modernization made modern education more available to ordinary people. In addition to members of the royal family and high officials, King Chulalongkorn also granted student a number of scholarships for study in Europe. These students brought back with them experiences of Western culture and society which was considered to be "modern taste". During this time, new artistic media such as short stories and spoken-word plays were introduced to Thai society.

Towards the end of King Chulalongkorn's reign, traditional dance drama gradually declined in popularity since audiences began to tire of female-led performances which seemed slow-moving to them. Ideas from Western drama were increasingly being combined with Thai elements. These factors, together with social changes and competition among theatre businesses, led to the introduction of new forms of drama aimed at attracting larger audiences. These new genres included *Lakhon Phanthang*, *Lakhon Dukdamban*, *Lakhon Rong* and *Lakhon Phut*.

In the past, theatre troupes in Thailand travelled to their audiences staging performances at locations such as markets or village temples. They may also have been engaged to perform on specific occasions such as at house-warming events, weddings or celebrations at temples. Therefore, the establishment of permanent theatres in Thailand towards the end of the nineteenth century was a new phenomenon which marked a major shift in the context of Thai drama.

The Prince Theatre of Cao Phraya Mahin, the first permanent theatre in Bangkok, staged a new style of dance drama called *Lakhon Phanthang*, which developed from *Lakhon Nok*, with new stories taken from historical legends. This new Thai theatrical genre disregarded the traditional method of using narrators to introduce characters, settings and action, instead dividing the scripts into acts and scenes like Western plays. Cao Phraya Mahin, the founder of this genre, stipulated that dancers sing the scripts. Furthermore, at the finale of his performances, all dancers reappeared on stage in a manner similar to Western ballets. He also made use of three-dimensional set designs and special effects such as using make-up instead of traditional masks.

Another new kind of Thai theatre emerged which was called *Lakhon Dukdamban*, created by Prince Narisaranuwattiwong and Chao Phraya Thewet-

wongwiwat. It was developed from the *Lakhon Nai* and *Lakhon Nok* traditions, but involved new music, songs sung by the dancers, rapid actions and contemporary dialogues.

In 1909, the Prince Narathip's Pridalai Theatre presented a new form of drama called *Lakhon Rong* which was intended to imitate Western operettas using Thai music and stories adapted from Western plays in contemporary settings and fashion. *Lakhon Rong* was different from the two former kinds of theatre in the sense that singing rather than dancing was its main element. The dance movements were simplified and minimised in such a way that they were almost like natural gestures. The musical accompaniments were also simpler than those of traditional dance drama and the stories were concerned with contemporary events and non-royal characters. In contrast, *Lakhon Phanthang* and *Lakhon Dukdamban* tended to involve romance and adventure featuring royal characters.

The influence of Western models of playwriting can be seen in each of these new forms of Thai drama. Traditional scripts in which song lyrics provided narrations and descriptions of the various aspects of performances, such as settings, props, direction, acting, music and tunes, were replaced by Western-style scripts dividing plays into acts and scenes. Moreover, performers tended to sing and speak the lines ascribed to their characters instead of relying on singers and choruses as had been the case in traditional theatre.

During this period, playwriting became a form of business activity in Thai society. Formerly, the activity of playwriting had been confined to the royal court not least since playwrights tended to be either court poets or members of the royal family. However, the spread of female dance-drama troupes outside the royal court in the

nineteenth century created a competitive environment in which different troupes attempted to outdo each other by putting on more and more impressive performances. In turn, this competition led to innovations in the style of dramatic performances intended to attract audiences. Moreover, the emergence of a middle class who could afford entertainment helped to fill the playhouses in Bangkok.

While the *Lakhon Rong* enjoyed popularity among urban middle-class audiences, another kind of dramatic performance, the *Likay*, was also gaining popularity, mostly among ordinary people both in Bangkok and rural areas. *Likay* were essentially comedies aimed at a popular audience in which improvised singing played an important role. The styles of dancing and melodies they used were adapted from those of traditional dance-drama. During the 1970s-1980s, modern elements, such as Western bands and contemporary Thai country songs, were adopted in *Likay* performances as well as colourful costumes both in traditional and Western styles. The popularity of this type of drama was the result of the wide range of sources it drew upon as well as the efforts of its practitioners to adjust performances to suit the tastes of Thai audiences.¹¹

The *Lakhon Phut*, a new genre of Thai drama directly derived from Western sources, was introduced by King Vajiravudh (1910-1925). The king is often regarded as the “Father of Thai Spoken Drama” because he contributed a large number of spoken plays to the Thai drama circle. The styles of theatrical productions of his *Lakhon Phut*

¹¹ For further details, see Carkin, Gary Bryden. (1984) *Likay: the Thai Popular Theatre Form and its Function within Thai Society*. PhD dissertation, Michigan State University; and Virulrak, Surapone. (1980) *Likay: A Popular Theatre in Thailand*. PhD Thesis, University of Hawaii.

were clearly influenced by nineteenth-century European theatre. These works introduced a balanced artistic harmony between dramatic components such as acting, setting, costumes, lighting and theatre design.

Lakhon Phut or “spoken drama” differs from other genres of Thai drama in the respect that it is basically composed of spoken dialogue, either in prose or verse, which conveys stories to audiences. It is well-known that King Vajiravudh was fascinated by theatre throughout his life. He produced a great number of spoken-word plays in Thai, many of which were adapted from Western plays, mainly French and English, including works by Shakespeare. He also produced many original works. Nevertheless, his *Lakhon Phut* style of drama only seems to have gained popularity among elite circles and Western-educated aristocrats (Rutnin, 1993:151).

The processes of modernization and Westernization introduced during the reigns of kings Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh brought about several important changes in Thai dramatic circles. The aesthetics of Thai drama changed as the slow-placed movements of traditional performances failed to appeal to the tastes of modern audiences who were the newly emerging middle class and the elite. Instead, audience expectations shifted towards fast-moving stories and greater realism in terms of acting and stage design. It has been said that this period marked ‘a turning point’ in the development of Thai theatre (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 47).

The reign of King Phrajadhipok (1925-1935) was called the “Dark Age of Court theatre”. King Phrajadhipok faced a serious financial crisis both within his court and throughout the country as a whole. Therefore, he decided to close down the Department of Royal Entertainment which had traditionally taken charge of court drama because he considered it an extravagance. Five months later he re-established the

department, but in a scaled-down form and under the wing of the Ministry of the Royal Household. However, theatre outside the court did not suffer a similar decline. As mentioned above, a new kind of drama, *Lakhon Rong*, was beginning to grow in popularity, first among the elites of Thai society and later spreading to the middle classes. Since *Lakhon Rong* remained popular for five decades (1910s-1950s), it can be assumed that the characteristics of this kind of theatre were compatible with the tastes of middle-class audiences. Traditional dance movement was scarcely used; moreover, the stories were more contemporary and mostly dealt with romances between middle-class characters. This theme seems to have been more attractive for middle class audiences than those of the romances and adventures of royal characters which had dominated older Thai theatre.

In 1931, Phran Bun, a famous theatre practitioner, began to use Western music in his *Lakhon Rong* performances. Formerly, most performances used orchestras called *piphat mai nuam*, comprising xylophones with cushioned hammers, two-stringed fiddles and sets of wooden slats for rhythmic sounds. Phran Bun's production of *Rosita*, which was adapted from the story of a Western film, was the first Thai drama to make use of a Jazz band and simple English words in the song lyrics to make the performance more fashionable. This production was a great success and marked a turning point in Thai theatre in the respect that it was the first drama to make use of Western music.

Another remarkable change which took place around this time was a shift in the gender of casts. Whereas nineteenth-century Thai theatre had mainly used all-female casts, the new kinds of theatre which developed in the early twentieth century began to use mixed casts. This change marked a further shift towards realism in the aesthetics of Thai theatre since mixed casts brought performances closer to everyday life.

When political change took place in 1932, political power changed hands from monarch to parliament. As a result, court drama was placed under the responsibility of the Fine Arts Department or FAD, which was set up in 1933 to take charge of all national cultural activities including traditional dance drama.

Between the 1930s and 1950s, theatre faced heavy competition from new kinds of entertainment such as film, radio and television. The popularity of Thai theatre began to decline in the latter half of the 1950s. In response to the changing demands of Thai audiences, some playhouses started to show films while many stage performers entered the film industry. It would seem that these modern forms of entertainment were more able to satisfy the tastes of modern audiences than theatre.

Thai stage drama performed by private troupes completely stopped in the late 1950s. Only the Fine Arts Department continued to put on productions of such works. When Dhanit Yupho took charge of the Fine Arts Department as the Director-General, he tried to revive various kinds of dance-drama. He invited former leading dancers of princes' troupes to train a new generation of dancers. In order to promote traditional dance and drama, Seri Wangnaitham, the Head of Dance and Music Division, sought to draw modern audiences back to traditional theatre by entertaining them with comic scenes, in many of which he performed himself. The lengths of plays were also reduced. During this time, traditional theatre needed to adapt in order to survive in modern Thai society. As a symbol of Thai culture, traditional performances have been promoted on various occasions to reflect Thai national identity. However, the traditional meanings of Thai theatre no longer seem to be relevant to modern life. I agree with Kerdarunsuksri who states that, "The audiences of today do not understand the aesthetics of traditional court dance-drama, nor appreciate the beauty of the long slow dance pieces. The development of traditional theatre is thus about the adaptation

and simplification of its form and conventions to suit the expectations of modern audiences” (2001:66).

The Modern Theatre

The term “Modern Drama” or so-called *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai* refers to Western-style drama which emerged during the late nineteenth century. Modern drama was introduced into Thai theatre in the mid-1960s by Sodsai Pantoomkomol, a graduate in Theatre Arts from the United States. The Department of Dramatic Arts was established at the faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University under her supervision with the purpose of raising the standard of performing arts in Thailand to the same level as that of the West. Later in 1971, Mattani Rutnin founded the drama department at Thammasat University, another famous university at that time. Both institutes used Western methods of modern acting in the style of realism in their curriculum. University plays are mostly translations or adaptation of Western plays, particularly the masterpieces of world theatre.

Apart from theatre in universities, small theatre groups were established by intellectuals and college students as to express their ideology about social values, cultures and politics due to the long period of political suppression under the military dictatorship. For example, the *Phra Can Siaw Group* was founded in 1969 by a loose association of young writers from Thammasat University. They adopted Western literary techniques such as surrealism, the absurd and existentialism in their work. They not only translated Western plays, but also wrote their own works. Mostly of their works usually dealt with liberty, social problems and feelings of rebellious.

Makhampom is another permanent theatre group outside academic circles that was formed for the purpose of social development. Their works usually employed performances to convey social messages to rural communities such as social and health problems such as drugs and sex education. This group has not only used Western theatrical arts but also traditional Thai theatre and folk performances in order to create their own unique production style.

The Monthian Hotel in Bangkok opened the *Monthian Thong Theatre* in 1984. Productions performed there were usually light comedies; many were adapted from Western plays. Many young actors who performed at this theatre later became famous performers in television drama. However, after nine years of success, *Monthian Thong theatre* closed down permanently in 1993 due to financial problems.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, as a result of the economic boom, some practitioners formed their own troupes and founded their own play houses such as *Dass Entertainment*, *Patravadi theatre* and *Moradok Mai*. Also, a huge world-standard theatre, *Kat Theatre*, was founded in Chiangmai by Suchai Kengkankha, a businessman who was fascinated with stage drama. However, these stage theatres were less popular among Thai people, and numbers of theatre-goers continually decreased. *Kat Theatre* folded due to a crippling deficit of millions. Most theatre productions now limit their performances to educational institutions and small stages occasionally opened to small theatre groups. Recently, only one commercial theatre that making a profit from its productions is *Rachadalai Theatre* which was established in 2007 by Thakonkiet Viravan, a former successful television director. Most of his productions are musicals which are adapted stories from Thai novels and performed in Western musical style. The use of famous television stars and singers in the leading roles has been a marketing strategy for every production.

Likay is considerably the only one kind of dance-drama theatre still popular in Thai society. However, its popularity has mostly expanded in the countryside rather than in big cities. The other kinds of dance drama like *Khon* or *Lakhon* are totally under the administration of the Fine Arts Department. Nowadays, this dance drama can only be seen on special occasions held by the Fine Arts Department and in traditional theatre programmes performed regularly and mostly for foreign tourists.¹²

Conclusion

The history of Thai theatre shows that it has been influenced by Western theatre in two periods. The first period began in the late nineteenth century when many changes resulting from influences of Western culture could be seen in Thai society. These included the theatre circle, where significant changes occurred in the aesthetics of the Thai people, which later led to the emergence of new dramatic forms and also the growth of commercial theatre in Thai society.

Since audiences began to tire of static female dance-drama with slow-moving gestures, traditional dance drama gradually declined in popularity toward the end of King Chulalongkorn's reign (1868-1910). In order to survive, the theatre business tried to adjust to the modern tastes of society. Together with an attempt by each commercial theatre to find its own individual style of performance, Western dramatic ideas were brought to the Thai dramatic circle. *Lakhon Phanthang*, *Lakhon Dukdamban*, *Lakhon Rong* and *Lakhon Phut* were created within this period to respond to the tastes of the newly emerging middle class and elite audiences. These new genres

¹² The Sala Chalerkrung Royal Theatre, Bangkok, stage *Khon* performance in every Thursday and Friday night. The Fine Arts Department also regularly perform the traditional performances at the National Theatre, Bangkok, throughout the year.

applied the Western theatre style in their performance. Even though each of them has its own characteristics and different ways to apply Western theatre style for their performances, the main characteristics of these changes can still be identified. Generally, new plays were divided into acts and scenes, like Western plays and the description of stage and performance such as setting, stage props, direction and acting were also given. The narration part, which traditionally introduced character, setting and action, was discarded, to render the performance more rapid and realistic. In addition, the dancing part was cut or simplified in order to make it easy for modern audience to understand. Instead of using a chorus, actors began to sing and speak their lines themselves (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 42).

This change in the development of Thai theatre can be considered as the first process of modernization and Westernization in Thai theatre history. Moreover, the increasing influence of the West can still be seen in later periods, most clearly in *Lakorn Rong*, which became the popular form of theatre in the 1930s-1950s. Traditional dance movements were scarcely used, and also Western music was introduced in some productions. Furthermore, during the Phibun periods (1938-1944 and 1948-1957), when theatre was exploited as a political tool to propagate nationalism, plays written by Laung Wichit emphasized only on nationalistic purposes¹³.

When Thai theatre began to decline in popularity in the late 1950s on account of the widespread invasion of new kinds of entertainment, such as film, radio drama and television drama, private theatre troupes suffered a complete demise and only the dance-drama productions of the Fine Arts Department (FAD) still remained in

¹³ For further details in the research of theatre during this period, see Witayasakpan, Jiraporn. (1992) *Nationalism and the Transformation of Aesthetic Concepts: Theatre in Thailand during the Phibun Period*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Cornell University.

theatrical circles. This, later, led to the complete separation between the traditional and modern theatre.

After Thai theatre slowly developed and became less popular during the late 1950s, the pure Western theatre style was re-introduced into Thai society in the mid 1960s by Sodchai Pantomkomol, a UCLA graduate in theatre arts. Therefore, the term “modern theatre”, in the Thai context, refers to Western style dramas that were introduced into Thai society again in the mid 1960s. Starting within universities, dramatic arts became an academic subject on the university curriculum. Western plays, particularly the masterpieces of world theatre, were translated or adapted for the stage in order to train students in new dramatic techniques and various styles of Western drama.

Later, theatre groups, such as *Phra Chan Siaw Group*, *Makhampom Theatre Group* and *MAYA*, emerged outside educational institutions for the purpose of social development. The commercial theatre for modern theatre was established when the *Monthian Thong Theatre* opened in 1984, followed by others such as *Bangkok Playhouse*, *Patravadi theatre* and *Moradok Mai*. Some of them used the new plays that were mostly written in the form of Western spoken plays. Although some plays were inspired by traditional literature, their presentation adapted a style which was directed towards Western theatre.

At this point, the separation between traditional theatre and modern theatre became clear in terms of the form of presentation and, especially, the different groups of artists who produced the performance.

CHAPTER TWO

TRADITIONAL THEATRE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THAI DRAMATIC LITERATURE

What is ‘Thai traditional theatre’?

After the Revolution of 1932, in which the political system was changed from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary system, royal dance drama was transferred to the hands of the Fine Arts Department (FAD) or Krom Silapakorn who took responsibility for all national cultural activities including dance and dance-drama. Re-established in 1933, the Fine Arts Department was authorized, under the government’s national cultural policy, to set up the standard of Thai theatre by issuing rules and regulations regarding music and theatrical performances. This was part of the nationalist campaign of Phibun’s government in order to stabilize the political power, and theatre was used as a tool to spread political propaganda¹⁴. Under the control of FAD, private troupes required permission to stage performances for the public, and this department had the right to alter the script and performance styles or suspend troupes’ permits if they felt that the performances did not follow the government’s national cultural policy (Witayasakpan, 1992). Consequently, FAD had control over the aesthetic concepts of Thai theatre. Subsequently, in the late 1950s, with intense competition from new kinds of entertainment introduced to Thai society namely film, radio and television,

¹⁴ Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkram was leader of the Thai government from 1938 to 1944 and 1948 to 1957. His national cultural policy aimed at establishing a unified Thai society with a single standard of Thai cultural identity believed to be the way to modernize the nation. His policy affected not only the changes in Thai theatre but also revolved around the ethics and lifestyles of the Thai people (Witayasakpan, 1992).

Thai theatre began to decline in popularity. As part of this process, private theatres were closed down and only FAD productions remained for Thai audiences. When Western-style drama was re-introduced in the mid- 1960s to the Thai people and was referred to as *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai*, literally ‘modern stage drama’¹⁵, traditional and modern theatre began to separate from each other.

As Thai modern theatre is considered to begin in the mid-1960s, other kinds of theatre that existed before this period are simply categorized as traditional theatre. This is due to the fact that most of these theatre genres are no longer performed except by FAD; they are regarded as part of the national heritage, so that promotion and preservation of the traditional way of performing appears to be the main purpose of their presentations. Development in terms of creating new scripts or new performances rarely occurs due to the fact that traditional theatre is no longer relevant to the modern audience. However, it is important to note that Thai theatre, before the emergence of *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai*, could in fact be divided into two groups: the kinds of theatre that emerged before and after the period of modernization as a result of Western influence. The impact of Western culture, which began during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), resulted in the establishment of new kinds of theatre that applied some elements from Western theatre in their performing style. Some scholars, accordingly, classify the theatre genres that emerged during this period as modern theatre. However, it is obvious that Thai modern theatre or *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai* emerged in a different period, with no relevance or connection to these theatre genres, so that even though these genres applied Western theatrical characteristics in their performances,

¹⁵ As the word “Lakhon” means “drama”, “Wethi” means “stage” and Samai mai means “modern”, the word “wethi” was added in order to distinguish this kind of performance from other entertainments that emerged during that time, such as television series which is referred as *Lakhon Toratas* and *Lakhon Witayu* which means radio drama.

they are unlikely to be categorized as *Lakhon Wethi Samai Mai*. The main difference lies in the static standard, or *kanob*, of the forms of these theatre genres; even productions that are staged now follow the *kanob* methods of performing. A new script is rarely created: mostly the old one is performed with small adjustments. Indeed, most of the changes are concerned with cutting the length of scenes or adjusting the text. For example, scenes may be cut or some specific part may be selected to perform, a new piece of dance or a comic scene might be added (Duangpattra, 2001:119-121). The *kanob* of Lakhon Thai is also concerned with Thai custom, including the belief in the sacredness of traditional arts. Changes and innovation are risky to be condemned as improper and disrespectful to national traditions. This conservation has also resulted in the limitation of the records of Thai theatre which most of the sources dealt only with the description of theatrical genres. Consequently, dramatic texts with critical analysis were rarely provided.

Lakhon Thai is a term that refers to kinds of Thai performance that emerged before the establishment of Thai modern theatre. Some scholars categorised *Lakhon Thai* into three types, based on their modes of performance: *Lakhon Ram* refers to dance theatre; *Lakhon Rong* refers to theatre which uses singing as the main element to tell the story; and *Lakhon Phut* means spoken drama. However, in general, each theatre genre is more likely to be called by their specific name of its kind such as *Khon*, *Lakhon Nai*, *Lakhon Nok*, *Lakhon Dukdamban* or *Lakhon Phantang*.

With the aim of finding original characteristics of Thai theatre, my research focuses on Thai theatre before Westernization; so ‘traditional theatre’ in this context mainly refers to types of theatre which existed before the first impact of Westernization during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), which is considered to be an important turning point of Thai theatre. In the following part, I explain the characteristics of Thai

traditional theatre by dividing the genres into two groups, to indicate the development of Thai theatre that existed before the establishment of modern Thai theatre. I define these two groups as traditional dance-drama, and Westernized theatre during the early twentieth century.

Traditional Dance-Drama

The early forms of Thai performance were dance, music and songs while stories were believed to be added later during the *Ayuttahaya* period (1351-1767).¹⁶ It could be said that dance is the main element that is used to perform the story in Thai theatre. Even in the later period when the influence from Western culture resulted in the creation of new kinds of Thai theatre, dance was still retained in their performances even though it was given less importance than before. Traditional dance-drama is sometimes referred to as *Lakhon Ram*, as the word “*ram*” means dance¹⁷. This indicates the importance of dance as the main element of its performance.

A treatise on the art of Thai dance consists of dancing gestures. These gestures are later put together in order to present the dance pattern in each performance. The process of creating the dancing pattern of each performance goes along with music and script. In Thai theatre, dance is the gesticulative way to narrate the story. Each gesture illustrates the expression of the character’s feelings, actions and also dialogue which are described within the script that is sung along with the dance pattern. The degree of using dance in each kind of theatre is different, as well as its level of

¹⁶ The first evidence is the report of de La Loubère, the French diplomat sent to the Siamese court in the reign of King Narai in 1687 where the names concerning dramatic performance were mentioned.

¹⁷ Actually, the term *Lakhon* generally means dramatic performance. It was initially used to refer to a dance-drama. Yet after other genres of Thai drama, i.e. singing drama and spoken drama emerged, dance drama began to be called “*Lakhon Ram*” (Nimnetphan,1989).

complication and elaboration. These depend on the different nature and characteristics of each kind of theatre, based on its type, namely either court or popular theatre.

There are four genres of Thai traditional dance drama. *Khon* and *Lakhon Nai* are originally court entertainment while *Lakhon Chatri* and *Lakhon Nok* are the dance-drama of common people.

- **Khon**

This kind of theatre is often referred to in English as the masked dance-drama as actors wear masks which present the characters they are performing.¹⁸ *Khon* is a genre of court performance and has always been respected as a genre of the high arts. Actors perform their characters by using expressive gestures without speaking their lines themselves. The description of the scenes, actions, characters and dialogues is narrated in the script, which appears in the verse forms sung by the chorus who sit on the side of the stage with the Thai-musical orchestra. The story is solely from the *Ramakien*, a Thai version of the Indian epic *Ramayana*. As a courtly art, the dance was elaborately created in order to present the sacred and elegant nature of royal entertainment. Costumes, music and the verse-form of the script are also utilised in order to create the splendid spectacle of the performance.

- **Lakhon Nai**

Court dance-drama was originally performed only by female dancers. It is believed to have been adapted from folk theatre in which actors begin to speak by themselves; chorus is used only for the narrative description parts. The repertoire consisted of four plays, namely *Ramakien*, *Unarut*, *Inao* and *Dalang*.

¹⁸ Initially, all characters wore masks in *Khon* performance but later, there is the exception for characters of hero (Phra), heroine (Nang) and gods.

- **Lakhon Chatri**

This kind of theatre is believed to be the prototype of *Lakhon* or Thai drama. It developed from the performance called *nora chatri* of southern Thailand. It has maintained most of its indigenous southern characteristics, such as rapid dance with swift hand and foot movements. Dancers wear long brass fingernails. It was first performed by a small cast of three or four male actors and then later with mixed casts, and at the present time by female dancers, with exception of the roles of clowns.

- **Lakhon Nok**

A popular dance drama, *Lakhon Nok* originally consisted of two or three male performers; each of whom played several roles. Female actors were added at a much later period. Sources of the stories were folktales and the *Pannasa Jataka* (*The Fifty Birth Tales of the Buddha*). The actors speak their own lines. Originally, there was no written script; the performance was based on the performers' wit and improvisation. While court art is strict with a sense of seriousness and formality, folk dance-drama appears to place an emphasis on its sense of humour and comedy.

Thai theatre in the early period based its performance on dancing and singing. With the impact of Western culture along with the changes in Thai society, the new kinds of Thai theatre were created under the influence of Western theatre. These theatre genres were developed through the combination of the characteristics of Thai and Western theatre. However, different from the straight importation of Western theatre style in the later period, these new genres borrowed Western elements to enhance their performances. Consequently, these elements were adjusted and mixed

with traditional elements and established a harmonious mixture that resulted in the uniqueness of Thai theatre during this period.

Westernized theatre during the early twentieth century

During the reign of King Rama V, Thai theatre faced significant changes in its developments. The impact of the Westernization and changes in society resulted in the emergence of new kinds of Thai theatre during the time that commercial theatre was spreading to the middle class. With competition in theatre business, theatre playhouses attempted to create their individual style of performance in order to attract more audiences; by doing so, some elements from Western theatre were applied in their plays, which led to the innovation of new theatrical forms including *Lakhon Dukdamban*, *Lakhon Rong*, *Lakhon Phanthang* and *Lakhon Phut*.¹⁹

Lakhon Phanthang is a new-style of dance drama created by Cao Phraya Mahin. The source of the stories came from imaginative and foreign literature and chronicles. A major feature of *Lakhon Phanthang* was the portrayal of characters of foreign countries as to give an exotic flavour to the performance. Hence, this sort of drama incorporates a diverse range of cultures, as also indicated in its name *Phanthang*, which literally means ‘thousand ways’ or ‘thousand sources’. This Thai music and dance style imitated foreign influences. Traditional dance was simplified and combined with foreign postures.

¹⁹ *Likay* is another new kind of Thai theatre which also emerged during this period. However, it tends to be regarded as folk theatre rather than traditional performance which appears to have a fixed standard of performing. *Likay* has continuously developed its form up to the present: there are many private *Likay* troupes still performing in Thailand, especially in the rural areas.

Lakhon Dukdamban was created by Prince Naris and Cao Phrya Thewet. Narrative parts, which traditionally introduced character, setting and action, were discarded as to make performance more rapid and make them more realistic. Scripts were divided into acts and scenes as in Western plays. The performers sang their own lyrics while dancing. Western theatrical techniques were employed for the setting, such as three-dimensional set designs and special effects.

Lakhon Rong was inspired by Western opera, in which singing was the main element in narrating the story. The dance movements were extremely simplified and minimised in such a way that they more closely resemble natural patterns of movement. Actors also sang their own lyrics and spoke dialogues that repeat the content of the lyrics, while the narrative part was left to the chorus to sing. The plays were newly written or adapted from Western opera and literary works, usually concerned with everyday life and contemporary issues. Traditional dance movement was scarcely used. *Lakhon Rong* developed in its style of performance and was very popular during the period 1910-1950.

Lakhon Phut is the Western-style spoken play. It differed from other genres of Thai drama in being basically composed of spoken dialogue, either in prose or in verse. Even though King Rama VI adopted this theatrical style directly from the West, he adapted the script to suit the Thai context, both in his own plays and translations. With a different style in context, language and mode of performance from current Thai modern plays, this genre has preserved its mode of performance and is considered as *Lakhon Thai* or older Thai theatre rather than as a modern genre.

It could be seen that the Thai theatre genre under the influence of the West developed their style toward a more realistic mode of performance, in which dance was

reduced in its importance and verse was replaced with normal dialogues which are likely sung by the actors themselves. Not only has Western culture influence the form of performance, but it has also resulted in significant changes in the characteristics of the scripts used in Thai theatre.

Thai Dramatic Literary Works

In the past, dramatic literature was patronized and developed by the court as part of the belief that it is symbolic of the wealth and prosperity of the reign (Rutnin, 1993). Accordingly, Thai dramatic texts had been newly composed and revised throughout Thai history, particularly by the kings and the poets of their court. The early recorded source of Thai dramatic texts was court literature, while Thai folk theatre mainly based their performances on improvisation. The literature composed by the court was and still is regarded as high art. When the Fine Arts Department took control of national art and culture after the political Revolution of 1932, its actions also included publishing the court literature, of which some was added to the curriculum of Thai high schools' literature courses; these resulted in the wider recognition of these texts among Thai people. Among these texts, dramatic literature composed during the reign of King Rama II earned the most recognition; this period is considered as 'a golden age' of art, literature and dance-drama. The king composed not only the script for the court performances but also included six plays for *Lakhon Nok*, a kind of Thai folk theatre. His works are approved for his elaborate composing. The productions of traditional theatre by FAD are mostly based on court dramatic literatures.

Wannakadee kan sadang, meaning dramatic literature, is a general term which refers to traditional literature that was initially composed for the purpose of

performing. The literature that was composed in the form of *klon*, a kind of Thai verse form, was also mentioned as *klon bot lakhon* which means a verse play. A traditional Thai dance-drama appears in a verse form that is different from the form of a Western play; so frequently it is referred to as ‘dramatic literature’, since ‘play’ tends to give more the idea of a script in the Western style. Also as the traditional theatre is no longer the main entertainment of the Thai people, this dramatic literature is accordingly seen as reading literature, rather than as a play.

Before the influence of Western culture, the characteristics of Thai dramatic literature for dance-drama explicitly differed from Western script. Firstly, it is composed based on the specific kind of theatre. Each type of traditional theatre has different characteristics and style of performance; therefore each text is composed based on this individual style. Also, there are repertoires that are restricted for court theatre genres: *Khon* is solely based on the *Ramakien* story, *Lakhon Nai* is restricted to only four plays, which are *Ramakien Inao*, *Unarut* and *Dalang*. Thai folk theatre mostly uses stories from folktales and the *Pannasa Jataka* (*The Fifty Birth Tales of the Buddha*).

Secondly, the texts appear in verse form. The description of characters, scene, actions and dialogue are included within the text. This text is sung by the chorus, and actors dance with gestures that demonstrate the meaning of these words

Thirdly, it is unusual that Thai playwrights, either as an individual or as a group, found it necessary to write the whole story from the beginning to the end. On the contrary, only a dramatic part of the story was chosen to be written for the performance, except for *Ramakien* of King Rama I that appeared as a full story; later when it was revived during the reign of King Rama II, only some parts were selected to be rewritten to perform on stage. Among King Rama II’s six plays of *Lakhon Nok*, only *Sang Thong*

was composed from the beginning to the end. This is because Thai dance drama places more emphasis on the performance rather than the story, as Witayasakpan states:

Thai theatre cannot be separated from dance, music and song. Stories only serve to tie those elements loosely together. Each theatrical genre has a specific repertoire which is familiar to the audience. Therefore, the audience pays more attention to the elaboration of dance style, music, and costume.
(1992:26)

Fourthly, the theme of dramatic literature is generally concerned with Buddhist belief, with traditional moral lessons like ‘good begets good and evil begets evil’ or the Buddhist idea of *Karma* or fate that is caused by one’s actions in a previous life. The good deeds of a hero in his previous life contribute to his high-born status and the beauty in his appearance.

Thai theatre after the process of modernization had changed its direction towards the style of Western theatre, not only in its mode of performance but also in changes in the form of the dramatics texts that were used in the performance: they were divided into acts and scenes; characters were changed to be commoners in order to make performances more relevant to a middle-class audience; the narrative parts sung by the chorus were discarded, and actors began to sing or speak their own dialogue, which was changed from verse to prose. A steady trend towards a more realistic presentation led to a decline of the role of dance in the performance. Thus, Thai theatre in this period had developed its style toward the Western theatre, and some of its traditional ways of performance had been changed or adjusted to suit the taste of new audience. So this development of Thai theatre on one hand had shows us changes in the taste of Thai people towards the Western theatre style; but on the other hand, it also presents us with some of the main characteristics of Thai traditional theatre, which were

kept in these new genres with the aim of impressing the audience. The new genres of Thai theatre during this period of modernisation provide a harmony between the classical and the modern, a balance of the old and the new which rarely occurs in the circle of current Thai modern theatre.

CHAPTER THREE

THAI TRADITIONAL DRAMA AND ITS ADAPTATIONS

Thai traditional plays on the modern stage

As discussed in the previous chapter, although the trend in modern Thai theatre is to use Western performance methods, some artists have also attempted to use elements from traditional Thai theatre in their works. *Nai Aphaimani*, written in 1971 by Witayakorn Chiengkul, was an early attempt to use traditional literature as a source for modern stage drama. This play was staged for a small circle of students and intellectuals at a seminar on *The Identity of Thai Society in the Future*, held at the Siam Society, Bangkok²⁰. In 1985 the Dramatic Arts Department of Chulalongkorn University, in collaboration with the Goethe Institute, sought to create a modern theatrical production entitled *Phra Sang-Iphigenia*. The play was based on a Thai folktale, King Rama II's *Sang Thong*, and Goethe's retelling of a Greek myth, *Iphigenie auf Tauris*. It involved Thai and German actors performing in mixed forms of Thai *Lakhon Nok* and modern Western-style drama.²¹

On a wider and more commercial scale, during the late 1970s and 1980s two modern theatrical productions, *Rak Thi Tong Montra* and *Lo'dilokrat*, were based on the bestselling novelist Tommayanti's modern reinterpretation of the literary classic, *Lilit*

²⁰ The play made use of the characters in well-known work of Sunthon Phu, *Phra Aphimani*. Witayakorn applied the conflict in the original version to satire to the issue against the society norm as to implicitly present the political message to her audience. Please see Chiengkul's *Nai Aphaimani* (1988).

²¹ The seminar report on the discussion on this production could be found in Nagavajara, Chetana. (2005) 'Theatre as an East-West Encounter', in *Criticism as Cross-Cultural Encounter*. Bangkok: Chommanad Press.

Phra Lo, in his novel *Rak Thi Tong Montra*. The success of these two productions may be taken as a reflection of the influence of traditional literature for Thai audiences.

By the 1990s, an innovative trend of combining Thai and Western theatre had developed in contemporary Thai theatre. This was particularly apparent during the period of *Pi Ronnarong Wattanatham Thai* or the Year of Thai Cultural Preservation (1994-1997) when over fifteen plays based on traditional literary works were produced in the Thai theatrical circle, both on commercial and non-commercial scales.

Kittisak Kerdarunsuksri carried out research on the adaptations produced during this period. In his PhD dissertation, *The Transformation of Traditional Thai Literature into Modern Stage Drama: The Current Development of Thai Theatre* (2001), he analyzed some significant works by well-known artists who frequently make use of traditional theatrical elements.

After the 1990s, the trend of adapting traditional literature to the modern stage seems to have declined as indicated by the fact that such productions have been less created. Occasionally, only performances that relate to traditional drama have been produced by contemporary artists with personal interests in traditional theatre.

Most of these adaptations are staged within the modern theatrical circle. Meanwhile, very few obvious changes can be seen in traditional theatre. Most activities related with traditional drama fall under the official responsibility of the Fine Arts Department (FAD). As a result, it is difficult to apply any changes or new initiatives. For private companies, traditional Thai theatre is usually performed either for tourists or on special occasions intended to promote Thailand's cultural heritage. Therefore, traditional plays are likely to be preserved as they are. Furthermore, a lack of state

support funding has done little to encourage the development of new ideas within the traditional theatre circle.

In contrast to the traditional theatre circle, exponents of modern theatre in Thailand, even in small groups that survived the decline, are active not only in translating and adapting Western plays, but also in creating original scripts and performances. In order to create original Thai dramatic performances, some artists have turned to sources from traditional theatre. These artists have developed their own unique ways of using the traditional elements of Thai theatre in their performances. However, because traditional Thai theatre is a complicated and delicate art, only a small number of theatre practitioners have attempted to create works based on adaptations of traditional performances.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the different methods used by contemporary Thai artists to approach traditional literature. The selected artists whose significant works are in the area of adaptation of Thai traditional literature will be analyzed with the aim to present their approaches to traditional plays. These artists include Patravadi Mejudhon, Pornrat Damrhung, Makamphom Theatre Group and Dangkamon Na-Pombejra. Some still continue to create adaptations of traditional literature.

Patravadi Theatre

Patravadi Mejudhon is a well-known artist. She is a legendary actress as well as a renowned director and playwright. Her works appear in movies, television and on stage. After creating several performances for other enterprises such as the *Monthian Thong Theatre*, she opened her own open-air theatre in 1992. Her theatre, located adjacent to Chao Phya River bank and the royal temple, Wat Rakang, Bangkok, consists of a main open stage, on which one large production is normally staged each year, and a small indoor theatre, in which small productions have been held from time to time. Her audience varies from artists, critics, students, academics to the general public. Coming from a wealthy family and with many businesses to help fund her productions, together with regular support from sponsors such as government organizations, she has been able to continuously produce performances without any financial difficulties. As reflected in her wish to “create an entirely new type of contemporary Thai theatre” (Maneerat, 2008:56), Patravadi is always open to new ideas and inspiration and she strives to explore something new in her productions. She also encourages the new Thai theatre practitioners to create original works for contemporary Thai theatre. In 1999, her theatre hosted the first Bangkok Fringe Festival in order to provide new artists with a space in which to present their works.

As her performances appear to be unique and different from others, her works attract media attention and have come to be widely recognized by the Thai people. According to Maneerat (2008), her productions gain both financial success and artistic appreciation. It could be said that Patravadi Theatre is one of the most successful troupes among small the number of professional modern theatre companies in Thailand.

Since she studied and lived abroad, in England, the United States and Canada, Patravadi was trained and gained experience with Western theatrical productions. However, she took an interest in Thai traditional literature and theatre which she initially experienced in childhood. This interest became the inspiration for her to produce many performances that are based on traditional Thai literature and her theatre has earned a reputation for its popular modernized adaptations of traditional literary works. To preserve and promote Thai arts and culture is one of her theatre's policies; this also reflects her attempt to return to create works from her cultural background.

The following analysis of Patravadi's famous productions, based on traditional literary works, aims to present the unique characteristics of her adaptation principles²². Five productions are selected for examination in order to reveal the methods that are used in each work. These performances are *Lo'dilokrat*, *Singhakraiphop*, *Inao-Joraka*, *Ngo'Pa* and *Sahatsadecha*.

- ***Lo'dilokrat***

This production showed Patravadi's first attempt at transposing traditional literature into modern stage drama. *Lo'dilokrat* was staged in 1986 at the Silpa Bhirasri Auditorium, Bangkok. This play was not directly transposed from the original *Lilit Phra Lo*²³, but from the novel, *Rak Thi Tong Montra*, the contemporarily reinterpreted novel

²² The detailed analysis of each performance can be found in the third and forth chapters of Kerdarunsuksri. (2001) *The transformation of Traditional Thai Literature into Modern Stage Drama; The Current Development of Thai Theatre*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies.; and Udomphon. (2001) *Withi Namsanoe Wannakhadi Thai Nai Rup Khansadaeng Baepphasomphasan Khong Patravadi Theatre [The Presentation of Thai Literature in the Hybrid Performance of Patravadi Theatre]* Research Report. Bangkok: Thammasat UP.

²³ *Lilit Phra Lo* is one of the most well-known Thai traditional literatures. It was a literary work of the early Ayutthaya period. The story deals with a love triangle and ends with the death of the three main characters.

of this classic. However, the essence of the original literature is still shown in this production. Writing and managing the production by herself, Patravadi also performed the role of *Jao ya*, one of the main characters of this performance.

- ***Singhakraiphop***

Singhakraiphop or *Nithan Khang Wat*²⁴ was produced in August 1992. When Patravadi opened her own theatre in 1992; it was the first production of the Patravadi theatre and was directed by Patravadi herself. The script was adapted by Marisa Saenkunsirirak. Based on Sunthon Phu's poetic tale, *Singhakraiphop* was represented in the form of a musical play. The production was restaged across the country for sixty-nine performances and also was chosen to be the country's representative at the 3rd ASEAN theatre festival.

- ***Inao-Joraka***

Based on King Rama II's *Inao*, Patravadi transposed this classic literature into the form of a rock-opera. Not only did she direct the performance by herself, but she also adapted the script and performed a role in this production. *Inao* is a classical literature as it has been taught in both schools and universities. The story deals with the love and adventures of an ancient Javanese hero-king. The production was staged in 1994 and gained impressive success at the box-office.

- ***Ngo'Pa***

Adapted from a classical Thai drama, *Ngo'Pa* written in 1905 by King Chulalongkorn in the form of dramatic verse; *Ngo'Pa* was staged in 1995 and was

²⁴ As the location of the theatre is next to temple, Wat Rakhankhositaram, the performance is given the title *Nithan Khang Wat* which means the tale beside a temple.

directed by Patravadi herself. The plot revolves around a tragic love triangle that ends with the death of the three main characters. The production ran from November 1995 to March 1996 at the Patravadi Theatre and was a huge success with audiences. In 1997, it was restaged for the event called *Three Styles of Ngo Pa* for purpose of preserving and promoting Thai culture. In association with the Thai Khadi Research Institute of Thammasat University and the Fine Arts Department (FAD), this time, the performance was adjusted by mixing three theatrical and cinematic forms which were traditional dance-drama, film and modern stage drama.

- ***Sahatsadecha***

First staged at her theatre in 1997, it was later re-staged several times both in Thailand and abroad. Inspired by the *Khon*, masked dance-drama, a performance of *Sahatsadecha* produced by the Fine Arts Department (FAD), this work was an experimental work in which Patravadi applied *Khon* in conjunction with *Nang Talung* (southern shadow puppets) in order to enhance the performance. The production was co-directed by a leading dancer of FAD, Gunlachat Aranyanak and Manop Micamrat, a prominent dancer of the Patravadi theatre whose dancing skills had been trained in the Western style. In this production, Patravadi rewrote the script based on both King Rama II's *Ramakien* and the script of the FAD's production.

Creating many significant works, Patravadi Mejudhon has earned a solid reputation for her theatrical adaptations of Thai classical literatures for the modern stage. Although she performs different duties in each production, as the owner of the theatre, it is plausible to say that the overall image of the performance's aesthetic is under her supervision. With regard to her productions' various styles of presentation, by analysing her works in this section, I try to specify the significant principles that

Patravadi applies in her adaptations in two aspects: script adaptation and performance presentation.

Script Adaptation

In order to be able to communicate with modern audience, the original story is adjusted to make the adaptation suit the current social context; three significant techniques in script adaptation can be identified from Patravadi's productions.

First, the original plot is deconstructed in order to make the new script strong and concise. As it is typical of Thai traditional literature, the story is long and covers an extensive period of time, leading to the occurrence of numerous subplots. Therefore, in *Singhakraiphop*, the playwright chose to narrate the play by focusing on the storyline of *Singhakraiphop*, the hero of the story. In *Inao-Joraka*, only some parts of the original plot were chosen to be reworked. In this regard, Patravadi claimed that only the suitable parts were selected to be re-presented in order to illustrate and emphasize the message of the play (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001:142). In transposing *Ngo'Pa* into a musical, although most of the original plot was retained, including the subplot, an adjustment in the technique of narrative was made. The final part of the original play was placed as the opening scene of this renewed production; therefore, from the second scene onwards, the play was a flash-back to the rest of story in the original plot.

Secondly, the attempt to emphasise the theme is explicit in her adaptations. In *Lo'dilokrat*, the theme of vengeance is presented more prominently than others that appear in the original version, for example, love and loyalty. In *Singhakraiphop*, the symbol of coloured leaves presented in the original literature is emphasized by the colours of masks that are added to the performance in order to emphasize the message

of the play. In the original version, the hero found the magic tree, *Ton Sapphaya*, by eating its leaves, thereby enabling human beings to transfigure into various creatures. Not only did the new script interpret these leaves as symbols of what humans want - for example, the green leaf that could transform people into parrots illustrating freedom- but it also made the actors wear coloured masks and reveal each colour's meanings in the opening scene. In the *Inao-Joraka* adaptation, the theme of karma is illustrated through the behaviour of the main character, Inao; the play points out that the separation of him and Butsaba, the heroine, occurred because of the karma he set in motion by leaving Chintara his first wife for Butsaba. Although he has sacred powers from his previous life, he cannot avoid the karma he committed in the present life. The fact that he chose to leave his first wife after he met the heroine caused the separation between them in the new version.

Moreover, in all of Patravadi's adaptations, the theme is plainly stated either at the beginning or the end of the play. In the opening scene of *Singhakraiphop*, the "mask" song describes the meaning of the four masks, which links to the theme of the play, which later also appears in the lyric of the song in the final scene. Each colour of the masks represents the desires of human beings, namely power, passion, freedom and wealth. In *Inao-Joraka*, the theme is clearly stated in the god's dialogue at the beginning of the play. The voice over of God replies to King Kurepan's prayer for a son, stating that the prince will have great power and defeat all his enemies, but that 'Everyone has his own karma, which needs to be repaid. Whether good or bad luck depends on one's own deeds'. The lyric at the end of *Sahatsadecha* when all the main characters emerge for the final dance, also concludes the theme of the story, that is, wisdom claims victory over power.

The attempt to highlight the message of the play in Patravadi's adaptation demonstrates her intention to make traditional literature communicable to modern audiences. The emphasis on selected messages that are relevant to current events is one of her unique modernized adaptation principles that is used in stories from traditional literature as a tool to express her commentaries on contemporary society (Manreerat, 2008). Therefore, the technique of having a narrator to criticize and comment on the play or the character's behaviour is frequently seen in her works.

Finally, her adaptation often deals with characterization. Reinterpretation and telling the original story from the perspective of a less prominent character in the original are significant characteristics of her adaptations. In *Lo'dilokrak*, changes in characterization are made in order to clarify the messages of the play. The character of *Jao Ya* is given a significant role in the adaptation in order to convey the theme of vengeance that leads to the tragic ending. Additionally, the role of the hero in the original was minimised, while the role of the female characters was highlighted. This indicates the feminist idea which Kittisak Kerdarunsuksri mentions as 'a new phenomenon for female characters' (2001:101) in Thai theatre where normally they are presented as the victims. Alternatively, for *Inao-Joraka*, Patravadi reinterpreted the two main characters in order to give a clearer image of the contrast between them. *Inao* is well-known for his attractive appearance while *Joraka* is recognized among Thai people as an ugly villain. The appearance of the two characters' names as the title of the performance reflects the message of judgment on people's virtue. The new play tries to point out that when *Inao* kidnaps *Butsaba* and accuses *Joraka* of this, people tend to believe *Inao* and base their judgment of *Joraka* on his wicked appearance, as opposed to

their opinion of *Inao* who is admired for his beautiful look²⁵. The presentation of *Lamhap*, the main female character of *Ngo 'Pa*, shows us the attempt to criticize social restraints that continue to be imposed upon women's lives. *Lamhap*, torn between her fiancé and her lover, has to sacrifice her life. By focusing on the main female character, the play tries to evoke the strong side of this female character that goes against society's expectation placed upon women's lives. Maneerat states "since the script is rewritten from a modern-day perspective, the result is a clarity with which the contemporary audience can approach these characters without viewing them simply as the emblematic images of irrelevant fictional women of the past"(2008: 129). The negative portrayal of the main character of *Sahatsadecha* is presented by inserting the narrative character to comment on his thinking. The new play tries to present the anger of this character by adding a scene that shows his strong emotion.

Performance presentation

- Traditional elements

As Patravadi precisely expresses her interest in her cultural background, it comes as no surprise that traditional elements are apparently presented in all of her works: these elements consists of the quotations from the original text, traditional theatrical elements, namely music, song and dance, and the application of other forms of traditional theatre.

Most of her adaptations are based on famous classical and highly respected literature. So frequently, the well-known parts from the original are retained in the new

²⁵ The high value that Thai people give to physical beauty is influenced by the Buddhist belief that "Physical beauty is a reflection of merit store, good deeds in the past or present lives, and moral purity. Clarity of complexion grace and serenity [are] reflections of moral goodness, and an indication of the merit store. Ugliness, unfortunately, convey the opposite" (Esterik, 1989:12, cited in Manomaiphibul, 2006:59).

versions. Mostly, these quotations appear in the dialogue. To show the poetic value of the works, direct quotations are sometimes used in the form of song and dialogue. In *Lo'dirokrat*, three well-known poems from *Lilit Phra lor* are quoted in the form of verses spoken by the main characters. Additionally, the well-known song from the previous version of traditional literature, *Phra lor* also appears in this version. In *Inao-Joraka*, some dialogues are quoted from the original text that is written in verse. The actors speak these poetic dialogues in normal speech. In *Ngo'Pa*, all narrated songs are taken from the original text.

In order to enhance the performance, other forms of traditional theatre are used in some adaptations. For example, the traditional shadow puppets, *Nang Yai* (large shadow puppets) and *Nang Talung* (southern Thai shadow puppet) are employed in the journey scene in *Inao-Joraka*. The use of shadow puppets is also seen in *Sahatsadecha*. However, the puppet is adapted from the traditional puppets; they are made from carved paper instead of leather in the size of *Nang Talung* but manipulated in the *Nang Yai* style. The Japanese technique of using elastic bands to control bodily movements such as nodding is also used.

- The Western theatrical technique

The apparent application of Western theatrical techniques in her adaptation can be seen in five areas: acting, costumes, setting, lighting and special effects.

In the area of acting, it is interesting to look specifically at the performance of *Sahatsadecha*. While other scripts are presented in the form of modern plays, Western acting is assumed to be used; but for *Sahatsadecha*, when the performance is still presented in the form of *Khon*, traditional mask-drama, it is interesting to point out that *Patravadi* chose not to conform with the convention of making the non-masked

actress fully reveal her facial and emotional expression, something that does not appear in the traditional form of *Khon*. This change made the performance more realistic and attractive to the modern audience, since the character expression is more realistic and therefore more relevant to them.

The splendid traditional costume is obviously simplified to make it have more contemporary relevance. This characteristic is obviously seen in most of her productions where the traditional costumes are not applied; instead, she uses a mixture in style in order to enhance the performance spectacle.

Special effects such as slides are used to clarify the visual aspects of performance, by suggesting the scenery or showing *Sahatsadecha*'s innumerable eyes that are impossible to find in a traditional mask. Sound effects are employed to create the atmosphere of the performance, such as the sound of rain fall. Modern light is especially designed for the shadow puppetry. In *Lo'dilokrat*, , video and voice over are used to present the supernatural power of *Pu Cao Saming Phria*, the main villain character who used dark magic to cast a spell on the hero.

- The mixture of traditional and Western style

The juxtaposition of traditional and Western style is another significant characteristic of her adaptations. Most of her adaptations consist of both traditional and Western music. However, the selection of traditional melodies is mainly based on the emotion of the song rather than the convention. In *Lo' dirokrat*, Western music is employed to express the characters' emotions and the atmosphere of the play. In *Singhakraphop*, there is an attempt to adapt the traditional dance into Western style. The song taken from the traditional melody is played by Western musical instruments. In *Ngo Pa*, while music and song are principally based on traditional Thai melodies,

nevertheless, they were played by Western instruments and a contemporary Western dance style is implied to create the atmosphere of “jungle” people.

Patravadi is representative of contemporary Thai theatre practitioners who seeks to turn back to their cultural roots. One of her intentions in combining Thai and foreign elements in her adaptation is the hope that Thai audiences, especially the younger generations, will eventually return to appreciate their own cultural background. The traditional elements obviously appear in her production express her deep interest in Thai culture. She adjusted the traditional form to fit into contemporary society where the aesthetics has tended towards Western culture. Foreign theatrical techniques are adopted and adapted to make her productions more attractive. The collaboration between Thai and foreign theatre practitioners in her theatre’s productions implies a direct foreign influence, particularly Western, on Thai theatre. In staging traditional literature, these works were reinterpreted from a modern viewpoint and the old messages of the original were linked to contemporary society. Her works, therefore, are one of the significant creations in the area of adaptation of the traditional theatre on the modern stage.

Pornrat Damrhung

Pornrat Damrhung is a lecturer of the department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. She is a well-known theatre practitioner whose many works have been inspired by traditional theatre and literature. Working in the educational institute, most of her works are produced within the educational context which allows her to use her performances as a tool for research and experimentation particularly in areas that may be difficult to do in commercial theatre. Her productions can, thus, be said, to create a significant innovation in the area of adaptation of traditional theatre.

Her renowned performances in the adaptation of traditional literature include *Kham Rak lae Kham Tai* (1996), *Nonthuk* (1997), *Lui Fai* (2005) and *Sita-Siram* (2006). *Kham Rak lae Kham Tai* was staged at the Suan Phak Kat Palace under the name of The Search Group, a temporary group of theatre practitioners, while the rest were produced by Dramatic Arts Department, Chulalongkorn University. Requiring sufficient knowledge of theatre, most of her audiences are university students, scholars, theatre practitioners and educated middle-class people. In most of her works, Pornrat writes the scripts and directs the performances herself, in collaboration with other skilful artists especially in the area of dance, music and staging.

Kham Rak Lae Kam Tai is adapted from King Vajiravudh's *Sawitri*. In this adaption, dance movement is the main element to narrate the story rather than dialogues. This style of presentation is also seen in the production of *Nonthuk*, in which two actors employ dance movement to develop the story taken from a part of *Ramakien* literature. The script of *Lui Fai* is inspired by female characters from several traditional literatures such as *Inao* and *Ramakien*. These traditional female characters are presented

on the modern stage from the perspective of modern feminism. In *Sita-Sriram*, the character of *Sita*, the main female character of *Ramakien*, is explored and re-illustrated with a new interpretation that relates her to the parallel situations faced by women today.

The significant characteristic of Pornrat Damrhung's adaptation is that her work always expresses a new interpretation of traditional literature from a feminist perspective. Obviously, her work puts emphasis on the female character who normally becomes the main character in her performances. Her productions portray the social inequality these female characters suffer with the intention of arousing the audience to see traditional concepts from a new point of view (Diamond, 2006:126).

In *Sawitri*, while the traditional story regards the main female character as an idealistic woman whose love and loyalty towards her husband can overcome everything, even death, Pornrat presents this character's action from the opposite perspective. From her view point, what this female character did was to en-slave herself. In spite of knowing that her husband would have a short life, she insisted on marrying him and later tried to retrieve his life from *Yama* (God of death).

Feminist ideas have been explicitly developed in her later work, *Lui Fai*, when she selected female characters from many traditional plays to present the idea of status of women in Thai society from the past to the present. These characters were well-known female characters who were normally regarded as supporting characters who seem have few choices in their lives except maintaining good behaviour which mostly means being loyal to their husband and accepting every fate that happened in their lives without any resistance or complaint. Towards the end of *Lui Fai*, Pornrat made one of her main female characters talk to the audience and say she could no longer

bear to stand on the stage any longer when everyone thought what happened was entertaining. Then, she walks off-stage and leaves the theatre. After a short pause, the performance on stage was continued without any notice of her absence.

It is interesting to note that one of Pornrat's unique ways of reinterpretation of the traditional literature is the way in which her works do not just analyze these female characters but also attempt to present them from a totally new perspective that has never been mentioned in the normal interpretation of the original version. In other words, her adaptations always show the new images of female characters that break with standard stereotypes that were normally presented in traditional theatre. This statement is explicit in her work *Sita: Sri Ram* in which the character of *Sita* is investigated, from the perspective of the hidden side of her story. In spite of the normal portrayal of ideal images, the diverse and complex side of this character is demonstrated. Pornrat also expands her study to the various portrayals of *Sita* which are depicted in *Ramayana* stories in South and Southeast Asia, and finally ended up with seven versions of the story of this character. In her adaptation, *Sita* is presented as normal person by relating her story with parallel situations that women nowadays have to face in society. It is her intention to present this new play with a non-linear plot without climax and an absolute denouement but revealing it like a jigsaw puzzle, combining stories and various kinds of theatrical presentation (Damrhung, 2006b).

Pornrat states that if the adaptation just emphasises the same message as the original, it could not be called "reinterpretation". Therefore, her works always go further than reconstructing the plot or modernizing the story (Damrhung, 2006b:123). The attempt to create a new perception that differs from the traditional norm becomes one of the significant principles of her work.

Apart from reinterpreting the traditional plays from a feminist point of view, the second significant characteristic is the way she applies the elements of Thai theatre, especially Thai conventional dance, on the modern stage. Even though the image of her performance always looks contemporary, the traditional elements are always given importance. Dance is another main element that is used to narrate the story in her adaptations, particularly in the dance movement pieces such as *Kham Rak lae Kham Tai* and *Nonthuk*. Since she always works with well-trained traditional dancers, dance movement, both in traditional and contemporary forms, makes the spectacle of her performances both stunning and impressive.

The traditional *nang yai*, large shadow puppets, are adopted to create a dramatic effect. For example, in *Kham Rak lae Kham Tai*, shadow puppets are used in the scene where the God takes a soul of *Sattayawan*, *Sawitri*'s husband; in the traditional theatre; the death scene is forbidden to be presented on stage as it is believed to bring bad luck to the production.

Quotations from the original literature are applied in some performances. In *Sawitri*, the dialogues are directly drawn from King Vajiravudh's play of *Sawitri*, which was composed in verse. Some were adapted into prose. It is noteworthy that some of the quotations are occasionally used to satirize the meaning of the original text. For example, the quotation of King Vajiravudh that displays *Sawitri*'s love for and loyalty to her husband is used in an ironic way to support Pornrat's new statement.

Whether my husband is taken to anywhere

Or wherever he goes,

I will follow him to that place.

This is the lasting custom.

(Pornrat's adaptation of *Sawitri*, scene 5)

This quotation forces the audience to reconsider the character's behaviour; it emphasizes the fact that Sawitri chose to 'enslave' herself to her husband without any conditions. However, as this adaptation applies dance as the main element to tell the story while the dialogue is hardly used, some critics, including Nantaklang (1996) and Danutra (1996) commented that this production lacks the strong statement of the message of the play.

The music that is used for dance movement and which creates the atmosphere of the story is mainly based upon a contemporary style. A few melodies are borrowed or adapted from traditional songs. As well as the costumes, which are newly designed to suit the dance, the influence of traditional theatre style can be seen. The lighting technique is carefully designed by skilful artists. The spectacle of the production, it could be said, is one of the significant elements that impresses the audience and has become another hallmark of her works.

Makamphom Theatre Group

The Makhampom Theatre Group was established in 1981; it is one of the leading troupes and is well-known for works produced with the socio-political objectives of the NGO movement. The members of the troupe consist of both employees and volunteers. Their funding source usually comes from state and international organizations. Their performances are in various styles from the traditional style to the contemporary theatre, and are staged from rural areas to international theatre festivals abroad. Most of their productions are aimed at educating their audiences regarding the social development issues.²⁶

During the 1990s, under the direction of Phradit Phrasarthong, one of the leaders of the group, traditional literature was applied in their works as a tool to deliver a social message to the audience. Being trained in both modern and traditional theatre, Phradit employs traditional elements in a way that makes the performance appropriate for its purpose. By looking through the group's three adaptations from traditional literature, I try to examine the way that the group reinterprets traditional literary works in order to address social issues. These three performances are *Cao Lo Lo Lam* (1994), *Canthakorop Ton Co Before Time* (1995) and *Malai Mongkol* (1996).

One of the techniques that appears in Makhampom's production is the basing of the script mostly on the group's discussions and improvisation. In effect, their performances are filled with a combination of creative ideas. Unlike the work of other artists, it is obvious that the re-presentations of the traditional plays in their works are not intended to re-illustrate or reinterpret the theme of the original: the group actually

²⁶ For further information on the group's history, working organization and objectives, see Barber, Richard H. (2007) *Performing Praxis, Community Culture, and Neo-Traditionalism: A Study of Thailand's Makhampom Theatre Group*. Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Monash University, School of English, Communications and Performance Studies; and the group's website, www.makhampom.net

adapt traditional stories to suit their own new message. Therefore, it could be said that the traditional literature is regarded only as a bridge to convey their new message to the audience. Their use of traditional adaptation is based on their belief that this is the best way to make the play more accessible to rural audiences; the broad familiarity of the Thai public with the tale provides a cultural bridge into contemporary dialogue within their productions: Barber (2007:207) calls it “applying the popular to promote efficacy”.

The significant principle in their script adaptation is the deconstruction of the original literature with the aim of addressing the social issues. Rather than offer a reinterpretation of the original theme, the story is adjusted and used to serve the new purpose of each project. Funded by the Office of the Narcotics Control Board, *Cao Lo Lo Lam* was created as part of a government campaign against teenage drug use. It was staged in slums, schools, youth detention centres and communities in Bangkok and the provinces. *Canthakorop Ton Co Before Time* was produced under the project of Campaign against AIDS and for Sexual Ethics in Educational Institutes, which was financially supported by the Canada Fund of the Canadian Embassy. The purpose of the project was to provide teenagers with a better understanding of the disease and sexual morals as the way to prevent and decrease the rate of AIDS infection, particularly among teenagers. *Malai Mongkol* was also part of the same project. This production was staged in eighty-two shows across the country and twenty performances in Australia.

The group chose to keep the well-known part of the original plot as well as the renowned characters and adapted them and the rest of the story to serve the purpose of the production. For instance, in transforming the classical text *Lilit Phra Lo* to *Cao Lo Lo Lam*, the original theme of passionate love is compared with the issue of narcotic substances. *Pu Cao*, a villain, appears in this adaptation as a drug producer. Instead of

using dark magic spells as in the original story, he exploits the potion to harm *Cao Lo*, the hero of the story. *Cao Lo*'s actions indicate the causes of drug addiction: his curiosity, unhappy family and environment. The death of the main character, which is a famous tragic love-ending scene in the original, conventionally appears in this version; however, it results from the effect of the narcotic the hero has taken for a long period of time.

The original version, as a Buddhist tale, shows female immorality in the form of infidelity; however, in the new version the tale of *Canthakorop* was adapted to teach sex education to teenagers. The play selects the objects from the original story and presents them as symbols for sex education; the sword is a symbol of the male sex organ and the casket represents the female sexual organ. In the original version where the prince is given the casket from his teacher with conditions to not open it until he arrive his kingdom, by breaking the rule, the hero meets a tragic ending. The play tries to compare this wrong decision the hero in the new version as to imply the sex education to its teenager audience.

In spite of deconstructing the original plot, a narrator is added to the new script in order to emphasise the new message. The narrator is employed to narrate the events in the story, to introduce the characters, and to express the characters' thought and feelings as well as to give comments on the story.

Traditional elements are used to make the performance more interesting. In *Cao Lo Lo Lam*, two characters used traditional dance to illustrate part of a dream world. Within the modern production itself, the choreography is marked by a modern physical theatre style, combining elements of hip hop, contemporary dance and acrobatics, often backed by Thai pop music soundtracks.

Due to the fact that most of their works are touring productions, the setting and props are simple. Actors mostly wear the same basic costume, which is black shirt and trousers with accessories to indicate the character they perform. Except for the main role, other actors normally perform many roles in the performance.

The Makampom's adaptations of Thai traditional plays are a good example of how the original story is deconstructed and adapted to present contemporary social issues. Their work also represents a further development in the dramaturgical fusion of tradition and modernity. However, after these three productions, the group decided to do further exploration in another kind of Thai popular theatre, Likay, based on their belief that this would help their works become more familiar to rural audiences.

Dangkamon Na-Pombejra

Dangkamon Na-Pombejra is one of the best-known practitioners of modern theatre in Thailand. He is a lecturer in the Department of Dramatic Arts at Chulalongkorn University. Most of his works are translated and adapted from Western plays. However, in 2006, he created a production adapted from the traditional play, *The Miraculous Adventure of the Conch Prince*.

This performance formed part of the research project, *Legends Retold*, conducted by Chulalongkorn University's Department of Dramatic Arts. The project, which was supported by The Thailand Research Fund, aims to study the processes of recreating the scripts and performances of Thai traditional literature. Written and directed by Dangkamon Na-Pombejra, this performance is based on *Sang Thong*, one of the best-known traditional Thai literary masterpieces.

The story is about the life of Phra Sang Thong, a prince who is born in the golden conch shell. After birth, he and his mother are falsely accused by the king's concubine and are banished from the city. Having experienced many adventures including being separated from his mother, Phra Sang is adopted by the ogress, Phanthurat, who loves him as if he were of her own flesh and blood. Phanthurat is afraid that her genuine nature as an ogress may frighten the young prince so she disguises herself as a normal human being. However, Phra Sang later finds out the truth about Phanthurat and decides to run away from her. Phanthurat tries to follow him and begs him to change his mind. On the prince's refusal, the ogress falls into despair. After leaving some of her magic to him, she dies of a broken heart.

Using a magic mask that had once belonged to Phanthurat, Phra Sang disguises himself as an ugly Ngo Pa²⁷ and goes to the city of king Samol at a time when the king is holding a ceremony for his seven daughters to choose their bridegrooms. Princess Rochana, the youngest daughter, is the only one who sees through Phra Sang's disguise and chooses him as her husband. The disappointed king is so angered by Rochana's decision that he drives them both out of his palace to live in a small cottage in the countryside. There, the young couple live humbly for some time. However, the prince refuses to take off his magic mask because he is satisfied with his way of life. Meanwhile, the God Indra, having watched these events unfold, feels sorry for the distressed Princess. With his army, he comes to challenge king Samol to a game of Polo. His other six sons-in-law all lose the game, but Phra Sang comes to help and finally wins the game. King Samol finally realizes that Phra Sang is in fact a prince, following which he apologizes to his daughter and selects Phra Sang as the heir to his throne.

The Miraculous Adventure of the Conch Prince is an adaptation of this story intended to re-present it from postmodern perspectives. The story is divided into 18 scenes all of which are performed in a contemporary Western style. Elements of traditional Thai theatre, such as dancing and traditional songs, are not used in this version. Therefore, it can be said that the only thing that this adaptation preserves from its source material is the main plot.

²⁷ So-called *Jao Ngo*, referred to the character of Phra Sang when he disguises himself as Ngo Pa. Thai people refer this term to the Sakai tribe who live in the southern part of Thailand. The troupe consists of small numbers and lives in the jungle. Their appearance is different from Thai people in that they have a darker skin tone and curly hair. Sakai people lives in the jungle and speak a different language. Because of their differences, this character was used to suggest the inferiority of this tribe among Thai people.

In this modern version, all situations occur in chronological order just as with the original story. However, Dangkamon chose to keep only the main storyline and discarded many of the original sub-plots. As Thai audiences are already familiar with the story, it was not necessary to retell it in detail in order to help them to understand the play.

Sang Thong is a fairly long story and raises more than one theme. In this adaptation, the director chose to focus on one major theme: namely the shell-illusion and its place in Thai culture. The original scenes that represent this idea are kept, as well as new plotlines are added to support this theme. The conch still appears in the play as a symbol of the shell-illusion and also serves to remind the audience of the original story on which the play is based.

The significant reinterpretation is the character of Phanthurat. Instead of presenting her as an ogress, Phanthurat in this version is reinterpreted as a bisexual man. The acceptance of homosexuality is very limited in Thai society. The play compares the character of this bisexual man with an ogress in the aspect of a queer thing in society's opinion. Rather than judging him from his heart, society, represented by Phra Sang's reaction when he knows the truth, tends to judge him from only from his outside appearance. Phra Sang rejects Phanthurat's goodwill and love for him because he believes that Phanthurat wants something in return.

The director cut the story about the God Indra who comes to Rochana's aid at the end of the story. Instead, Phra Sang solves the final conflict by himself. This may be taken to mirror the attitudes of modern Thai people who tend to act to solve problems on their own accord rather than waiting for miracles or divine intervention.

Modernization is another technique used in the adaptation of this story. The magic spell that Phanthurat gives to Phra Sang before she dies is replaced with a credit card thus implying that credit cards hold a similar status to magic in contemporary societies. As with the incantation of the original story, the credit card grants Phra Sang the power to do and get anything he wants.

A new scene intended to address current social problems in Thailand is added into the story. This involves Phra Sang finding himself among a group of homeless children who have been abandoned by their own parents after he is banished from the city and separated from his mother. Moreover, when he arrives at King Samol's city he meets another gang of homeless children who live by themselves without any help from the government. Instead of finding a solution to the plight of these children, society treats them as a social problem which needs to be placed out of sight.

This adaptation also tries to pass comment on the values of modern Thai society. For example, when King Samol holds the party for his seven daughters to choose their bridegrooms, each of the men selected by the six daughters, excluding Rochana, represent values held by current Thai society, including social status, financial power, appearance and the popularity of Japanese and Korean stars and singers.

This adaptation also uses character to satirise current Thai society. Even though it retains most of the main characters from the original story as well as its original name, their characteristics are highly exaggerated. For example, King Samol is presented as somebody who worships money as though it were a god and he judges everything by its monetary value. Furthermore, instead of being a quiet queen who

bears her fate with equanimity as in the original story, Phra Sang's mother, Chantra, is a normal woman given to complaining bitterly and loudly about her misfortunes.

The characters of Phra Sang and Rochana are reinterpreted with an aim of addressing the issue of marginality. Since he was born differently from others, Phra Sang feels that he is isolated from the society. Rochana faces the same problem as her belief goes against her family's idea of judging people on their appearance. Phra Sang and Rochana are both treated by others as odd people. The reinterpretation of these two main characters is based on the theme of the story rather than being reliant on their original characteristics. The conflicts and objectives are adjusted to support the message of the play. In order to emphasize the message of self-acceptance, instead of revealing his real status as the prince, the play emphasises the importance of the acceptance of self-identity; Phra Sang and Rochana are happy at the end when both of them can accept who they are rather than the illusion they had tried to create in order to belong to society. This message does not appear in the original version and creates a new meaning for this adaptation.

In addition to the ways in which the story is reinterpreted, the scenery, costumes and music of this play are also presented from postmodern perspectives. Nothing in the scenery indicates time or place. Instead of having a realistic setting, the location is described by dialogue and the actions of the characters. Likewise, the costumes are designed to be independent from time and place. Some characters dress in modern costumes while others dress in ways that are exaggerated. Jiwakanon (2006), the production artistic director, states that the costumes are purposely designed to reflect the characteristics of the characters rather than aiming for realism or connecting them to traditional performance.

This adaptation still grants an important role to music as can be heard from the songs used in the opening and closing scenes. However, in order to create a modern atmosphere for audiences, the director only chooses songs with English lyrics, for example, *Out Here On My Own* (Fame: the Musical), *Go West* (The Pet Shop Boys) and *I am What I am* (La Cage aux Folles). According to him, the songs are employed to present the meaning and internal life of the characters.

It is noteworthy that this adaptation was produced for the purpose of studying the process of recreating traditional literature for the stage. Similarly, many other adaptations have been made with the aim of exploring possible ways to reinterpret this traditional story rather than reimagining it for the sake of entertainment. However, this performance embodies many interesting ideas which make it a good example of how traditional Thai plays may be adapted.

Conclusion

In order to create original Thai dramatic performances, some Thai artists have turned to sources from traditional theatre. These artists have their own unique ways of using the elements of traditional theatre in their performances. In this chapter, I had attempted to present the methods used by each of these artists in adapting traditional literature.

The works of four contemporary Thai artists are analysed in this chapter in order to demonstrate earlier methods used to transpose traditional Thai literature onto the modern stage. All of these artists are well-known in this area and some of them continue to work on adaptations of traditional literature.

Patravadi is famous for her unique artistic style. Her interest in traditional theatre can be seen in her productions in which traditional elements always stand out. She has collaborated with many talented foreign artists over the course of her career. These opportunities and the experiences she has gained from them have helped her to create a unique performing style and have enable her to experiment with different ways of adapting traditional Thai theatre, thus leading to significant developments in her own work as well as in Thai theatre.

Patravadi has applied four principles in her works in order to transpose traditional literature onto the modern stage. First, the original plot is deconstructed with the aim of emphasising the theme of the play. Second, she focuses on characterization in order to make the characters in her adaptations appear well-rounded and relevant to current sensibilities. Third, quotations from the original source material appear to play an important part in her adaptations; this could signify that she has a deep interest in her own cultural roots and also that she intends to present the value of traditional literature.

Finally, her efforts to bring Western techniques to her productions demonstrate her commitment to modernizing traditional theatre so that it fits with current social contexts and appeals to the tastes of modern audiences.

Pornrat reinterprets traditional Thai theatre in ways that frequently give messages which are new and sometimes even opposed to those of the source material. Feminist ideas recur throughout her works. Her performances are stylistically unique and are impressive spectacles which involve modernised forms of many traditional elements, especially traditional dance and music which are adapted and used as important means for delivering messages to the audience. Thus, apart for her feminist approach to traditional theatre, the spectacular performances of her plays are one of the hallmarks of her style.

Meanwhile, for the Makhampom troupe, traditional literature is the tool to deliver their social messages to audiences. They use the audience's familiarity with traditional literature as a bridge to connect their performance with them. Therefore, the Makhampom troupe tends to retain well-known plot-lines and characters while developing new messages to fit them.

Further attempts to modernize traditional literature by reinterpreting it according to a modern perspective can be seen in Dangkamon's adaptation of *Sang Thong*. In his work, the traditional story is reinterpreted by comparing it to the current Thai society. However, apart from referring to the original story, he prominently uses and emphasises Western techniques. By contrast, traditional Thai elements rarely appear in this production. The deconstruction of the plot and reinterpretation of characters are purposely created as to emphasize this version's selected message of self-illusion rather than aiming to restrict to the original version.

Adaptations of traditional Thai literature may be regarded as significant attempts by contemporary Thai artists to find and create an original Thai script which can be used to communicate with a modern Thai audience. Instead of relying on Western sources as before, the demand for an original Thai script as well as national cultural pride encourage Thai theatre practitioners to turn back to their traditional literature (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001); this development also comes from the belief that with the same cultural and social context, these works can communicate more effectively with Thai audiences. The analysis of selected adaptations given in this chapter demonstrates the approaches that have been used by well-known Thai artists in order to relate traditional literature to modern audiences. The aim of each production and the nature of the audiences are significant factors in the differences in the reinterpretation in each artist's work. It is important to examine how Thai artists adapt a traditional story for the modern stage; what these artists choose to keep and what they select for change indicate their different perspectives toward traditional stories. This area of research could contribute significant benefits to the development of Thai modern theatre and is worthy of further exploration and investigation.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF MODE OF ADAPTATION

According to Kerdarunsuksri (2001), the transposition of traditional literary works into modern Thai stage drama resulted from the awareness of contemporary Thai artists of a need to create original Thai play to communicate with Thai audiences. He states that adaptation of traditional theatre became a popular trend in the 1990s and can be seen as ‘a watershed in the development of Thai theatre’ (2001: 9). In the conclusion of his dissertation, he further mentions that the juxtaposition of traditional and modern, Thai and foreign elements is ‘the beginning of Thai postmodern theatre’ (2001:247). Unfortunately, fewer new adaptations have been produced in the new millennium. Therefore, it appears that this trend has declined since then. In my opinion, this might be the result of discontinuous support from the government and the private sector to encourage Thai artists and people in general to take an interest in their native theatrical traditions. It may also come from a lack of knowledge of traditional Thai theatre among modern Thai practitioners, who are usually more familiar with Western theatre and thus tend to prefer to translate or directly adapt their scripts from Western plays. Nevertheless, there are some artists who have shown an interest in traditional Thai theatre and continue to create works based on traditional literature. These artists are very well-known and their works have received positive feedback from both critics and audiences, not only on domestic but also on international stages. The fact that these artists are constantly working on adaptations of traditional Thai theatre and the recognition that such adaptations have achieved show that this area of the performing arts is still worthy of investigation.

Rather than translating or adapting the Western plays, these Thai artists choose to turn to their own theatrical roots with the belief that traditional literary works can be an appropriate source to create an original Thai contemporary play. Having the same belief, I am eager to further investigate and, through my practice of adaptation, experiment with the potential effective approaches that can be exploited in the adaptation process. By drawing on examples of adaptations of traditional Thai literature, I aim to show how the methods used and explored in these productions can be investigated and developed further in my own practical adaptation projects. In the next section, I analyse the effectiveness of these approaches with the aim of identifying the methods that could be further explored in order to support the aims of my practical research.

Retelling the story: reinterpretation of the traditional literature

In order to make a traditional play comprehensible to a modern audience, changes need to be made to the script. In the process of translation, I agree with Vandal-Sirois and Bastin that an adaptation is made in order to “preserve the meaning, effect, or purpose of the original text, while ensuring the best reception possible of the translation among the target audience” (2012:23). This involves emphasising and reinterpreting certain aspects of an original work, including characters, themes, and plots. This way of adapting source material can also work as a means of updating traditional stories to fit with current social contexts. The new or latent messages identified by this method of adaptation are mostly concerned with issues that were previously overlooked and which have been brought into focus by recent social developments. In his research, Kerdarunsuksri (2001) examined how Thai artists have

used adaptation in their works. He categorized ten productions selected in his study into two types: modern and revisionist mythmaking. According to him, Patravadi's works are classified as modern mythmaking because "they merely shed light on hidden messages in the stories or modernized them to suit the modern social context" (2001:245). For revisionist mythmaking, he explained that "the traditional stories were deconstructed to deliver contemporary issues" (2001:246). These issues, he states, are feminism and social development.

Kerdarunsuksri's research focuses on the creation of these adaptations rather than aiming to evaluate or critique the approaches that were used in these productions. According to him, these adaptations are successful in the aspect of serving the artists' purposes. However, as a practitioner, I question the ways in which these approaches have been applied in these productions.

These two kinds of approaches, modern and revisionist mythmaking, reflect the different attitudes toward the way these artists 'reinterpret' a traditional play. Patravadi, for example, has a strong interest in the traditional theatre. Her works explicitly aim to link a traditional story to a contemporary society. "Thai literature", Patravadi said, "never dies. It can be reinterpreted over and over again." (*Language and Literature Journal*, 2002:88). Therefore, she chooses to select a message that appears in the original play and emphasizes it in her new version; in other words, her works represent the 'old' message from the modern perspective. Preserving and promoting Thai arts and culture are amongst her theatre's policies (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001:131); unsurprisingly, the core message of an original play is implicit in most of her adaptations.

While Patravadi's approach appears in a form of modernizing an indigenous message, some artists go further by re-presenting a traditional play with a 'new' message which differs from and, sometimes, even goes against the common understanding of the original work. Some of these reinterpretations are intended to criticize or pass comment on established ways of thinking about traditional plays. Pornrat Damrhung is one such artist whose works explicitly challenge established interpretations of traditional literature. As she states, 'retelling an old story is one thing but whether it is considered as a reinterpretation is another question. If it tells the same message, presents the same story, that play is not "re-interpreted" (2006b:123).

In my opinion, both approaches appear to have their own strengths that are sufficient in adapting a traditional play. Modern mythmaking gives an audience a better understanding of a traditional play. The new adaptation, in this aspect, retains the core message of its original, which affirms the timeless value of traditional theatre. However, revisionist mythmaking provides us with a new perspective of a traditional play; it gives a 'new' life to a traditional story, which could draw an interest from a modern audience.

During the time I investigated these two methods, I have found that, among their differences, certain ideas within their approaches seem to overlap. A noticeable example is feminism, which has been particularly influential in adaptation works. According to Kerdarunsuksri (2001), feminism has provided a means of responding to the inferior status of female characters in traditional Thai literature. As a result, feminist ideas have been highly influential on modern artists working on adaptations of traditional Thai literature. Even in Patravadi's works, which are categorised as the modern mythmaking, the female character(s) is/are given more important roles than they had in the source materials and places greater emphasis on the unequal treatment of women, and this forms part of the main message that her adaptations try to convey.

Maneerat (2008) even claims that the portrayal of strong female characters in Patravadi's plays is a major reason for the success of her theatre; these characters, referred to as *phuying kraeng* ²⁸, reflect real women in contemporary society and so offer Thai contemporary audiences the [familiar] picture of their own modernity. It is noteworthy that most adaptations that have been created by female artists regularly deal with feminist ideas.

In my opinion, the significant difference between these two approaches is the extent to which an original text and its message are retained in its new version. Both feminism and social issues, in some way, appear in all of these adaptations. For revisionist mythmaking, a traditional play is used more as a tool to deliver a new message. In this case, a message in a new version may differ to its original source's. The disadvantage, in my view, of approaching a traditional Thai play in this way is that an adaptation may leave behind the core nature and aesthetic of traditional literary works.

My question, here, is whether it is possible to combine the strength of these two approaches and create a new method that suits the particular case of adapting a traditional Thai play. If turning back to the traditional literature is an attempt to search for our original theatrical identity, I question whether the core message of the traditional literature should be retained. Duangpattra states:

If you aim to present something “new”, you can write a “new” script that has nothing to do with the past. But if you choose to pick up a traditional play to re-present, you should make

²⁸ According to Maneerat, “*Phuying Kraeng* literarily means strong woman, and it serves as an umbrella term to describe a new type of non-traditional main female character that began to surface in the 1970s in Thai fictional works” (2008: 14)

people understand and become involved with these traditions as much as you can.”

(Language and Literature Journal, 2002:93)

However, it cannot be denied that giving a new perspective has an important role in the success of many productions. The significant point of this kind of approach is that it encourages Thai people to look back on a traditional text from a critical perspective and set a traditional play free from a frame of preservation.

In order to retell a traditional story on the modern stage, adjustment of its context becomes essential in order to make it relevant to its ‘new’ audience as Vandal-Sirois and Bastin suggest that “an adaptation might well be an intrinsic part of successful translation” (2012:23). Re-interpreting the old message, whether by repacking, repercussions or redefining (Parivudhiphongs, 2005:1), poses a new meaning to an old play. In the end, it depends on the objective of each artist to decide which approach is best suited to their adaptation’s purpose. However, it is noteworthy that when it comes to a traditional Thai play, an adaptation creates expectations that are concerned with cultural norms and customs; many adaptations usually undergo criticism from conservative audiences on their treatment of virtues of the old plays: Dangkamon (2006) admits in his research that dealing with the complex cultural dimensions is one of the main problems of his adaptation. Thus, in my view, it is important that an adaptation of a traditional play is done carefully and does not damage the thematic concept of its source. It also requires a deep understanding of traditional arts, as Pornrat suggested “so they can toy with the ideas wisely or merge them with other art forms appropriately” (Parivudhiphongs, 2005:1).

When an old story is retold in a different time and place, re-interpretation seems to be the first step of making an old message become coherent to current society.

At the end, an adaptation, as Hutcheon (2006:8) said, will always involve not just re-interpretation but also re-creation. The repetition of a traditional story will, finally, present to us both something of value from its original source as well as a new meaning in itself. With a wide range of dimensions to look to, an adaptation of a traditional Thai play is, I believe, another step within the exploration of searching for the identity of Thai theatre development amidst the overwhelming encroachment of external culture in the current Thai society.

Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments by virtue of mutation-in their “offspring” or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish.

(Hutcheon, 2006:32)

Through diverse opinions and different ways of ‘re-interpretation’, Pisarn²⁹ states “After all, we’re just trying to make sense of these gems, see what lessons we can still learn from them.” (Parivudhipongs, 2005:1).

Reinforcement of a sense of familiarity

In my opinion, one of the advantages of creating a play based on traditional literature is that Thai audiences might feel familiar with the plot, characters and context, and this is one of main reasons why many Thai artists return to the traditional sources; with the same cultural roots, they believe that a traditional play could better communicate with Thai audiences.

²⁹ The director of *Phra Rod Manora (The Shadow of Karmam)*. Performed in 2004, the play merges two classical couples from two traditional literatures in order to present ‘a metaphor of consciousness versus ignorance’.

The sense of familiarity is exploited in Makampom's adaptations as the main method to deliver their new messages to audiences. With the broad familiarity with the stories, Phradit Phrasarthong, the founder and the leader of the group, believes that adaptations of traditional literature are more accessible to rural audiences (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001:211); Barber clarifies that this acquaintance provides "a culture bridge" which "offered the freedom for the group to deconstruct the text" (2007:207).

In the investigation of the achievement of Patravadi's theatre, Maneerat (2008) indicates that the reinforcement of a sense of familiarity is one of Patravadi's main strategies to popularize the strong female characters in her works. One of these familiarities is offered through the way she presents the renowned characters from beloved Thai literature and folktales.

While her work highlights the oppressive conditions to which the female characters have been subjected and which have gone unnoted in previous versions, the retelling of Thai literature retains a sense of familiarity.

(Maneerat, 2008:192)

Frequently, Thai artists choose to present in their adaptations memorable scenes, famous original texts or recognised songs that were specifically composed for the original; the appearance of well-known aspects of tradition heightens the sense of familiarity. Not only does it create a familiar atmosphere, it also fulfils the expectations of an audience to see what they know or remember from an original version. Additionally, this shows the appreciation of these artists toward traditional theatre; the beauty of the sources is confirmed by the reappearance of them on the modern stage. Consequently, in my opinion, this suggests that the sense of familiarity could be developed as a significant tool in adapting a traditional play. It contributes to the success of an adaptation in two ways. First, it gives audiences a comfortable feeling of

seeing things that they know or feel familiar with. In this aspect, the sense of familiarity provides a cultural bridge that connects audiences with a new play. Second, it supports the emergence of a new message. The reinforcement of familiarity performs a significant function, especially when an adaptation deals with the parallel image of traditional stories and contemporary society; the satire involved in this comparison may be more comprehensible to an audience who ‘knows’ more of a previous version. Without enough knowledge of a traditional text, it is difficult or even impossible for an audience to understand a new message that an adaptation aims to present.

Another important step is to identify what the familiarity of a traditional play for Thai people is, and how to apply it in a process of adaptation in order to achieve an effective result. With the Thai audience’s limited knowledge of traditional plays, the reinforcement of familiarity may be necessary in order to make them understand a new play: as Hutcheon states “as audience members, we need memory in order to experience differences as well as similarity” (2006: 22). This subject, therefore, should be carefully examined in an adaptation of a traditional play.

A contemporary context

Seeing a traditional play from the modern perspective implicitly adds a contemporary context to an adaptation process. Whether this context is modernized from an original source or later added in order to present a new message, it creates a contemporary sense that helps connect a traditional story, through its adaptation, to the current society, that is to its new audiences.

A contemporary context in an adaptation results from a shifting of perspective of an author who wrote a traditional play more than one hundred years ago to a writer who lives in contemporary society. The expression of this contemporary sense can be seen through the modernized messages and changes in the characters' reinterpretations. With or without intention, this contemporary context not only reflects the current society but also stresses the differences in the significance of some social issues through the comparison between the traditional text and the new contemporary version.

When a traditional play is adapted into a contemporary context, the changes which result from this transformation may also reveal the changes in the society. This matter should be taken into consideration. "An adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context - a time and a place, a society and a culture." (Hutcheon, 2006:142). My point is that an adaptation may also be a method to criticise or comment on the changes in society.

Actually, using comparison to indicate differences is not something new; some Thai artists have regularly applied this method into their adaptations on issues regarding female characters. For example, in *Sita: The Honor of Ram?* (2005), the life of Sita, a well-known traditional female character, is paralleled with situations faced by women in current society. In 1994 when Rutnin adapted *Inao*³⁰, she focused on the main female character and represented her through the double characters of *Butsaba*: one represents a traditional woman who is being repressed by her parents and husband while the other is more modern, to say, more independent. By presenting this comparison, these artists aim to raise questions about the inferior status of women in society.

³⁰ Her production of *Butsaba-Unakan* was staged at the Cultural Centre of Thailand. The play is based on King Rama II's version of *Inao*.

As the status of women in Thai society has changed, unsurprisingly the contemporary aspect of the traditional female character is frequently presented in a new adaptation. However, I am curious whether, rather than just focusing on presenting the inferior status of these traditional female characters, the complicated status of women in current Thai society could also be questioned through this contemporary context; whether a contemporary aspect of this traditional female character on the contemporary stage really illustrates the current status of Thai women or if it is an idealistic view.

The insertion of contemporary situations is another technique that I found interesting. Kerdarunsuksri (2001) mentions only one paragraph about this in his analysis of *Singhakraiphop*: the election that occurred during the time this adaptation was staged is referred to in the narrator's dialogues. Kerdarunsuksri asserts that not only does it bring the story closer to the audience but also creates a comic sense in the play (2001:139). Referring to a current situation in society at the time of the presentation may not only give contemporary life to an adaptation but also can be a way to indirectly criticize the society. From time to time in Thai history theatre has been related to political propaganda. A contemporary context in this sense could be presented through referring to the current political situation in Thai society. As Hutcheon states that "an adaptation can obviously be used to engage in a larger social or cultural critique" (2006: 94); my adaptation has the potential to explore this issue.

Application of the traditional elements

It could be said that one of the motivations of the Thai contemporary artists to continue experimenting in this field comes from their personal interest in Thai traditional theatre. Different in their ways of adaptation, what they have in common is

an attempt to give a new life to a traditional theatre form. Their admiration for their own kind of theatre can be seen in the way they choose to apply traditional elements in their works. In order to transform traditional plays to the modern stage, not only they do make use of the original script, but also some traditional elements are borrowed and experimented with in their adaptations; the exploration in the performance presentation becomes the significant hallmark of some artists.

Thai traditional theatre has its own unique style of performing that differs from Western theatre. For example, as **same as** other Southeast Asian theatre forms, music and dance perform an important role in Thai traditional theatre, which is often referred to by some scholars as dance-drama, since the story is told mainly through dance and singing: an actor performs his/her role by dancing and music is used not only to accompany the dance but also to allow the actors/ chorus to sing the dialogue and the description of scene and characters. However, it is claimed that, because the interpretation of these elements requires a deep-knowledge of their meaning, this decreases the interest of modern audience towards traditional theatre. Consequently, when these traditional elements become parts of the works, they will be adapted from the original forms in order to be easily accessible for modern audience. The techniques of adaptation vary from one artist to another. Each artist has his own unique method of adaptation to serve his own purpose. For example, the traditional elements are juxtaposed with Western elements in order to make the presentation appeal to Thai audiences; the complicated dance is simplified by using only basic gestures to make it understandable to the modern audiences. The traditional music is no longer used in the conventional way but applied to create atmosphere or sometimes juxtaposed with Western musical instruments.

It is notable that in most of the works, the adaptation is limited to representing the original forms in the broader ways rather than trying to achieve the modern audience's appreciation by finding the way to make them understand the original meaning and roles of these elements. It is possible that the artists are convinced that the modern audience are now too far removed from the times of the original performing arts, or it might possibly come from the lack of profound understanding from the artists' background themselves, whatever the real reason is, the result is that the artists keep only the forms from the original theatre to impress the modern audience.

An attempt to present the traditional elements on the modern stage fulfils artists' purposes in two aspects: first their aims to present the beauty of traditional theatre and second their attempt to make these traditional elements become understandable to a modern audience.

However, I question in the way these elements are adjusted in these adaptations. I argue that the process of modernization may cause the loss of the core beauty of these elements. Even though the new image of these elements, including dance, music and costumes, provides an impressive spectacle on the stage, I question whether the beauty of these traditional elements is retained through these ways of adaptation.

Since traditional theatre and literature are also considered to be parts of Thailand's national heritage, they are treated as highly refined art-forms and the original ways in which they were performed are believed to be strict models which need to be followed. Therefore, faithfulness to traditional customs is highly prized and respected among traditional Thai artists. Changes or modifications to traditional performing styles are seen as risky because they are believed by some to destroy traditional beauty.

Some contemporary artists whose works are experimented with traditional art forms have experienced negative responses from conservative audiences and artists. Pichet Kranchun, a contemporary Thai artist who is famous for creating a contemporary work based on traditional dance, often states that his work is “at a war with Thai culture”, because his way of thinking and creating go against the convention. His work is not only “different” but also “offensive” to some audiences who expect to see a traditional theatre as the way it is. (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2008:14).

The reason that these traditional elements should still be applied in a modern adaptation because they show the unique characteristic of traditional Thai theatre. They perform unique functions within the dramatic structure of the play (Brandon, 1967:125). As they are inseparable companions of traditional performance, in order to find the identity of original modern Thai performance, these traditional elements are a vital method that should not be overlooked.

However, in my opinion, in order to avoid damaging the aesthetics of traditional Thai theatre in the process of adaptation, it is necessary to find an appropriate balance between preservation and change. These elements should be applied in a way that retains their original concept of beauty and, moreover, gives them an opportunity to present most of their beauty and value. Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn (2008) is of the opinion that the way to appreciate traditional art has changed: in the past, people understood these traditional elements, so they appreciated them in a different way from the current audiences. She further suggests that the artist should find a way to present the traditional theatre so that audiences can relate the presentation to their contemporary life, while at the same time, avoiding the destruction of the ‘identity’ of traditional theatre.

Another point that I would like to raise regarding the use of these traditional elements is that their application should not be limited only to their re-appearance on the modern stage, but should include the investigation of their core nature and functions within the performance. That can be another potential and interesting way to adapt a traditional source to create an original Thai contemporary performance. With this approach, I believe, these traditional elements would become understandable, while at the same time keeping most of their impressive characteristics, which in some respects would fulfil the audience's expectation to see something related to a traditional play.

CHAPTER FIVE

Commentary on my first practical project, *Sang Thong*

Kittisak Kerdarunsuksri states in the introduction of his dissertation, *The Transposition of Traditional Thai Literature into Modern Stage Drama: The Current Development of Thai Theatre*, that:

‘With a predominance of adaptations and translations of Western plays in Thai theatre, many theatre practitioners began to be aware of the necessity to create original Thai dramatic texts in order to communicate with Thai audiences, and thereby turned to the ‘transposition’ of traditional literature works into Western-style modern stage drama (Lakorn Wethi Samai Mai).’

(2001: 7)

My first inspiration to do research on adaptation of Thai traditional plays has close similarities to this intention. I believe that investigating the alternative way to represent the traditional literature would be a possible way to create an original playscript that is able to communicate with the modern audience. Also, this may be a solution for the problem of unpopularity of both traditional and modern theatre in Thailand.

In order to create a new adaptation, I began with the research on both Thai traditional and modern theatre. In the area of traditional theatre, the history, the characteristics and its way of performance are examined. Additionally for the modern theatre, I gave emphasis to the performances that related to the Thai traditional literature. The analysis of these works is discussed in the third chapter: Thai traditional drama and its adaptations. I employed this information as the primary source for my

adaptation. In order to frame my idea of how the script should be, I set up these purposes for my practical project.

1. To find a possible way to adapt a Thai traditional play in order to bring the traditional story closer to the modern audiences.
2. To present the value of the traditional play (*Sang Thong*): how does it present Thai identity and social values (in the past and now)?
3. As a modern Thai woman, to present my attitude and thought toward the traditional play in my own version of adaptation.
4. To prove that even though the traditional play was written a long time ago, its plot still suits the taste of the modern Thai audience and also it can still present something of value about Thai culture and identity.
5. To find an alternative way to present the traditional literature to a modern audience by using some elements from the traditional theatre combined with modern theatre techniques.
6. To explore the possibility of using the adaptation of a traditional play as the way to develop the new form of modern play for Thai theatre.

From idea to script

I began to plan my first practical project in October 2008. After discussion with my supervisor, I started with the idea of writing two short plays that used different ways of adapting Thai traditional literature; evaluating these plays would provide a better answer to my research questions. However, during the script development process, I saw the opportunity to present the different methods in just one version of the

play. Not only would it be more challenging but I also believed it would be the better way to present my idea of an effective adaptation.

The first important decision that had to be made was to select the traditional play that was best suited to adapt for this practical project. As there are many aspects of Thai traditional literature and each of them has different qualities and unique characteristics, it is essential to choose the right story for the right purpose. The play I am looking for should be able to present some essential qualities of the Thai character such as cultural identity or nationally literary identification. Also it should be a play that is well known among Thai people. At this point, the story of *Sang Thong* came to mind.

There are four qualifications of this literature that make me believe this literature is suitable to be adapted in my practical project. First, this story generally talks about the importance of appearance, which, in my opinion, is one of the major value judgments in Thai society. This would support my conviction on the contemporaneous message that traditional literature can still reflect.

Second, *Sang thong* is very well-known story in Thailand. Ingersoll mentions about how Thai people are familiar with this story in the introduction of his translated version of this play.

When Sang Thong (The Golden Prince of the Conch Shell) is mentioned in Thailand, people respond with warmth and enthusiasm; an elderly villager will describe with relish a travelling players' performance he has often seen; a taxi driver will speak of the verse he studied in the fourth grade;....

(1973:19)

According to the study by Watcharaporn Distapan (2006), the Sang Thong legend is widely known among Thai people. Her research shows that there are almost

seventy stories on various forms of literature, such as tales, allegory, and folklore, based on the legend widely known in all regions of Thailand. This, in my opinion, can be assumed that the story definitely has some characteristics of Thai classical literature that was popular among Thai people for a very long time

The third qualification is the specific characteristics of the version of *Sang Thong* that I chose to base my adaptation on. *Sang Thong* was an old tale of Thailand. Normally it was used for folk theatre performance. In the reign of Rama II (1809-1824), this tale was rewritten by the King Rama II and his court poets as a dance drama in verse form. I chose to base my script on this version not only because it is the most complete and well-known version of this story, but also a speciality that appeared in it. This play is written in traditional form of dramatic poem and divided the story into nine parts. As I mentioned before, usually *Sang Thong* was performed in *Lakorn Nok*, which is theatre for villagers; the story is comic and full of the improvisation. Since this version was written by the King, it additionally has some of the beauty and well-written quality of *Lakorn Nai*, which is theatre for the royal family and elite. For me, this version will give me both the flexible and fun character of folk theatre, and at same time the delicate beauty of Thai traditional text. This story, therefore, presents the transposition between “folk” and “elite” theatre which Ingersoll mentioned it as the interaction between “great” and “little” traditions (1973:26).

The fourth qualification is associated with the recent appearances of *Sang Thong* in the modern society. In 2005, *Sang Thong* was adapted by Dangkamon Napombejra, a well-known Thai dramatist, as a part of the research project called *Legends Retold*. This project was supported by The Thailand Research Fund aimed at studying the process of recreating/restoring the script and performance of Thai traditional literature. The research shows that this new adapted play, *The Miraculous Adventure of*

the Conch Prince, received both acceptance and refusal from the audiences at different levels and for different reasons. The analysis from this research will be a very good source and helpful example to develop my thinking toward the ways of adapting traditional plays³¹. Moreover, in 2006, *Sang Thong* reappeared on Thai television as the *Lakorn jak jak wong wong* series³² and became very popular. In my opinion, this proves that this story has some quality that can still interest Thai people.

I grew up with this story as both a bed-time tale and a textbook in class, so not only do I feel familiar with this story but also when I asked myself which traditional plays would most interest me for adaptation, *Sang Thong* was the one that first came to mind. Therefore, for all the above reasons, I decided to choose this traditional play as the storyline for my first practical project.

The selected parts of the play

As I mentioned before, I started with the idea of writing two adapted versions that use two different approaches. In order to enable audiences to distinguish the differences and to be able to compare their qualities, which later result in my evaluation, these two approaches, in my view, should be clearly contrasted with or different from each other. However, during the time I did research on the play and considered about the two methods that I should use, the detail in the story led me to another thought: instead of using just two different approaches, I could experiment with various approaches in only one version of the play. This is because I found that, in fact, each part of the play suited a different way of adaptation. Therefore, instead of having

³¹ The analysis of this production is explained in chapter three, Thai traditional drama and its adaptation.

³² A kind of drama series in Thailand that has a mixture of characters from traditional theatre and modern television drama: the plot is mostly about a prince and princess; actors dress in adapted traditional costumes, speaking normal dialogue; traditional songs with lyrics are used as a way to describe the scene or a character's feeling. Normally this series is on air early Saturday and Sunday mornings.

two versions, maybe it was more appropriate to apply a specific method in each particular part and present them in only one version of the play. This would provide more opportunities for the audience to experience the various kinds of adaptation and be able to compare them without having to see the story twice. Moreover, to present the play this way would also give me more space to experiment with a variety of hypotheses about which appropriate ways of adaptation should be used. At this stage, I was concerned that this diversity could cause irritation. However, I counted it as a challenge for me to find the precise connection between each part and how to make the whole play finally go smoothly and, crucially, make sense.

When I started my script, it was essential that I consider what an adequate amount of the original storyline was. As the original play covers large period of time, to present the whole story appeared to be impossible and in fact unnecessary. However, there must be sufficient original context to allow audiences who have no idea about this Thai story to be able to follow the play.

I defined the process of selecting the suitable scenes from the original as the first step of doing the significant adaptation. In specific case of *Sang Thong*, even I mentioned earlier that this story is well-known but actually not every part is well-recognized by Thai people. There are some parts that are famous and frequently are chosen for performance as well as some unfamiliar parts that are ignored or rarely presented in theatre. To perform only a part of the play is a characteristic of recent Thai traditional theatre. Since the story itself was not given so much importance as the way they perform it, the audience will be more entertained with the dancing, singing and other elements than the plot itself.

Finally I decided to choose three well-known parts of *Sang Thong* to adapt in this project: *Story of Phanthurat*, *The Winning of Rochana* and *Hunting and Fishing*. Thai people are familiar with all of these three parts; actually, they are the parts that most Thai people first may think of when *Sang Thong* is mentioned. As Thai theatre is considered as entertainment in Thai culture, the comic part is preferred by audiences than the tragic one. Therefore, it comes as no surprised that *Winning of Rochana* and *Fishing and Hunting* are parts that are frequently selected for performance. For Phanthurat, even though she is a well-known character, the part that is her story is not often chosen for performance.

In fact, the character of the ogress appeared in many Thai traditional plays. Mostly they are categorized as wicked characters, as creatures that have a frightening appearance and eat human beings as food, even though in some stories the character of the ogre does not do anything wrong. It appears that just being a non-human is enough to make them horrific. Phanthurat is a good example of this pattern, and I found that it is interesting to analyse the rationale of the fate she is forced to meet. Moreover, for me, this ogress character is the most realistic in this kind of fairy tale, presenting many ideas about Thai culture and also woman's appearance and identity. Therefore, the less this character has been examined or mentioned, the more challenging and interesting for me to find the way to present it in an adapted play.

Theme

The explicit original theme of judging people from their appearance is intended to be kept in my adaptation as it is one of my main reasons for choosing this story. However, my adaptation also stresses this theme in the aspect of the unchanged value judgment in Thai society. This, in my own belief, could be the possible link

between the traditional literature and the modern audiences. Moreover, as this value judgment is still current and noticeable, it is a proof that the traditional literature is still able to connect with current Thai society. Accordingly, it affirms the continuing significance of traditional literature itself in the contemporary social context.

Actors

It was my early intention to have only four actors in my play, specifically two Thai actors and two non-Thai actors. This was because I wanted them to present an idea of the relationship between Western influences and Thai traditional theatre. Each actor was given a role based on their ethnicity in order to create a specific message within the play.

Traditional elements

Thai theatre is described as the composite arts. The beauty of language, pleasant music, graceful costumes, elegant and delicate movement and splendid spectacle are all main elements in Thai traditional theatre. My interest in the traditional theatre is not limited only to the theatrical literature. The beauty of the traditional elements, for instance dancing and singing, has always impressed me every time I have the chance to see the traditional performance. For many people, these elements seem boring because they are slow and make it difficult to understand the language of the play and the meaning of the dance.

To find the right place for these elements to be presented was another task for me in this project: that is to make the traditional elements, namely traditional dance, music, costumes, literary script, props, scenery, constantly appear in the performance.

With various approaches, I experimented with the way to present them in different functions in each part of the play.

Script development

I divided my script into six parts. The separation was based on distinct sequences in the story and also different ways of adaptation. However, all parts were connected to each other by theme and development of plot and characters.

It was not my expectation that the audiences who come to see my play would have knowledge about Thai theatre. Actually, it was my preference for them to know nothing as this would link them to modern Thai audiences who have only limited knowledge about Thai traditional theatre. Therefore, it was my early intention that the performance should start with an introduction to Thai theatre. In order to do that, I decided to use dance as a main method to deliver this information to audiences. Not only is dance one of the most important elements in Thai traditional theatre, but also Thai traditional dance has a unique character that, I believe, is able to represent the image of Thai aesthetics. Under its appearance of slow movement and the delicate tendency of dancers, it contains strength in its nature. Using ballet in this part as the representation of Western culture helps emphasising the unique character of Thai theatrical dance. The contrasting picture of these two kinds of dance portrays the impact of Western culture on Thai theatre.

The whole idea of having dance in my piece could not be realized if I did not have a potential actor who could perform both modern and Thai traditional dance. This actor had trained in ballet rather than in traditional dance; however, I had some

knowledge of Thai traditional dance and together, along with a lot of practice, we explored many movements of this part. Even though most of the movement in this traditional dance is basic, it is enough to show the image of traditional dance; on the other hand, and will not be too complex to be understood by an audience who knows nothing about Thai theatre.

I decided to use ballet as a symbol of Western influences in Thai theatre. In Thailand, many parents in the capital city prefer to send their child to study ballet rather than Thai dance, as obviously they think it looks more modern and fashionable. Therefore, in my opinion, ballet is a good example of how Thai people show their appreciation for Western culture more than their own arts.

Part One: The introduction

The performance begins with an actor standing in a Thai traditional posture in the middle of the stage with the top light on his head. Then Thai music fades in and he begins a Thai dance. I chose *Ram Mae Bot* as the opening dance for this performance. This dance encloses all the primary movements of Thai traditional dance. There is a specific song which has both music and lyrics together with specific dance movement. So, beginning with this dance pattern is the perfect way, for me, to present Thai traditional theatre as art that combines literature, classical dance, musical arts and visual arts.

Ram Mae Bot lasted for approximately one minute in the first part of the performance, which I think is long enough for the audience to have an image about Thai traditional dance and short enough to keep the audience's attention to a dance with

which they are not well acquainted and might appear to be very slow for them. Then the music suddenly changed to ballet music.

All the ballet music that I chose is from well-known pieces such as *Swan Lake* and *Nut Cracker*. The actor changes his dance, switching between Thai traditional music and ballet. I let the first Ballet piece last for a minute, and then switch into the Thai song that is used in *Lakron Nok* theatre for a shorter time, approximately 20 seconds, and then revert to ballet again. This routine happens three times in order to allow the audience to have time to understand what I am trying to say.

At the end of this point the actor returns to stand in the centre of the stage as at the beginning. He stops dancing and the video begins to project on the screen behind. The first part of the video has the same pattern as the first part of the dance; however, this time audiences will see the real picture of traditional theatre alternate with modern Thai theatre. Images of the modern Thai theatre combine with a variety of musical, comedy, monologue, and experimental theatres from well-known large and small theatre groups in Thailand. After this, the music fades in and the actor begins to dance again. The first music I use in this sequence is a song from the *Boy Thai* band. This band is famous for combining the Thai traditional and Western music instruments. The song, therefore, has the character of Thai traditional rhythm and Western style of music. I use this song as background music. The actor starts with contemporary dance, followed by a mixture of traditional and ballet dance based on the video sequence that is projected behind.

At minute 6.18 of the video, the music becomes unsynchronised with the lyrics. The video shows an image from Thai modern theatre but the music is traditional. When the music and picture contrast, at this point, we can see the attempt of the actor to

get himself to belong to this mixture. He begins to do contemporary dance with a mixture of traditional dance and ballet movement. However, after a while, we can see him discontinue his dance. Then the video and music of the ballet come back again at minute 6.43, and the actor begins to dance properly. However, only a few seconds later, the mix-up suddenly occurs again. This time, all kinds of music and image are mixed-up. When the actor is unable to find the dance that suits this confusion, he begins to combine ballet, traditional and contemporary dance together. His movement at this point is full of images of confusion and uncertainty. At minute 8.05, when the music fades out, leaving only the video on the screen, he stops dancing and stands in the middle of the stage in a position that mixes the Thai traditional and ballet gesture together. Then the video image of theatre in Thailand becomes unfocused and fades out.

Instead of just showing the Thai traditional dance as an introduction to Thai theatre, I have explored the possibility of presenting further related information. In this first part I have tried to experiment with the ways of presenting the issue of the development of Thai theatre by using dance as my main method. Every change of song and dance actually shows, in an important sequence, the significant changes that occurred in Thai theatre history.

I compare the significant change periods³³ in Thai theatre with the six sequences of this dancing part.

Sequence 1 – Ram Mae Bot

This sequence represents the image of original Thai Theatre before it was affected by the first Western influence in the nineteenth century.

³³ The detail of these change periods is indicated in the first chapter, the development of Thai theatre.

Sequence 2 – Ballet

Western culture was introduced to Thai society: some Western plays were translated or adapted into Thai context and performed within the elite circle.

Sequence 3- The swap of ballet and Thai dance

At the beginning, both kinds of theatre had continuously staged in Thai society without the correlation between each other.

Sequence 4 - The mixture: The emergence of new kinds of Thai theatre

In order to attract audiences and be able to survive, some theatres applied some techniques of Western theatre to use in their performances which later lead to the emergence of new kinds of theatre in Thai society, such as *Lakorn Phanthang*.

Sequence 5- The re-introduction of Western theatre

The discontinued dance from minute 6.18 depicts the development of theatre in Thailand that was stopped for a while due to the economy crisis and the changing of our political system. At the minute 6.43 when the video and song of the ballet come back and the dancer is be able to continue his dance, this telling point presents the Western theatre that was re-introduced to society in the mid-1960s. Started within the education institutes, this time it was referred to as the “modern theatre”

Sequence 6 – The confusing

I compare the last fusion dance with the attempt of Thai artists who try to create the new Thai “original” play. In this period, the mixture of Western and traditional theatre techniques was seen in Thai theatre.

Sequence 7 – Current status of Thai Theatre

Even though there was an attempt to combine these two kinds of theatre together, the theatre in Thailand still does not have a clear image of how it is going to be. Our inability to find our own original play that suits the taste of modern audiences, in my opinion, is the barrier that causes the slow development of Thai theatre. The image of the dancer standing still in the middle of the stage with the combined gesture from both modern and traditional theatre, together with the on-going video of mixed image of Thai theatre behind him, therefore illustrates the position of Thai theatre in my view. The problem of unpopularity still occurred in the theatre. Unless we can find a clear identity for our theatre, the development of theatre in Thailand will stop and go nowhere.

I realise that this detailed analysis of these sequences may be difficult to recognize or identify by an audience that has insufficient knowledge of Thai theatre history. However, if this first part can show a sense of the struggle in the mixture of Thai and Western theatre, in my opinion, it is enough for a practical function of this first scene in relation to the whole play.

Part Two: Adaptation

The *Sang Thong* story begins to be told in this part. When the light fades in, an actress in Thai traditional dress is sitting on the floor and begins to sing and move her hand in the original way to perform the Thai traditional play. Just when she starts performing, an actor, totally ignoring her existence, walks past her into the middle of the stage and begins to talk to the audience. Without any choice, the actress has to stop her performance; however, she does not go out but she is still sitting there on stage with no attention from other actors.

This character presents the status of traditional theatre in Thai society that sometimes is overlooked by people in society. Even though she is sitting there, on stage all the time, no one seems to notice her existence and she, herself, is not strong enough to get attention from other characters either. With traditional theatre in Thailand, everyone may notice its existence, as it is always there, but nobody really pays attention to it especially the modern people represented by the actor, who just walk past her without any recognition.

The actor plays a function in this part of the play as a storyteller and later, as the main character that connects every part of this play together. The character of actor is created as a modern actor who would like to perform the Phra Sang character in the traditional play. This character is performed by a non-Thai actor who seems to know nothing about the Thai traditional theatre. However, he comes on stage and talks to audiences with an enthusiastic interest in performing this story. I create this character with his inadequate knowledge in order to establish a connection between this character and audience who also has no foreknowledge about Thai theatre. I present this idea through his direct address to the audience:

Actor **Good evening...Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the performance tonight. It is gonna be very interesting for you as I am quite sure none of you may have any idea about Thai theatre at all! Nor do I, in fact.**

(Sang Thong, part 1)

Additionally, this character represents the character of modern Thai people, educated in Western influences, who look into this traditional play from the perspective of a Western way of thinking. Attitudes toward the traditional play can be seen in his opinion when he tells this story to audiences. The actor is performed by the non-Thai actor. He dresses in Western-style costumes: a proper suit.

Actor **OK, I know I may not look that Thai...but so what? You won't expect to see me in traditional dress anymore, right?**

(Sang Thong, part 1)

This dialogue implies the question of whether people still expect to see the traditional plays performed in the pure traditional art form anymore.

The way he forgets the story or feels surprise with the unexpected plot in the play indicates what happens to a traditional story nowadays; people appear to remember only a small amount of the story.

Additionally, in this part, I also try to insert information about Thai traditional theatre. When the actor asks for a setting, a second actor brings only a bench on stage.

Actor **That's it? That's all the scenery? What's that supposed to be, and where?**

Actor 2 **Wherever.**

Actor **What do you mean by "wherever"?**

Actor2 **Throne hall, forest, market, hut....**

Actor **OK...at least, there must be some props?**

Actor2 **Which props?..Oh..you mean a conch shell you were born in?**

Actor **No..let's skip that part. Thank you then.**

(Sang Thong, part 1)

I define this conversation as the way to introduce the information about setting in Thai traditional theatre. That is the reason that Actor 2 is set to perform by a Thai actor. In traditional theatre, setting is not an important element compared to the others. This may be because, in the past, there was no permanent theatre building. Normally a theatre group moved from place to place to perform in different communities. So to have a simple setting would be easier for their moving.

After the Thai actor goes off stage, the actor begins to choose the part he would like to perform in this story. It is perhaps therefore no surprise that he chooses to skip many parts that do not suit his modern taste for different reasons.

Actor **What happens next? (Looks at the book) Umm...this one is not good..this one is too slow..this one...I think it is not that**

interesting...um...let's skip that and that ..and also that..oh...there are ogres as well...but better skip to more realistic part..

(Sang Thong, part 1)

Reasons that he mentioned state the attitudes of Thai modern people toward the traditional play. Some may think it is too slow, not interesting or even not realistic enough. However, for me all these attitudes are only based on the Western-theatre way of thinking, and that is reason a Thai actress comes on stage and stops him.

This character has a contrasting attitude to the actor; she seems to believe that the original beauty of a traditional play should be kept with no change needed. Despite the fact that she is Thai, she appears in a Western costume, a long white ground dress with a little crown on her head. I intend to make the contradiction between her conservative idea about Thai theatre and her costume as a portrait of the attempt of contemporary artists who try to put the traditional play on the modern stage. This character also presents my attitude toward the adaptation; even though I see the beauty of the traditional play, I admit that the adaptation needs to be made. So even if this character claims she is traditional princess Rochana, she chooses to appear in the modern costume.

At this point, the information of Thai theatre is inserted in their conversation again when the actress asks the actor to perform the whole story; unsurprisingly he complains about the impossibility of doing it.

Actor It needs three days to present the whole story. I don't think everyone here will have that much time.

Actress If you stop talking...I think we can finish in a day and a half

(Sang Thong, part 1)

After she seems to be satisfied with her requirement, she heads out of the stage, but the actor stops her with the question of who would perform an ogress character. Her refusal reaction expresses the attitude of Thai people toward the character of an ogress. However, as she thinks this character is still important to the play, she asks another actress to perform this character instead of her.

It is the first time that the actress in Thai traditional dress who has sat on stage since the beginning of this part of the play becomes noticed. When the Thai actress asks if she can perform the character of an ogress for them, at first she refuses to do so as she does not want to. However, she says ‘yes’ at the end. This presents the type of female characters in Thai traditional plays. Most female characters in Thai traditional literature, especially heroines, accept their fate without any resistance. Their character appears to be passive rather than active.

In the original, the story begins with the king asking the god for a son to inherit his throne, and then Phra Sang is born. After that the story follows his childhood and all his adventures. By contrast, I summarize this entire background story up until Phra Sang met Phanthurat within this first part. The later part, then, is the story of Phanthurat.

Part Three – *Phanthurat*

In Thai traditional literature, the character of an ogress usually is given the negative aspect. Considered as non-human being, an ogre is seen as an ugly, frightening and cruel creature. Whether the ogress takes the role of an antagonist or support for a hero, this character, normally, faces a tragic ending.

This description can also be applied to Phanthurat. Phanthurat is one of the well-known Thai ogress characters. Her story is told in act three and four of *Sang Thong* in the original version written by King Rama II and the poets of His court, *the Boyhood of Prince Sang* and *the Fight of Prince Sang*. When Phra Sang was drown by his father's mistress, the serpent king rescues him and later sends Phra Sang to the kingdom of the ogres where his friend, Phanthurat, is the queen. Phanthurat, a childless widow, raises him with all her love. Afraid that Phra Sang would know her real nature, she commands every ogre in her kingdom to assume a human appearance. However, Phra Sang discovers the truth and decides to run away from her. She follows him up to the mountain. No matter how much she tries to beg him to come back, he refuses. She finally cries until she dies of a broken heart.

Even though this character is well-known among Thai people, this part of the play is rarely selected for performance in *Lakorn Nok* theatre where the comic scenes are more preferable for audiences. In Thai traditional theatre, normally, audiences are entertained by the conflict within the plot and the beautiful presentation rather than deep analysis of the message of the play. Therefore, characters appear to be flat; particularly in Phanthurat, her character's tragic ending is not given much in its reason rather as the ogress thought; she is supposed to have a tragic ending.

In contrast with other characters, in my opinion, Phanthurat has depth in her character. Moreover, her story actually classifies clearly the theme of the play: the judgement made on appearance. This inspired me to explore a way to present this character in a new, different aspect. Consequently, in this part of my play, I tried explore a way to present the aesthetic dramatic of Thai traditional literature by using Phanthurat's story as a source.

Many elements in Thai traditional theatre are used in this part. Beginning with Thai traditional music; I try to create the atmosphere of Thai theatre in this scene. The actress sits on the bench in traditional posture while another actress stands behind her and starts to read the play in traditional style.

The dramatic text is taken up from the original literature which was that originally written in verse. The actress, playing Phanthurat, does a traditional dance that translates the meaning of the verse through the meaning of the movement. This sequence presents the picture of the original way to perform traditional theatre. After that, she begins her story with a monologue talking about herself and how she met Phra Sang and brought him up as her own son.

The use of a bench, as already indicated in the previous chapter, shows the way it presents various places. It is also seen in the next scene when Phra Sang secretly follows her into a forbidden room.

Instead of changing or adapting the story, I kept most of the original plot, but put emphasis on the point of misjudgement of this character. Phra Sang chooses to run away from her and not even go down from the mountain to give her a last hug, which later leads to her death from a broken heart. Instead of putting blame on the hero, an excuse given for his action is that Phanthurat is not sincere with him first, she lives

with a lie about her nature; therefore, it is reasonable for Phra Sang trust her no more. However, I could not deny the fact that she did it because of love. It can be proven even before she dies, as she gives her last magic spell to him as she knows it might help him in the future.

In many former modern adaptations, the character of a weak heroine has been adapted to be strong and stand up to fight for her rights as result of changes in women's position in society. In these adapted plays, changes in the actions of and perspective on female character are obviously seen. However, the character of an ogress is rarely mentioned in this aspect.

In his *Sang Thong* version, *The Miracle Adventure of the Conch Prince*, Dangkamon Na-Pombejra chose to adapt this character to be a bisexual person. He compared the judgment in Thai society toward a bisexual person as the way Thai people view the ogress character. He claims that Thai society is prejudiced about both of them from their queer appearances and ignores their individual minds (Na-Pombejra, 2006:13)³⁴.

One of the functions of traditional dance drama was to use it as a tool to instil morals to the audience. Phanthurat's story signifies the ungratefulness of the hero of the story, Phra Sang, toward the person who has taken care of him for fifteen years. So to avoid mentioning this part in the performance made it easier to demonstrate a Buddhist doctrine which this story would contradict.

³⁴ The analysis is of this performance is given in the chapter three: Thai traditional drama and its adaptation.

Since I began to draft an idea for my first script, I have asked myself whether reinterpretation is necessary in every part of the play? Is there any section that should be preserved as the way it is? If there is, at the same time could it demonstrate a new message anyway?

This idea brought me into this part of the play. I found that Phanthurat character is understandable in her actions. Compared to other characters, she is realistic in the term of her motivation and deep personality. The way she accepts what happens to her shows one nature of the traditional play that fate is the explanation that given in actions. Presenting the analysis of this character from the modern perspective is another way to criticize traditional belief that appears in traditional literature. Therefore, instead of trying to change her, I emphasise her character as a creature who has a frightful appearance but at same time has a pure heart of love. She follows Phra Sang to the foot of the hill, but he refuses to come down; she asks him to look at her and questions if he sees any difference. Not even looking, Phra Sang says “yes” as his answer. His action presents the idea of how this character is judged by her original frightful image which is considered to be wrong in society’s value judgment rather than considering her actions. In order to provoke the audience’s thinking, this scene raises the question of whether it is her fault, or the value judgment in society that leads her to this tragic ending.

In order to make the story believable in the modern context, I made Phanthurat’s death a reason for Phra Sang to feel guilty, and decided to put an ugly mask on his face. In my opinion, this makes his action more reasonable and simultaneously affirms the theme of the story.

I kept the original story of hero's gold body and Ngo Pa³⁵ disguise in my adapted play in order to emphasize directly the theme of appearance. However, the disguise that helps the hero to assume an Ngo Pa body is replaced by a mask. The script describes this mask as “ugly” without any specification or any link to Ngo Pa in the original play as to present the wider contemporary meaning of it. The mask is painted in black with figures that are inspired by *Jao Ngo* masks and a giant mask from *Khon* performance.



The 'ugly' mask

The magic chant is kept as the way it is in the original story and later appears in the following scene as the method that the hero uses to win his father-in-law's tasks. The chant is kept, as it is one of the recognition of *Sang Thong* story. It symbolizes the pure love of Phanthurat toward Phra Sang. However, I determine to keep it without reinterpretation; the reason is further explained in the next part.

³⁵ *Jao Ngo* is the character of Phra Sang when he disguises himself as Ngo Pa. Ngo Pa or Sakai is small tribe living in south of Thailand. They mostly live in the jungle and depend on nature for their life. They appear in villages sometimes when they want to trade their food for medicine or other groceries they cannot find in the forest. A Ngo Pa has a dark skin, curly hair and normally dresses in red. Because they look different from Thais and cannot speak Thai language, in the past some Thais regarded them as an ignorant and undeveloped people.

Part Four- Rochana

This part covers the main plot of act five and six of the original story: *The Choice of Husbands* and *The Winning of Rochana*. This part of the story is famous since it is full of romance and humour. It is one of the most popular scenes performed in the traditional theatre. Beginning when Rochana, the princess, is forced to choose a husband, it ends with conflict between her father and his new son-in-law.

In order to make an “old text” able to communicate with a “modern” audience, I found that an adjustment in its context, especially in relation to current social issues, is necessary. When I examined *Sang Thong*, I found some contemporary aspects as well as parts that may be incomprehensible for a current audience. Therefore, in this part of my play, I tried to explore the way to relate this “old” story to the current social context. To do this, I believe, could make this traditional story become understandable for modern audience and also able to communicate to them both the old and the new messages. Additionally, I aim to prove my belief that Thai traditional play could provide some meaning for the current Thai society, in the reflection of current social identity and the value of the traditional play itself.

In order to achieve my aim, I kept the former plotline and characters as they appear in the original. Then I replaced some of their context with some modern features. For instance, the status of the princess and her father, the king, still are retained instead of replacing them with other realistic occupations in the modern world. Conversely, the way they are talking and thinking and their attitudes are different from the original story. I expect the audience to see the “old” characters who try to perform the “old” story, but, with their “modern” perspectives. I expect this contradiction would

create the comic elements that would draw an amusing analogy between the original and adaptation.

This part begins with the princess, performed by the Thai-actress who appears earlier in the second part, re-entering the stage. She starts by arguing with her father on the topic of her marriage.

Rochana I don't want to get married. I want to be with you.

Father But you have to. All your six sisters have already chosen their husbands and you should do that too. Please Rochana, you are the youngest. You are very lovely and I love you the most...please just choose someone...either rich or good looking or smart or an aristocrat...it doesn't matter.

(Sang Thong, part 4)

In this dialogue, princes are replaced with the types of popular men in the modern world, namely businessmen, aristocrats, politicians or even a singer or a celebrity. All of them are very popular in Thailand, as in other places in the world.

The character of the princess is like the modern woman who wants to play the traditional princess role. Sometimes she wants things to go as they usually go in the traditional story. Sometimes, she accepts the changes as she actually knows they have to happen. Her father is a traditional character who acts as if he knows what should happen in the modern world. In their conversation, we can see the different attitudes about what should happen and what should be changed.

A sense of humour comes from the modern issues that are mentioned in their conversation. For example, instead of holding an impressive ceremony and inviting all the princes for the princess to choose from, a catalogue with detailed information about each suitor is presented. Even the princess questions this excessively modern style, while her father insists that it would be better if there is an online service.

Rochana **It is a very weird catalogue. (But she looks at it anyway) But father, shouldn't we hold a ceremony...invite all the princes and I can see them and choose?**

Father **That is a very, very old way. It wastes time and money. Time is money.**

Rachana **Don't you think this is too modern?**

Father **No. There is still no online catalogue.**

(Sang Thong, part 4)

I intend to make the contradiction between the traditional characters and the modern subject in their dialogue to create a sense of humour. However, this sense of humour should further provoke the audience to realise what is really happening on the stage; namely the performance of the traditional play that tries to adjust itself to survive in the modern society.

Other modern subjects, such as a real prince in real life, Prince William or the issue of gay identity, are mentioned in the play in order to attract the modern audience. By presenting issues familiar to their life, I aim to initiate the connection between the story and audience.

Another important method that I would like to point out in this part is the way Thai traditional elements are used. As one of my intentions is to find the suitable way to use elements of Thai theatre, I shall discuss my attempts to put traditional dance into my play. Thai dance is used in three functions of this part: firstly, to replace the Phra Sang's disguise, secondly, to present the princess's motivation to choose her husband, thirdly, to symbolize the magic spell that Phra Sang uses in order to win his father-in-law's tasks.

In the original, when Phra Sang is in his Ngo Pa disguise, he looks strange and odd in the other character's eyes, both from his ugly appearance and his inability to communicate. In my version, the actor comes on stage, with the mask on his face, using the Thai traditional movement. When the father asks him a question, instead of speaking he used dance as way to communicate, which, of course, does not make sense to the father. This is the first function of Thai dance in this section, to present the image of the Ngo Pa disguise in the original play.

The second Thai dance is seen in the scene when princess Rochana decides to choose Phra Sang as her husband, the video of this dancing scene in a traditional performance is projected on the wall behind. In the original story, Phra Sang falls in love with Princess Rochana the first time he sees her. Under the ugly Ngo Pa's disguise, the prince makes a wish that, if he and Princess Rochana have been each other's soul mates in the previous life, she should be able to see his real appearance as the Golden Prince³⁶. The princess does see his gold body inside, and praying for the same thing,

³⁶ According to the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, a person has previous lives before the present one, and he will go on having a next life after death. The reincarnation will go on endlessly until he is able to reach Nirvana. In each life, he may also reunite with his previous family members, his friends, and most of all, the loved one. Therefore, it is not unusual for a Buddhist, especially in the old days, to make a wish when he falls for somebody, that if they have been lovers in the previous life, let the other fall for him as well.

decides to throw the garland to him. I decided to show a video of this famous scene to the audience for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted the audience to see how the original Thai theatre is performed, the way the actors dance with slow movements and the sound of the chorus who sings the story in verse form. The video lasts for 1.40 minutes, and shows only the action when Rochana decides to throw the garland. Secondly, I wanted this scene to present a parallel between the traditional play and this adaptation by pointing out the similarity between Rochana in these two versions: the reasons she has for making her decision to choose Phra Sang as her husband. I indicate a link between the video and what happens on stage through the red garland: when Rochana on the video decides to throw the garland, at the same time the actor catches a garland from the actress on stage.

The sequences of Thai dancing are presented again in the battle between Phra Sang and his father-in-law which are called *Hunting and Fishing*, the story in Act seven of the original play. This part is also another famous scene that frequently is chosen to be performed. The fight between the father and his son-in-law is full of comic relief. In the original play, there are another six sons-in-law who participate in this competition; but I decided to cut this out as I think the main point is actually the conflict between father and Phra Sang.

Thai dance is presented in this part as Phanthurat's Magic spell that is given to Phra Sang in the previous scene. Frequently, in former adaptations, this "magic spell" has been reinterpreted as money, power or even a credit card, unsurprisingly, since this is the result of the materialism that seems to appear in every part of the world when money is considered as solution for everything. However, in my version, I chose to not identify the method that helps Phra Sang to be able to solve the king's tasks as I intend

to imply it as the meaning of the solution of the last task. This topic is further discussed in the later part of this section: the political issue.

The different sequences of dance are chosen for each magic spell he has used. The first time when he uses the magic spell in order to find a fish, the movement comes from the traditional dance pattern of this original character. For the second task, the dance is picked up from the movement of the traditional Thai dance, while the last one, which is the spell to solve the hardest task, the movement of the giant character in *Khon* is chosen. Each sequence of dance presents a different level of the strong gesture. The first one seems to be flexible movement as the character of *Jao Ngo*, or Phra Sang in his Ngo Pa appearance, is funny and relaxing. The second sequence has a firmer gesture but could not compare with the last one when the *Khon* movement is presented. Among all characters in *Khon*, the giant character is considered to have the strongest image. Therefore, this character movement illustrates its powerful characteristic. To use the sequence of this character movement for the last tasks, I aim to present how hard this task is.

As mentioned earlier, *Hunting and Fishing* is an iconic scene of this story. In many previous adaptations, there is always an attempt to reinterpret the meaning of *Hunting and Fishing* and try to replace them with some tasks that suggest similar qualifications but are more acceptably realistic in modern society. When I finally came down to idea of finding the strongest interpretation of it, I asked myself what fishing and hunting can mean in this modern world. Then, I found that it is the impossible task that father asks his son-in-law to do as an excuse to get rid of him.

After Phra Sang won the first two tasks, the king goes off stage and brings back the book in order to check what he did wrong. Then he comes with answer:

Father **No, everything is right. In the book...here...in Act seven...hunting and fishing ...oh, I know. I am wrong...I forget to reinterpret it! Of course, this way won't make any sense now.**

Ok...What do hunting and fishing mean? What do they stand for?.....

The impossible task! Yes, that is the way I can get rid of him! When he can't do the task I ask him to do, I will have reason to kill him!

(Sang Thong, part 4)

This idea leads to his finding of the possible task which also leads me to the presentation of political issue in my play.

Political issue

Politics is one issue that I intend to present it in my play. Thai theatre in the past, apart from being an entertainment, sometimes also is used as a political instrument. The example can be seen during the Phibun's period (1938-1944 and 1948-1957) when theatre is used as the way to express idea of nationalism. Not only could an opinion about politics could be expressed through an adapted play, I believe it may also be another way to bring traditional literature closer to the modern audience by referring to the topic that is of interest for Thai people. Especially in Thailand, during the time I did this play, political conflict is very strong; political problems seem to be the main issue in society. It is big topic in Thailand about how Thai politicians use their position for being successful in business.

Actually, I have implied this political issue since the beginning of part four when father suggest to his daughter about Thai politician.

Father None of them? OK...(He brings a new catalogue) These are the rich and smart people...businessmen, aristocrats, politicians..Thai politicians may be very interesting...they are politicians and also businessmen. They are rich and have power, perfect!

(Sang Thong, part 4)

My second attempt to present the political issue in my play can be seen through the king's impossible tasks. Thailand has faced political problems for a very long time. Some people believe that it has occurred from our misunderstanding or misuse of democracy. In order to present the impossible tasks, I project the video of Thai political news on the wall. I chose news that reported in English in order to make it easy for audience here to understand. Most clips were talking about the recent political problems that caused a big conflict in Thai society; two totally different attitudes separate Thai people into two groups. This conflict has caused a huge impact on Thai economy. Even now, the solution of this problem is still unclear.

The reason I compare Thai political problem with the impossible task is to present the idea of how hopeless it is for Thai people to find a solution for our political problems. Especially during the time I wrote this play, no solution can be seen for the current political crisis in the country. Therefore, I found that by comparing these two subjects, it is the way to imply my thought: the Thai political problem is like the impossible task, there is no way you can find its solution.

Finally, the way I let Phra Sang still be able to solve this task with his magic spell is my attempt to satirize a solution of Thai political problem; it needs a magic spell.

Traditional heroine character

There are three aspects of Thai traditional heroine character that I would like to mention through the presentation of female characters in my play: the belief in marriage, karma and the status of woman in Thai society the presented through these female characters.

- **The belief in marriage**

Marriage is still given an importance in Thai society. Although Thai woman tends to be more educated and as successful in work as man, the idea that a woman has to get married still remains in Thai society³⁷. I first present this idea in the beginning of this fourth part when the king tries to persuade the princess to choose any men to get marriage. However, later when he realizes that the man his daughter chose is Phra Sang, he tries to persuade her to reconsider about getting married. This time, it is the princess who insists in this idea and affirms that it is essential thing that a Thai woman still has to do. Without his approval, it comes to the end that she is exiled from her home to live in a small hut outside the city.

³⁷ In her research on Thai women's status that is reflected through the heroine role in a famous Thai soap opera, Manomaiphibul points out that the Thai traditional belief that Thai women have to depend for their life on men still exists in Thai society. This idea can be seen in the fact that in Thai soap opera, which is the most popular form of entertainment in current Thai society, no matter how strong and smart she might be, the female protagonist needs a hero in order to gain her status as a heroine (2006:115).

- **Karma**

According to Buddhist philosophical belief in the cycle of cause and effect, a man is responsible for his good and bad deeds, or "karma". He will deserve, one way or another, whatever he has committed either in the present life or in the previous ones. But for Thai traditional female characters, karma is something more than cause and effect. Whenever ill luck or misfortune happens to them, instead of complaining or blaming others, they will passively accept it as an inevitable karma. By tolerating the karma until they have paid the price, they will finally get through the trouble and achieve the happy end. There are three times that female characters mentioned about karma in my play. Rochana gives it as the reason to her father that why she chose this man as her husband even she knows it would make her father feel ashamed; it is because of her karma she did in the past. Phanthurat says the same thing when Phra Sang left her without any sympathy; it is karma that makes her have to face this fate. Karma is mentioned for the third time when Rochana tries to find a reason that causes the difficulty in her life. However, this time, mention of karma results in this character's reaction and turns out to develop the plot to another step. The discussion of this action is described in part five.

- **The status of woman in Thai society**

Feminism is another issue that appears in many adaptations. Since the nature of society has changed along with the status of woman in society, it is obviously why artists in Thailand, especially female artists, have picked up this issue to present in their adaptations. The well-known artists whose works always mention this topic include Pornrat Damrhung, Patravadi Mejudhon and Mattani Rutnin.

For me, as a Thai modern woman, I could not help bring up this issue as well as other female Thai dramatists, notably the question about the way the heroine in traditional story should act toward her fate. When I read this traditional play, I ask myself what Rochana did wrong: she chose a real prince but she was exiled to live in a small hut. Is it just an easy solution for Phra Sang to just take off mask and let everyone know he is a real prince?

In my play, during the *Hunting and Fishing* part, I present the image of Rochana, sitting quietly on the bench, in a middle position between her father and her husband, ignored by both characters; she sits there with nothing that she could do. I aim by this image to point out the characteristic of Thai traditional female characters. I hint at this before in the second part when the actress in traditional costumes is asked by another actress to perform an ogress characters; she says ‘yes’ even though she is not enthusiastic. Thai traditional heroines mostly choose to accept their fate and wait for god to come to the rescue.

I chose to begin with presenting the original status of woman in traditional play in order to present the change in modern woman’s status through her action later.

Part Five- The ending

In the original story, the princess asks Phra Sang once to take off his ugly disguise and tries to burn it which makes Phra Sang very angry. In my play, the princess starts asking him to take off his mask to do her a favour. After his second refusal, she begins to speak her deep feelings:

Actress My father is angry with me. I have to be banished from the palace...live badly here...just because you don't want to take of your ugly mask...to show that I am right.

(Sang Thong, part 4)

This dialogue does not appear in the original version. As I mentioned before, it is unusual that a traditional female character will stand up and fight for her right. In my version, the princess's thought develops throughout as she is ignored sitting on the bench and cannot do anything. When she begins to ask questions and express more of her thoughts, it caused the actor who performs Phra Sang to notice and begin to feel that something is wrong.

At this point, he turns into the actor who performs the Phra Sang character, and tries to tell her that she acts too seriously and points out that the good ending is about to come finally.

Actor Why do you have to care? The story will have a good ending anyway. You are a princess and I am real prince...that's the way for us. Let me see. (He looks in the book) See? The God Indra...he will come to help you.

Actress That's not reasonable.

Actor I know, but we can reinterpret and find something that looks more reasonable. Who can replace God?

Actress Fate...the only thing I can hope for.

(Sang Thong, part 5)

Instead of getting the answer she wants, his words make her realise that it is “fate” that her character can rely on. The key point is when she decides to ask Phra Sang for the last time if he can take off the mask for her. His refusal causes her to speak this important line:

Actress What karma do I have to make you do this?

(Sang Thong, part 5)

This is exactly the dialogue that Phanthurat says when Phra Sang decides to leave her. When the actress speaks this line, another actress, who performs the Phanthurat character, comes on stage and speaks the same sentence at the same time. Therefore, the image on stage presents two female actors, one dressed in modern style and another dressed in traditional costume. The first one stands in front of the stage while another stands behind at the back stage; they both speak this line at exactly the same time. After the actress says this line, she decides to stop performing this story and leave the stage.

This whole sequence presents the development in Thai female characters in terms of this status in society. The actress cannot accept doing the same thing as the

traditional one; she refuses to wait for “god” to come to the rescue, and so indicates the change in thought toward female characters in Thai society.

When the actress decides to leave the stage, the question of how people would know the ending is asked by the actor.

Actor But the story doesn’t end yet. How people will know how it ends?

Actress Is it important to know? Do we need to know how an old story ends?
You just know...it will have a happy ending...that’s all that matters.
Just you know what thought you...what is the meaning...what’s
funny...what’s the value...?

She walks out. Silence.

(Sang Thong, part 5)

This is **the ending** of my play version. The actor ends up telling the audience the rest of the story without expressing any emotion.

Since only part of the play is selected for performance in the traditional theatre, not so many people know what exactly happens at the end. Many people may know the story only until the moment when Phra Sang reveals his real appearance, and is accepted by the king; that seems to be already a good ending for a fairy tale.

I demonstrate this in the way I end this part. When the actress asks if it is important to know the ending, I attempt to evoke the current awareness of Thai people, how much importance they give to the traditional literature. I also raise a question that may be inspired by the actress’s last dialogue; what should we do now to traditional literature after this?

Part Six

When I wrote the script up until part five, I felt that the play was not complete even though the whole story of *Sang Thong* is already told. I asked myself again: what is the real purpose of this adaptation? That is the moment I felt that the last part needed to be written.

When the light fades out and all the actors come back on stage, their conversation presents what I am trying to do in this adaptation. The non-Thai actor asks if he can perform a Thai character in the next round, while the Thai actor says actually he feels more familiar with his Western-style character. This conversation poses my expression of how traditional theatre is appreciated by others, while Thai people themselves actually tend to know more about modern theatre than their original roots.

When I make the two actresses say that their characters are same, I am trying to raise the question of woman's status in Thai society, whether it is really changed.

The question about the costumes represents the many possible ways that adaptations of traditional plays could be done. When they come out with no answer to the actress's question, the suggestion of discussing it while they are walking out presents the attempt of Thai artists to do further investigations in this idea: we are in the process of developing our theatre identity.

During the script development process, I received comments from friends and actors about this part. Some feel that it is an additional part that does not actually belong to the whole play. They feel that story has already ended in part five. I kept thinking about it and finally decided to keep going with my idea.

My play is not only about the adapted story but also about the attempt to find the possible way to adapt the traditional play. In other words, I am not just concerned with the completed plays that would I like to present; the journey of how that play is created is also the important message I would like to share. This last part presents this purpose of my work. I found that, without this part, my play would not be complete. Therefore, I insisted on keeping this part in my final script.

Reflection on the Process of Rehearsal

The first reading was arranged in November 2008. The script had developed together with the couple of rehearsals within the two weeks before we took the short break during the Christmas holiday. Many questions were raised by the actors, particularly in the area of Thai traditional theatre. It is noteworthy that even Thai actors who should have more knowledge in this field still did not recognize some common information about the Thai theatre. This provoked my awareness of the audiences' possible lack of background knowledge: how should I introduce this information in the "right" way and "right" quantity in order to make the audiences able to understand and appreciate the beauty of traditional performance?

Trying to find an answer for this question led me to the challenge of creating the play's opening scene. The early idea for this scene was just the simple presentation of the traditional Thai dance. However, after the discussion between the actor and myself, we came up with the possibility of using the conceptual juxtaposition of Thai traditional dance, ballet and contemporary dance in order to present the history of Thai theatre.

The process was very challenging for us because we had to develop the idea based on our own different individual skills. I started with watching several videos of famous ballet performances along with the explanation from my actor about the basic movement of the ballet and contemporary dance. Several rehearsals were tried before we found that without a common core to base our ideas on, it is very difficult to develop and coordinate our ideas with only the concept to guide us; therefore, I decided to make the first outline of the sound and video for this scene as a guide for both of us to our develop our ideas in the same direction.

During the time I edited the video, I came up with a new thought: instead of just switching between images of the traditional dance and ballet, I could use the sequences of the dance to illustrate the developmental history of Thai theatre as well. All the contrasts, the juxtaposition and even the assortment of different dance types could present a precise image of how Thai theatre has been influenced by the Western culture.

As a result, the video was carefully designed to serve this purpose. Every detail of the changes in sound and image portrayed the specific, significant changes in Thai theatre history. With the limitation in time of performance and background knowledge of the audience, I realized that it may be impossible for the complete information of this part to be recognized or even interpreted. However, I still believe that, at least, the general concept of how the Western culture has influenced the Thai theatre can be represented through this part of the play.

The meticulous selection of movement and gesture was another method that concerned me. Throughout the rehearsal, we explored the connection between each movement and how it was associated with sound and video. Only clear and noticeable movements were chosen in order to make it easy for the audience to recognize the differences. The stage space is another method that we discovered during the rehearsal: beginning with the small space and then extending to the whole stage and returning to the small space at the end emphasised the idea of how theatre in Thailand has developed. The final definition of this scene is explained in the script interpretation given earlier.

One significant thing I discovered during the process of rehearsal is the way that acting as an element could be used to present the different sequences of my play.

I realized from the beginning that the parts of my play tended to be separate from each other through the different methods that have been used. It became difficult for actors to perform the different parts of the story when they have developed the characters throughout the play, especially Kris who performs main character and will be on stage from the beginning until the end.

Therefore, we began our rehearsals with discussions about this issue. Each part of my play tries to present different forms of adaptation. Therefore, different interpretations of each character appear in different scenes, and this may be a suitable tool to divide the different sequences in my play.

For example, the actor who appears in the second part is the person who knows nothing about Thai theatre. He is a novice actor who is enthusiastic to perform the character that he knows nothing about. This contrasts with the following scene when he performs the character Phra Sang professionally, as if he knows everything about this character.

Similarly the actress who performs the princess in part five is princess Rochana until she decides to stop performing and go off stage. The person who goes off the stage, for me, is not princess Rochana but actually is the modern woman who could not force herself to accept the way traditional woman is anymore.

These differences can be seen in the last part when they all perform actors that just have finished performing the whole play. I asked the actors to have totally different characters from any characters which they have performed in the play, as I want this part to be totally separate from the rest.

When I wrote the script, the picture in my head was not that clear about how to end the *Hunting and Fishing* part. Also the decision about who would perform the father character and Phra Sang was still unclear in this scene. A non - Thai actor would be more suitable as I think two Thai actors performing together on stage would not create the sense of combined culture as I intended. Also as I had decided to use Thai dance for Phra Sang's movement in this scene, it became more suitable for a Thai actor to perform this character. However, as this scene connected with the scene when Phra Sang takes off the mask, it should be Kris who performs Phra Sang in the former scene still performing this role. Therefore, before the rehearsals, I had a problem about how this scene is going to be.

However, when we did the rehearsals, I experimented with the actors and found that actually the non-Thai actor could perform the father character and change to perform Phra Sang when he takes off his mask. When Rochana asks if appearance is all that matters, she not only implies it to her father but also to Phra Sang, who actually believes in the same thing.

When we did the rehearsal of this scene, I found that the character of the Thai actor does not have to go off stage after he has given the masks to another actor. I asked him to stand up stage in blue light together with the non-Thai actress who dresses in traditional dress. She has come on stage and then spoken the same dialogue as the Princess about karma. Not only has she presented the similarity between two female characters in Thai traditional theatre, but also the image of her dressed in Thai traditional costume standing behind the princess in modern dress presents the idea of the unchanged status of woman characters in Thai theatre, which makes the second actress decide to walk out.

Questionnaire

A discussion between the supervisor and myself about using a questionnaire has taken place since the beginning of this project. In my opinion, a questionnaire may help me know the response of the audience toward the play which later may be used for evaluating the performance. However, my supervisor did caution me about the difficulty of getting effective information from a questionnaire. At that point, I persisted with my intention, based on a belief that although it might not provide the complete essential information I require, nevertheless it may give me some worthwhile records. Based on his advice, three questions were asked of audiences who came to see the performance.

- What do you think this play is trying to tell you?
- Do you think this play was easy to understand?
- Can you identify specific values that were being questioned in this adaptation?

Seventeen people returned my questionnaire. Most of them were students. I recognized before the performance that my audience consisted of Thai and non-Thai people, some of whom were drama students.

The answers from the questionnaire do not give sufficient evaluation, as earlier mentioned by my supervisor. The audience tended to answer the questions in very short sentences without giving much in detailed explanation behind their responses. However, the answers from the first question draw my attention. Two different kinds of answer to the first question, what is this play trying to tell, can be noticed. Some of the answers mention only the message from the story; but there are others that talk about the issue of adaptation. This shows that my attempt to explore the

adaptation of traditional literature was detected by some members of the audience and, moreover, some of them considered it to be the main issue that this play was trying to present.

The first part of the performance appears to have impressed many people in the audience. The combination of ballet and traditional dance caught their attention and also gave the opening scene of the performance an interesting atmosphere. However, one of issues that raised up in the discussion with my supervisor after the presentation is about the way I use the video in this part of my performance. As I am insisting on the contemporary value of the live performance of traditional theatre, the role of the recorded, as non-live elements, is a question issue. As multimedia is increasingly being used in Thai modern theatre, I have to admit that I totally failed to notice this point. This comment evokes my awareness of the original nature of the Thai traditional theatre, which actually is one of its unique characteristics. This subject, therefore, is another interesting point for further exploration in my next project.

Sang Thong

Presented at Roborough Studio

on 30th January 2009.

PART ONE

- *Stage is empty with only black curtain on three sides.*
- *Thai traditional soft music starts when the audiences come in.*
- *Lights fade out, and then the music.*
- *Spotlight shines down on the middle of the stage. An actor stands there in the Thai traditional posture. Thai music cuts in, he begins a Thai dance. Then, the music suddenly changes to Western style and he changes to dancing ballet. However, there is no emotional expression on his face at all. (Light fades in to cover all the stage when he begins to do the Western dance.)*
- *Music changes to be contemporary, and then the video of Thai traditional performance is projected on the curtain behind him. He tries to dance in both traditional and contemporary ways. Light begins to fade out again until there is only a spotlight left on the middle of the stage. He stops dancing. Music is still very loud. Picture in video becomes dim and then disappear. There is silence and then light goes out.*

PART TWO

- *Light cut in. A woman dresses in Thai traditional costume sits on the floor. She begins to sing the story of Sang Thong in Thai traditional way.*

A man walks pass her to the middle of stage. When he passes, light around the actress fades out.

Actor Good evening...Lady and gentleman. Welcome to the performance tonight. It's gonna be very interesting for you as I am quite sure none of you may have any idea about Thai theatre at all! Nor do I, in fact.

Anyway, I am Sang...actually Phra Sang. Of course I am the hero of this story. Don't look at me like that. Yes...I gonna tell you about Thai story. Ok, I know I may not look that Thai...but so what? You won't expect to see me in the traditional dress anymore, right?

Ok...let's ignore that and begin the story. The story begins with...umm...

He brings up the book.

Actor Sorry that I have to open a book sometimes...you know...just want to be sure about what happens. It is a very very old story. Sometimes it's completely forgotten.

Begin with... a long, long time ago...in far, far away land. No, actually there is the name of city, *Paranasri*. The king doesn't have a son to inherit the throne, so he prays for the god for his queen to be pregnant. And then I was born ...(turns the page) in the conch shell?? Then my dad was convinced by the court astrologist that I would someday bring him disaster, so I was banished from the kingdom.

I don't have much of a happy childhood, do I?

Ok...I am not gonna read book to you.. I will perform for you of course!

He looks around.

Actor I think the stage is too empty. Bring the setting, please.

Actor 2 brings a bench and put in the middle just in front of back curtain.

Actor That's it? That's all the scenery? Where is the scene supposed to be ?

Actor 2 Anywhere

Actor What do you mean by “ anywhere”?

Actor2 It could be anywhere : throne hall, forest, market, hut....

Actor Ok...at least, there must be some props?

Actor2 Which props?..Oh..you mean your own conch shell?

Actor No..let's skip that part. Thank you then.

Actor 2 walks out of stage. Actor goes to sit on the bench.

Actor What happens next? (*Look at the book*) Umm...this one is not good..this one is too slow..this one...I think it is not that interesting...um...let skip that and that ..and also that..oh...there are ogres as well...but better skip to a more realistic part..

Actress You couldn't keep skipping like that?

Actor What? Why?

Actress Whole story is important. Now you get rid of everything...every beauty...

Actor Who are you?

Actress Who possibly can I be?? I am *Rochana*.

Actor The princess?

Actress Yes.

Actor Are you sure?

Actress What do you mean by that?

Actor I don't know...I just thought you supposed to look...different.

Actress Believe me..if you can be *Phra Sang*...I can be *Rochana* too.

Actor OK!

Actress We waste ten minutes already...Everyone is waiting!

Actor OK! Which part you want to perform?

Actress Like I said...all of that.

Actor You've got to be kidding.

Actress I am not.

Actor It needs three days to present whole story. I don't think everyone here
will have that much time.

Actress If you stop talking...I think we can finish in a day and a half

Actor Where are you going?

Actress Waiting for my scene outside.

Actor But who's gonna perform the ogre character then?

Actress I don't want to be an ogress.

Actor	No ogress, so I have to skip then...
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Actress Wait... (*Look at another actress who is sitting on the stage since the beginning*) She can perform it. Hi, would you like to perform this character for us?

Actress 2 I don't want to...(*pause*) well, yes.

Actress Good!

She walks out.

PART THREE

- *Lights of all the stage cross fade with light at the bench. Thai music fades in.*

Actor sits on the floor in front of actress 2.

- *The quotation from the original script is sung in traditional way from off-stage.*

Actress 2 performs traditional dance gesture along with the singing.

มาจะกล่าวบทไป

แต่ว่างเว้นเป็นมายาวหลายปี

ได้ลูกน้อยหอยสังข์มาเลี้ยงไว้ รักใคร่เป็นบุตรสุดจิต

พักฟูมอุ้มชูขมิ้น

(The poem is present in Thai with English version on the screen. It introduces the background of the main character.)

Actress 2 When the king's concubine learns that inside the conch shell lives a prince, Phra Sang, she decides to get rid of him. But because of his virtue, none of her schemes can harm him. Finally, she drowns him by tying him with a heavy stone around his neck.

The Sea-serpent King, my close friend, has found him at the bottom of the sea. As he cannot raise him up himself, he brings Phra Sang to me. I, a lonely ogre queen dowager, asked the courtesans if it would be good for me to raise him as my son. No one protests except the royal astrologist who warns me "He is human. For ogres and men to live together, it is unlikely, or even impossible. ". But I don't listen to him.

Now, fifteen years has passed. I watch him grow up to be a handsome lad. I was very happy to have him as my own loving son.

I have given an order to every ogre citizen to assume the body of a human being. So the Prince can't see that we are different from him. Only once a month that my people and I will go out into the forest for fresh meat... elephants, tigers and deer...

- *The top light on the actress 2 cuts out. Light on the whole stage cuts in.*

Actor You mean the meditation in the forest , as you have told me?

Actress 2 Yes, I do, and be nice boy...keep staying in the palace. I will be back soon.

Actor Why everyone can go with you...except me?

Actress 2 Because you have not yet grown up.

She walks out.

Actor Fifteen years already, I feel something is hidden and I must know.

She goes that way...to the forbidden room she never allows me to get in.

He stops and thinking for a second and then he follows her.

- *Light becomes darker. Thai music fades in.*

He enters the stage again.

Actor What's that?...the well of gold!

He stands on the bench and drops himself down, like he immerses himself in the water.

Actor (look at his body) Wow! And what's that? An ugly mask.

He hears some noises; he looks at outside of the stage.

- *Light fades in.*

Actor That must be Mother!

He walks to the light and then he becomes very frightened at what he is seeing.

- *Shadow of very big ogres can be seen on the stage*

Actor No!

He runs away to the front of the stage. Actress 2 comes on the stage.

- *Light changes into two circles. One is on Actor, the other is on Actress 2*

Actor (pray) Please, God of my real mother's virtue, do not let the ogress-queen follow me on this mountain.

Actress2 Phra Sang, dear... Why are you up there? Come down. Come down to me, your mother...

Actor You are not my mother... We are different. I can't be with you.

Actress Look at me...do you still see the difference?

Actor Yes.

Actress Please, fifteen years I have looked after you with all my love, don't you remember?

Actor Yes ...I do...but I have to find my real mother. I don't even know whether she is dead or alive. I will return soon.

Actress2 No, I know you won't come back. If you want to go and it will make you happy, I won't forbid it. But please come down..allow me to hug you for the last time.

Actor I am sorry...I can't trust you anymore. I am human. For ogres and men to love each other, it's impossible.

Actress2 What karma have I done to make you do this? My heart is broken. But before I die...I will give you the last thing...my magic spells. It will be useful for you some day.

Actress 2 writes down the spells on the floor. Then she drops dead of broken heart.

Phra Sang ran to her.

Actor Mother! I am sorry.

He looks at the spells she wrote. He picks up the ugly mask of a Ngo Pa and then he wears it.

- *Light fades out.*

PART FOUR

- *Light fades in.*

Actress sits on the bench.

Rochana Father, I don't want to get married. I want to be with you.

Actor 1 comes out in different costume, with a moustache, and holding a newspaper in his hand.

Father but you have to. All your six sisters already chose their husbands and you should do that too. Please Rochana, you are the youngest. You are very lovely and I love you the most...please just choose someone...either rich or good looking, either smart or aristocratic... I don't mind.

Rochana Why,father? Why? Do I need to get married?

Father Yes..you do. You are the princess..you need a prince....

Rochana Prince William, you mean?

Father Be realistic, dear. Here's catalogue of all single outstanding men.

Rochana It is a very weird catalogue. (*but she looks at it anyway*) But father, shouldn't we hold ceremony....invite all the princes and I can see and choose?

Father That is very, very old way. It wastes time and money. Time is money.

Rachana Don't you think this is too modern?

Father No. There is still no online catalogue.

Rochana Ok..*(look at the book)* No..I don't like anyone in here.

Father None of them? Ok...(brings new catalogue) this is the rich and smart people...businessman, aristocrat, politician..Thai politicians may be very interesting...they are politicians and also businessmen. They are both rich and powerful, perfect!

Rachana No.

Father Ok...How about singers or movie stars? They are very good looking and very popular. You will be so in trend!

Rochana No.

Father Rochana, only because I love you so much...just choose anyone then...just a normal one...any man in this room is fine.

She looks at audience.

Rochana Father, please...can I just stay with you?

Father No! You are not gay, aren't you?

Rochana If I am, can I stay with you?

Father No! Why we keep repeating the same dialogue?

While he is complaining it, Actor 2 in the ugly mask of a Ngo Pa comes in. Rochana looks at him. They stare at each other.

Father You have to listen to me. I know you are smart. You are working woman...but you have to get married. It is the thing we still have to do....

- *Light begins to fade in the father area. On the curtain, we see Thai traditional dance of this scene, presenting the scene when Rochana throws the garland to the Ngo Pa which means she chooses him as her husband.*

Rochana If from a previous life, we were soul mates, meant to be together, the garland I throw carelessly would be caught on his arm.

- *Light fade in the same time as father speaks.*

Father Rochana, did you listen to me?

Rochana I chose him.

Father What?

Rochana I chose him as my husband, father.

Father Him? Who is him?

Rochana I don't know.

Father You don't know? *(looks at actor)* Tell me who are you?

He looks at him. No answer

Father Great! Even he doesn't know who he is! Can't you speak?

He does not answer, instead, he dances

Father *(talk to Rochana)* Dear, I think I change my mind. Of course, you can stay with me. You don't have to get married.

Rochana No, father, I have to. You just told me, it is the thing we still have to do....

Father The idea is very old and out of date now...If you want to be single...just be single! Like...some smart modern woman....like...umm...umm... Carrie!

Rochana I think she already married with Mr. Big in the latest movie.

Father oh...ok...umm...like....ok, it must be someone. *(Try to ask audience)*
Do you know anyone?

Rochana Doesn't matter, I will marry him.

Father You can't marry him. Look, he is ugly, he is nobody, and he can't even speak!

Actor dances like he wants to tell him it is the way he speaks

Father Stop it! It is not funny. I do not allow you to marry this man.

Rochana But you said I can choose anyone I like. When I made my choice, why are you against it?

Father Do you realize your status? If you choose him, everybody will gossip until you die! You will make me feel so ashamed.

Rochana I am sorry. I already make up my mind. It is my karma that makes me chose.

Father Fine! You chose him. You cannot live here anymore. Get out of my house.

Rochana Father!

Father Live there in a hut outside the city! I wish you happy living with him!

Father walks out. Everything becomes silence.

Actors2 takes her to the bench. She looks around and feels unhappy. She looks at him but he says nothing.

- *Light at her fades out*

PART FIVE

- *Light fades in front of stage.*

Father stands there. He looks angry and unhappy.

Father I don't understand her at all?? That guy is nothing. I knew it the moment I saw him! I have to do something. I have to get rid of him...But how?

(As he comes up with an idea) Bring all my sons –in- law here.

Tomorrow each of you must bring back a hundred fish. I shall kill anyone who brings less than that.

Rochana Hundred fish? What you need them for?

Father I plan to give them as a gift to the gods.

Rochana Give them a cheque, who wants a fish!

Father I want it and it is my command! And we will see how you can do that
alone without anyone to help!

*Actor 2 walks towards the stage in same level as him. And then he dances presenting
the image that he is using his magic spell.*

Father How can he bring back with all these fish! And why none of you can find
any! You think you can win me? Now I want deer! Find them, as many
as you can! You may be good at fishing .But hunting...never ! How can
you be better than six of my sons-in-law, ...plus my soldiers.

Actor 2 dances again.

Father How can you do that? You must have magic spell? Something must be
wrong.

He looks at the book.

Rochana Phra Sang, why you don't take off your mask? Let him see your beautiful
gold body I see inside you.

He gestures with his hands to refuse her plea.

Rochana But don't you see? I have to live here forever. My father is angry with
me. Please.

Father No, everything is right. In the book...here..in Act seven...hunting and fishing ...oh..I know...I am wrong...I forget to reinterpret it! Of course, this way won't make any sense now.

Ok...What's hunting and fishing mean? What do they stand for? Hmmm..any idea? Ok...think it step by step. Fish, it maybe a symbol of something. Fish...slippery? Delicious? Low cholesterol? Is there any lifeline? Go back to the beginning again... fish and deer must present the same things. Any similarity between them? Yes, both are animals? Well, too simple. Both can be done as steak! Oh, how easier it will be if I have google.

The impossible task! Yes, it is the way I can get rid of him! When he can't do the task, I will have reason to get rid of him!

I just need to find the impossible task that no one can do.

- *On the curtain behind there is a video on the current political situation in Thailand.*

Father Haha...See if you can solve that!

Actor 2 dances again, the picture disappears.

Father How can you do that? With that magic spell again!? But that couldn't make me like you...Even though you have all that... Power, money or whatever...you are just a freak. You look ugly and that's the matter!

Actress Really?

Father What?

Actress The appearance. It's all that matter.

He takes off his moustache in same time we see in the dark that that Actor 1 takes off the mask.

Actor Yes..it's matter. I learn that through my whole life. It is the way people judge people, isn't it? Appearance...image....but it means nothing...

Actress What does mean something then?

Actor The charming prince inside...Something you see in me.

Actress Why you don't take the mask off for me then?

Actor Because it is my dignity. I have to prove that people are wrong.

Actress My father is angry with me. I have to be banished from the palace...live badly here ...just because you don't want to take off your ugly mask...to show that I am right.

Actor Come on... I think you are too serious. It's supposed to be the funny part. I look ugly. So your father doesn't like me, and we try to win each other, that are all fun.

Actress it's not fun for me.

Actor Why do you have to care? The story will have a happy ending anyway. You are a princess and I am a real prince...There is the way for us. Let me see. (Look in the book) See? God Indra...he will come to help you.

Actress It is not reasonable.

Actor I know, so we can reinterpret and find something more sensible. Who can replace God Indra?

Actress Fate...the only thing I can hope for? Can you just take off the ugly mask for me?

Actor No! People shouldn't judge person on their appearance and I have to prove it.

Actress What karma do I have to make you do this?

Actor Where are you going?

Actress I am off.

Actor But the story hasn't end yet. How people will know how it ends?

Actress Is it important to know? Do we need to know how the old story ends?

 You just know... it will be a happy ending. Just you know what the story thought you...what is the meaning...what's funny...what's the value...that is all matter, doesn't?

She walks out. Silence.

Actor The story ends with the God Indra comes to help Rochana by challenging the king with a polo match. If he loses the game, his kingdom will fall into the god's hand. After the defeat of his six sons – in- law lost, the king has no choice but to ask ugly *Jao Ngo* to help. Phra Sang takes off his ugly mask and wins the polo match. The king finally finds out he is the real prince. He feels so happy and invite him and his daughter back to

the palace. At the end of the story, Phra Sang finds his real parents.

Therefore, everyone lives happy every after.

Thank you very much. Hope you enjoy the performance this evening.

- *Light fades out.*

PART SIX

- *Light fade in again.*

Actors come on the stage.

Actress It is quite good performance, isn't it?

Actor I don't know....but I've learnt something. Next round, can I perform your character? I think that Thai dancing is very interesting.

Actor2 Sure. I would love to perform your character, too. I feel more used to.

Actor How about you two?

Two actresses look at each other.

Actress I think we are ok. Our characters are quite similar anyway.

Actress 2 Yeah...only one thing, I just wonder which one is better between me in traditional dress and her in the modern one.

Actor We can discuss about it while we are walking out then.

Actress Ok.

They walk out of the stage.

The end

CHAPTER SIX

Commentary on my second practical project, *Tao San Pom*

After the evaluation, I realised that my first practical project was a clear illustration of the various aspects of my research on Thai theatre. The characteristics of Thai traditional theatre were pointed out in various ways; some traditional elements were experimented with in order to find the appropriate way to place them within contemporary performance; inspiration from the previous adaptations of Thai contemporary artists could also be seen in this piece; and finally, the intention to explore ways of adapting the traditional literature was clearly stated throughout the play. Hence, this work, in my opinion, serves the function of introducing both Thai theatre and my sense of the problems and possibilities in adapting Thai traditional plays. Therefore, in my second project, I aimed to investigate further into creating my own principle of adaptation. I have tried to elaborate my own approach to creating an original Thai play script that is inspired by a traditional play. I intend to make this script more complete than the first one: the new script will not merely tell the traditional story, but will use sources from traditional literature in order to create its own contemporary plot, which I believe will suit the taste of Thai modern audiences.

Consequently, this practical project aims to answer these following research questions.

1. How can I use traditional literature as a source to create a contemporary play that could present the characteristics of Thai traditional literary works?
2. How can I use sources from traditional plot and characters in order to create a contemporary script that can communicate with Thai modern audiences?

3. How can I place in a contemporary play traditional elements that retain their own characteristics but simultaneously are understandable in a contemporary context?
4. How could my new play present the values of traditional theatre and make modern audiences aware of and interested in traditional plays, in other words, in their own theatre roots?

This second project started in April and the performance was presented on 24 June 2010. The script was developed, including in the rehearsals. Many ideas were explored and suggested by the six actors who participated in this project. This commentary aims to explain the process of creating this adaptation of a Thai traditional play and how well this project, at the end, was able to respond to my research questions.

The story

Selecting a traditional play appropriate for the purpose of this project was the first challenging step in this exploration. In my first project, *Sang Thong* was chosen for its recognition and familiarity among Thai people. Even though these qualities are still essential for this project, I aimed to find a traditional literary work that also has other unique characteristics different from those that I used in my earlier project in order to give me an opportunity to explore the diverse ways to adapt a traditional story. After examining many Thai literary works, I decided to use *Tao San Pom*.

Tao San Pom

King Rama VI wrote this play in 1913 in the form of a traditional theatrical poem. The king adopted the story from a Thai folktale, based on the legend of the pre-Kamphaeng Phet kingdom in the twelfth century. The play tells the story of a prince

who disguises himself as an ugly gardener in order to find a way to see a princess. Only the princess recognizes his real status; other people look down on and insult him for his ugliness. However, at the end, he reveals that as the prince who has everything he deserves the princess. The play was performed in both forms of *Lakhon Ram* (dance-drama) and *Lakhon Rong* (Thai operetta). It was also adapted to be staged in the *Lakhon Dukdambaan* style in the later period.

There are three qualifications that make this play suit the purposes of this project. First, this play presents the characteristics of traditional literature: the hero has to be a prince, the heroine needs to be a princess, the story has a happy ending, and the plot about the hero disguising himself is familiar to the Thai people. Second, the theme of judging people on their appearance is found in Thai society; additionally, in my opinion, it is an important to state this issue due to the increasing influence of materialism among the Thai people. Finally, the original play was written in a period of time later than that in which that *Sang Thong* was composed. When King Rama VI adopted the plot from the folktale, it could be seen that that the story of miracle or any super-natural power were given in less extent than the original version. In comparison with *Sang Thong*, this play is shorter in length, which results in a less complex story and a smaller number of characters. Even though, the play is not as widely well-known as *Sang Thong*, the name of *Tao San Pom* is recognizable to Thai people. So the different characteristics of these two traditional plays gave me an opportunity to explore diverse approaches to adaptation in this research project. I believed that in using this play as the basis for my new script would confirm my belief that the traditional play could be a valuable source for the creation of an original Thai contemporary script.

Deconstruction of the original plot

In attempting to create my own principles for adapting Thai traditional literary works, I investigated the structure of the traditional plot and unique characteristics of the main characters and aimed to adapt and place these in my new version. The traditional elements were selected and used in order to raise modern audiences' awareness of the contemporary value of Thai traditional theatre.

As mentioned earlier, one of my aims is to create a contemporary script that maintains the generic characteristics of the traditional Thai play, as I believe it would help the new play to be comprehensible to Thai audience. For that reason, I began my project with the question: what should be kept and used as a core to create a new adaptation of *Tao San Pom*?

Tao San Pom is the name of the prince, Phra Chinnasan, when he disguises himself as an ugly man. Unsurprisingly, the point that the prince disguises himself appears to be the most recognized part of this play for Thai people. Therefore, I decided to use this point as the basis to develop my script.

At the beginning, I thoroughly committed to the idea of modernizing. I struggled with the attempt to reinterpret the plot, situations and characters in the contemporary context. However, not only did I find that it was difficult to invent a modern situation that perfectly replaced the old plot; the problem was that modernizing the whole story made the new plot just a modern play that lost any connection with the original, which was totally against my primary intention. So I changed my direction, returned to the beginning and focused on the reason that the prince chose to disguise himself. His desire not to be judged as a prince is the reason why he does not reveal himself to other people except the princess. Only at the end of the story, when he is

insulted by the king, his father-in-law, does he reveal his high status in order to prove that he has everything that deserves the princess. I clarified my new plot based on this storyline: the hero disguises himself because he does not want others to know his real identity, and only reveals it when it is necessary to use his real status in order to get what he wants. Another point that concerned me at this step was how I could refer to the traditional story within this new version, in other words, to tell a new play and at the same time as retell an old one.

I kept reminding myself through the process of developing the script that it should not be necessary for my audience to have any previous knowledge of the traditional play, *Tao San Pom*. However, by the end, I expect them to gain an acquaintance with this traditional literary work through the medium of my adaptation.

When conducting the research, one thing that came into my mind was the audience. In both projects, my audience consisted of two groups of Thai and non-Thai people. Even though I believed that both of them had very little background in Thai theatre, I realized after the first project that, being familiar with the original story, the Thai audience were able to catch up with the story more easily than the non-Thai audience who had never heard of the story before. The different responses in the questionnaires possibly came from this matter. When the audience were asked about the theme of the play, the Thai audience tended to stick with the original theme they already knew, while the non-Thai audience may focus more on what the 'adapted' play was trying to say. These different responses show that the differences in cultural context could affect the way audience understanding the play. Coming from the different culture, the non-Thai audience may not understand the meaning of the original play as well as the Thai audience who share the same cultural context with the original story. Therefore, it makes me realize that just retelling the traditional story in my adaptation

may not be enough for audience here to completely understand the play. It is also necessary to remind myself that a traditional story is retold to audience which is not only unfamiliar with the original story, but also with the different cultural background. As Vandal-Sirois and Bastin suggest “Since adaptations are motivated by keeping the source text applicable to the target culture, and ensuring the efficacy of a text for a specific group of readers, the translator should consider the purpose of the text that will be introduced in different culture, the reason why the translation is requested, and the target readers of the translation” (2012:25), exploring the way to retell the story in the different cultural background will be one of the challenging aims for my second project.

These conditions were set as the task for me to solve and the guideline for me to create a new play. The story of a group of people trying to represent an old tale came to my mind. It is an effective way to retell the traditional story in a new form. The character of the hero is the main part I intend to preserve from the original plot. In my thinking, he has to be special in a way that could present his original ‘princely’ character. The story of disguising is also kept in my new version as I believe it presents the unique characteristics of a Thai tale.

My new script is divided into 3 parts, and each part serves a different function in this project. The first and the second part were roughly finished when the project started, while the last part was changed and developed together with the rehearsals: I shall thoroughly discuss this issue later in the process of script development. There are eight characters in this play: six main characters and two minor roles. These characters include a director, two Thai and two non-Thai actors and two stage managers. In this following section, I will begin with the explanation of the main characters, following by the casts and how the casts helped me develop the script throughout the rehearsals.

Characters

Who is Tao San Pom in my version?

This character appears in my play as the direct link to the original *Tao San Pom*, It could be said that this character is the core that I used to adapt this traditional play. In order to reinterpret this traditional character, I focused on three main aspects of him: his real identity as Prince (Phra) Chinasan, his character as Tao San Pom and his story of disguise.

Being ‘a prince’ in the contemporary sense could be presented in various definitions. For my play, I illustrated this characteristic by giving this character a particular talent that makes him stand out from the other characters. However, for particular motives, he has to hide his real identity and pretend to be someone inferior. He reveals the truth when he needs it as a proof that he deserves something.

In my play, when the director tries to rehearse the adaptation of the traditional play, *Tao San Pom*, this character shows up. Compared to the other actors, he appears as a new performer who seems to know nothing about how to rehearse a performance: “What am I supposed to do?” is his first question after the rehearsal starts.

In the original, Tao San Pom is an ugly gardener. I represented the ugliness of the original character in my adaptation by making him an odd character in the other characters’ opinion. This actor turns up at the rehearsal to perform the hero character; for the other actors, he is a nameless and amateur actor who seemingly has little knowledge about how to rehearse. Initially, he pretends to know nothing about the story. While other actors try to discuss or begin to argue about any points in the play, he tends to be quiet and barely give his opinion. Only at the end of an argument, when no

solution seems to be happening, he has no choice but gives his suggestion. This is intended to be a clue to his talent before he later reveals his real personality.

I portray how Prince (Phra) Chinasan disguises himself as an ugly gardener with the way that my hero pretends that he is a normal actor and comes to perform his character, in other words, himself in the adaptation of his own story. Whereas Phra Chinasan reveals that he is the prince in order to get the princess, the hero of my play reveals his real identity when he needs to prove to others how well he knows this story.

According to my first project, the way I used the characters to represent the different identities was continuously explored in this performance. In her analysis of Shakespeare's plays in China's Theatre, Wong states that "to translate from one language to another inevitably means to exchange one worldview for another" (2012:108). Characters became the important elements to present this similar idea in my exploration of adaptation. For the six main characters, I initially intended to divide them equally into two groups: Thai and Non-Thai characters. This aimed to illustrate my opinion toward a suitably balanced image of Western influence and the original 'Thainess' of Thai theatre.

Apart from the hero, the other two Thai actors depict other characteristics of the traditional Thai theatre. Their abilities to dance and sing in this new play represent the importance of these two elements in traditional theatre. The Thai actress is also used to express the attitude toward female characters in Thai literature. Besides, her comic personality imitates the Thai sense of humour that regularly appears in traditional theatre and receives enormous popularity and appreciation from Thai audiences. The comic personality of this character and the nature of humour that were demonstrated in this adaptation were created based on the analysis of Thai comic performance by

Wankwan Polachan which includes “the use of inferiority in the creation of comic characteristics and personality” (2002:10).

Non-Thai characters present an opposed attitude toward Thai theatre. These characters are the director and two actresses. In the play, the director is the leading person who starts the idea of adapting a Thai traditional play. His goodwill and determined effort to re-present the traditional play on the modern stage could be seen from his enthusiasm for and appreciation of Thai traditional theatre. However, his lack of knowledge of Thai theatre limits his ability to adapt the play effectively, which finally leads to the loss of his control of the group.

The two non-Thai actresses perform different roles in the play. While Non-Thai Actress 1 presents herself as a modern woman who opposes the traditional belief in the inferior status of female characters, Non-Thai Actress 2 seemingly understands this convention and tries to find a balance between modern and traditional values.

When I first created these characters, there were only rough images of them in my mind. After I started looking for the actors who could help me with this project, I found that the cast members that I finally found was not only suited to the roles but also helped to complete the interpretation of these characters.

Casts

Even at the initial stage, it was my early intention to have an international cast in this performance, and I was lucky enough to find a cast of actors possessing characteristics of benefit to the representation of each respective character in my play. For Grisana Punpeng who performs the Tao San Pom character, the facts that he is a mixed-raise Thai Japanese actor and has studied abroad since undergraduate level make

his appearance and personality slightly different from Thai people. This, in my opinion, can be exploited to distinguish the character of Tao San Pom from other actors. Peera Phunlukthao who performs the Thai actor is very a talented dancer who has professionally trained in ballet and contemporary dance. This aspect of him reflects the appreciation of Western culture by Thai people. Moreover, having a chance to collaborate work with him developing the dancing part of the play is an impressive experience for me. The character of Thai actress is performed by Sukanya Sompiboon. Apart from her great ability as a singer, her deep knowledge of Thai traditional theatre helped me a great deal in this project. Her joyful personality and her good skill in Thai dance perfectly suit the character she performs. The director was performed by a first-year drama student, Henry Boyd whose enthusiasm for performing and his interest in Thai theatre are obvious in his personality. From my perspective, he demonstrates the appreciation of the West toward the Eastern culture. Maria Papadakis, as Non-Thai Actress 1, emphasises the characteristic of this character from her personality of a confident modern woman. Ying Ni Ma, a Taiwanese actress performs Non-Thai Actress 2. Regarding the fact that she is neither Thai nor Western, but is still an Eastern woman, it is possible for her to understand both Western and Eastern culture.

I exploited the advantage of this international casts as a tool to create the implicit meaning to my adaptation. Moreover, their individual skills such as dancing, singing and acting also provide me the more opportunities to develop ideas for my script as well as its presentation on stage. Moreover, having a chance to collaborate work with the international casts give me an insight of the different perspectives that I could not find when I write the script on my own

The final version of my play script is divided into three parts. While the storyline of the first and the second part is about a group of people trying to rehearse the

play, despite the fact that the cast members for all parts are the same, the last part appears to be unrelated to the former parts. This last part was written after we started rehearsing the first two parts of the script. The inspiration for this part occurred after I had a discussion about the first two parts of the script with my supervisor; his comments and suggestions inspired me with an idea which was later developed with an exploration between the cast members and me.

The first part- when the story of an adaptation begins

In the first part, I attempt to present to the audiences the original story of *Tao San Pom* and the perception of my adaptation. Within this part, the audiences are introduced to the Thai story, Thai theatre and the opinions toward the ways of adaptation of traditional story through my new plot and actions of the characters, which I will be discussing in more detail through this section.

When the audiences enter, what they see on the stage is a table and an empty chair with the top light on them. On the table, couple of books are laid beside a computer keyboard. The director comes on stage with a book about Thai theatre on his hand, he is concentrating. He sits on the chair and then begins to type. I did this to give an impression to the audiences of the concept of this play as an adaptation and also to illustrate the image of myself as a contemporary playwright who has tried to create a new play through the research of the traditional theatre. The various actions of the director trying to write and erase and rewrite the script depict the attempt to adapt the traditional play which is the crucial purpose of this practical project. Despite the fact that he seems to be serious for what he tries to do, the obstruction he experiences in his writing, at the same time, shows a sense of humour to the audiences.

The others actors begin to enter the stage. Seeing the director is focusing on his work, they start to warm up quietly without trying to disturbing him. Tao San Pom is the last one who comes on the stage. From the beginning, some clues to his mystery character could be seen from the dialogue; for example, in the way he answers Non-Thai Actress 1 when she thought he is a new actor:

Non- Thai actress 1 You must be the new one? I’ve never seen you before.

Tao San Pom Actually no, but I am not surprised that you do not recognise me....

(Tao San Pom, part 1)

Also when he introduces himself to the director, his reply could be a sign for the audiences to notice his real identity.

Director It is an honour to have you here.

Tao San Pom Thank you for letting me have a part in it.

Director A part in it? You are the heart of this performance!

(Tao San Pom, part 1)

Then the rehearsal begins when the script is given to the actors. Tao San Pom’s original story is told through the script that was written by the director. The audiences learn the original story through a new script that the cast tries to rehearse, along with seeing some attitudes toward the idea of adapting a traditional play. Each actor expresses the different opinions about this new script; each character represents the different attitude toward the traditional literature from different perspective in Thai

society. From her contemporary perspective, the non-Thai Actress 1 seems to have a strong opinion about the issue of adapting a conventional story.

Non-Thai actress 1 May I ask you something? So why do we have to do it?

Director What?

Non-Thai actress 2 She asks why we have to use this old story?

Non-Thai actress 1 Isn't it easier if you just write a new play?

Director This is a new play.

Non-Thai actress 1 This is a very, very, old story. The prince, the princess, the disguise...just another typical fairy tale.

(Tao San Pom, part 1)

The above dialogue also shows the opposed attitude of the director toward an adaptation of a traditional play. Apparently, he may not know how to adapt it but his interest and enthusiasm in finding the way to adapt this play could be seen throughout the performance. This character, therefore, depicts the attempt of Thai artists, including myself, to adapt the traditional story and obstacles that we may face during the exploration. A story that was written one hundred years ago, he said, is difficult to adapt when there are also rules and customs of traditional Thai theatre that have to be considered. However, even with these barriers, I believe that the traditional play is worth being investigated and this attitude is implicitly stated in the response of the director to the Non-Thai actress 1;

Director Hey, you have just look through it, you never read it.

(Tao San Pom, part 1)

At this point when the argument appears to have no solution, Tao San Pom steps up and gives his suggestion. As a representative of traditional theatre, I intend this character to express the inferior status of the traditional drama, the kind of theatre that tends to be forgotten and uninteresting in the contemporary society.

Tao san pom We can make it new.

Non Thai actress 1 What?

Tao san pom I said we can make it new. This script may be not that...interesting...maybe because we have to accept that there is no prince and princess, or because a fairy tale may be not that rational or believable anymore.

Thai actress But something in this story might still make sense.

Tao san pom Yes.

Non-Thai actress 2 And more than that it may create a good play.

(Tao San Pom, part 1)

Because of his encouragement, the group begins to discuss about a possibility to adapt this old story. From here, the play starts to introduce the important elements of Thai theatre to the audiences. Dance and the traditional way of singing are mentioned here as the essential parts of Thai traditional theatre. Each character says his/her opinions, based on their characteristics, the thing that should be done in this adaptation: modern perspective from Non-Thai actress 1, the director's enthusiasm of doing an adaption and his opinion about contemporary material that should be added and finally, the blending of west and east, new and old that should be encountered

represented by the way the cast says they need to have non-Thai actress 2 in this performance.

“Now we’re ready for the new play!” said by the director at the end this part represents the beginning journey of this exploration of an adaptation of the traditional play. When the others go off the stage to discuss the script, Tao San Pom is left alone on the stage. He looks at the script and smiles to give a sense of a hope for traditional theatre that, finally, a change is going to happen.

The second part – the stage of struggle

After being introduced to the original story and give the idea of a traditional adaptation in the first part, in this later part the audiences experience together with the cast the problematic of adaptation. I develop the plot to the point that the hero will reveal his true status. I exploit the problems about adapting a traditional play to create conflicts that this group has to face when they try to transform this old story into the modern stage.

In this part, the important elements from Thai traditional theatre are more emphasised. The difficulty in finding the proper way to adapt the traditional play is explicated through the disagreement between the cast members, in other words the different perspectives that each character represents. The appropriate balance between preserving and changing traditional elements in order to be adapted into a contemporary play is a critical issue that is represented by the character of the director. For Thai traditional theatre, changes are hard to be happen according to the rules and customs, beauty is believed to come from the exactly retention of the original. While

contemporary theatre seems to need changes and modernizing, a contradictory concept could be a great barrier for the adaptation of a traditional play. The director, who tends to be unable to make a decision between the changes that are 'necessary' and the preservation of the conventional form, is struggling to find a solution. At this point, I do not intend to give the perfect solution myself; instead, I try to point out the problem of this complicated way of thinking. Other actors signify the various attitudes towards traditional adaptation. Non-Thai actress 1, in this part, still keeps her strong opposition to traditional literary work, especially in relation to the status of women. This is expressed through the way she refuses to perform the princess role in the traditional way. Her perception expresses the feminism idea in Thai modern theatre where woman's inferior status in traditional literature becomes a significant issue that has been discussed in most adaptations.

Thai traditional theatrical elements are presented through the character of the Thai actress. This second part of the play opens with the image of this character in the Thai traditional costume sitting on the floor in the traditional gesture and singing the original play in the traditional style. Her singing describe the character of the hero, at the same time that the character of Tao San Pom comes out and sits on a bench that is laid at the middle of the stage. I apply this scene from the way of performing in the traditional theatre where the scene begins with description, singing by the chorus, of the main character who enters the stage with dancing. To describe the character's identity and appearance is counted to be an important scene in traditional theatre which allows an actor to show his/ her delicate dancing ability. I utilize this as the opening of the second part of my play in order to show this important traditional characteristic of Thai theatre.

The rehearsal stops again when the Thai actor comes onto the stage and begins to dance ballet instead of Thai dance. When it finally turned out that he could not do Thai dance, the importance of dance in Thai theatre is emphasised again by the way that the director insists that a Thai dance could not be missed in this performance.

Director **How can we do a play without a Thai dance?**

Non-Thai actress 2 **Is that important?**

Director **Yes, it is.**

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

Even though I use the character of Thai actor to present the dancing element in Thai traditional theatre, here this character is also used to indicate a value judgment in current Thai society. The way he could do various kinds of dance except his own cultural one portrays an appreciation of Western culture by Thai people and the fact that the national roots increasingly tend to be overlooked.

The rehearsal seems to be stuck when Non-Thai actress 1 comments that there is ‘too much traditional’ in the current way they are performing. The matter of traditional elements that need to be changed, therefore, is raised up to be discussed again at this point.

Director **Ummm...ok..let’s do it this way, we throw away everything.**
You don’t have to be a prince, no Thai singing

Thai actress **No!!!**

Director **We will make this play a modern one. Yeahhh.. so you can do the ballet. It will not be awkward anymore!**

Tao San Pom	But how can I be modern?
Director	Good question...we can discuss about that. First, you are not the prince.
Tao San Pom	So who am I?
Director	You can be a rich celebrity, a rich businessman, an heir of rich people ...someone who was born with everything, upper class in society...
Thai actress	Politician?
Director	Yes!

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

To modernise the traditional play may be an option for adapting the traditional play. The way of reinterpreting the conventional characters in a contemporary context has been seen in several adaptation works in order to make these characters believable and relevant to modern audience. Here, I do not only try to present this optional way of modernization but also to satirize the superior status of politicians in Thai society.

The character of the traditional heroine becomes the next issue in their argument. The pattern of the ideal princess in Thai literature could be still considered as the model of good woman in Thai society. However, with the changes in women's status, this belief currently begins to be questioned. The argument here between Non-Thai actress 1 and others about how to present the traditional princess in this new

version ends with the appearance of both old and new aspects of this character on the contemporary stage.

Non- Thai actress 2 reflects my view toward the traditional value judgment of model of Thai woman that still exists in current Thai society. According to Manomaiphibul, Thai women have faced difficulty in defining their identity and status in society. “While those traditional norms are regarded as outdated and women are told that it is no longer like that, it is confusing that Thai women are still expected to follow those norm” (2006:63). I choose to present both characters in my version as the reflection of this contradiction of woman identity in current Thai society.

The speciality of Tao San Pom character is hinted here as well as earlier when he happens to be the one who always solve the problems that happen. He tells the director that he could dance when the director found that the Thai actor could not and he needs dance in this piece. When the attempt to adapt this play seems to lose direction again, Tao San Pom has no choice but steps up to give his suggestion.

Tao San Pom Come on guys, I come here because I really wanna know how you’re gonna make this play work on this stage. Ok, we can start with my character then.

He walks into the middle of the stage.

Tao San Pom Ok, I am a son of the prime minister, I have studied abroad and I will be the next talented politician who has potential to be the next prime minister in the near future. So I need to

**find a woman who is qualified in order to support my career
in the future.**

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

Then the rehearsal could continue. He retells the traditional story in the contemporary context. He mentions her as the daughter of ‘somebody’ in order to avoid the argument with her.

Non-Thai actress 2 sits in the traditional gesture on the bench besides the non-Thai actress 1 in the graceful contemporary dress. The characters are back to the rehearsal of a new play. Both characters talk to Tao Sam Pom with no concern for the other ‘princess’ character’s existence. The different answers and responses to the same question present the contrasting aspects of these two female characters. While Non-Thai actor 1 appears to have a modern woman’s personality, non-Thai actress 2 portrays the character of the traditional princess. The way she keeps saying “you are the prince” and “I am the princess” shows the strict pattern of hero and heroine in traditional literature, where the status of ‘prince’ and ‘princess’ is obligatory. The comparison of these two characters, therefore, aims to present the different perspective of the character of a heroine in a changed Thai theatre.

The rehearsal is interrupted when the sound of music cuts in. Two Thai actors enter the stage and begin to sing a karaoke of the famous song whose lyric comes from the most- well-known poem of this traditional play. The awkward atmosphere could be felt from reaction of other cast members.

When the song ends, the rehearsal seems to be back on track. Thai-actor takes off some props from his costume and adjusts his cloth into Thai traditional style. He, at this moment, performs the role of the princess's father.

Instead of saying, he uses traditional dance to deliberate what he is speaking. This is another point at which I applied traditional way of performing in my adaptation. The Thai actress translates the meaning of his dance gestures; she, now, performs the character of a king's attendant.

The contradiction in the nature of the 'heroine' is being pointed out here where the non-Thai actress 1, as the princess, asks another princess to confirm to the king the 'hero's' true high identity'. Another princess, performed by non-Thai actress 2, chooses to be quiet instead of declaring that he is the prince like she keeps saying earlier. This entirely surprises the 'modern' princess and causes an argument between them.

At the same time, another argument starts between the Thai actor and Tao San Pom when the Thai actor begins to do a contemporary dance that none of Thai style is left.

Tao San Pom stops him.

Tao San Pom *(Talk to Thai actor)* **What are you doing?**

Non-Thai actress 1 *(Talk to Non-Thai actress 2)* **Seriously, you won't say anything? You will just wait here and let everyone misunderstanding? Say something!**

Non-Thai actress 2 looks at her.

Tao San Pom What you just did is so not Thai.

Non-Thai actress 2 (*answer Non-Thai actress 1*) This is Thai.

Tao San Pom You lose all the beauty.

Non-Thai actress 2 I try to keep the beauty.

Non-Thai actress 1 Great! I hope god comes to help you this time!

Thai actor This is what I can do. If you don't like it, do it yourself.

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

In the part of the script that is quoted above, what I attempt to do is to evoke the consideration of Thainess that should appear in a contemporary adaption through the way the princess remains her traditional characteristic and the Thai actor changes the whole dance to contemporary style. While she is reproached by another princess for insisting on keeping the traditional quality, which she claims is to preserve Thai beauty, the Thai actor who chooses to modify the whole dance to be contemporary is also blamed for losing all the beauty. These two actions are happening at the same time on stage to present the questions on the status of traditional theatre in the contemporary society.

I intend to cut across this serious moment on stage with a humorous action. Momentarily, the Thai actress and two stage managers run into the stage. The song 'And then the story go' cut in, she begins to sing and dance along with other two stage managers. The rehearsal is stopped for another time as Tao Sam Pom could not bear to let all these mess to be continued.

When Tao San Pom can no longer tolerate the confused direction in which the rehearsal is going, he stops it. For the first time, this character seems to be unable to control himself. The interpretation of original Tao San Pom character is explicated through the explanation that this character tries to clarify the objective of Tao San Pom character in the original play to other actors.

The situation forces this character to reveal his true identity as Tao San Pom in order to prove that he knows this play better than anyone. This storyline, therefore, interrelates to the original plot of Tao San Pom when the prince reveals his real status when he is looked down by the king. In order to prove that he has everything to deserve the princess, he reveals that he is a prince; by revealing that he is the real Tao San Pom character, he can prove that he is the one who knows this story the most.

He clarifies his purpose in joining this rehearsal as he wanted to see how his story would be reintroduced on the contemporary stage. Just as happens in the original, Tao San Pom hides his real identity and disguises himself as someone in an inferior position, in order to not allow his true status to have an effect on what he sees or faces.

The second part of my play ends with their decision to continue the rehearsal. Without mentioning what they will do, the director is left with the obscure idea of what will happen. While the actors are discussing and leave the stage, the director, without knowing anything, gives a cue to the light controller to fade the lights out. Then he goes off the stage and sits on a chair among the audiences and that is the end of this part.

Before I continue to explain the following part of my adaptation, I shall go back to some important issues that should be emphasised and examined in these two parts. As mentioned earlier, the last part of the play appears to be separate and have a

rather different nature and function in the whole piece. In order to avoid confusion, I shall explain some points in these first two parts that might have a different interpretation or representation from the last part.

- ***Thai traditional elements – the adaptation practice of preserving and reintroducing the traditional elements in a contemporary script.***

According to my research questions, experimenting in ways of applying the traditional elements in a contemporary script is one of the aims of this practical project. In order to evoke the Thai modern audience's interest in traditional theatre, not only do I try to adapt a traditional plot, but I also attempt within my adaptation to make use of significant traditional theatrical elements. Besides my intention to inform the modern audiences about Thai traditional theatre, I aim to present these elements in a contemporary performance so as to show their beauty and to experiment to make them suit a contemporary context, and so be understandable for modern audiences who may not be familiar with Thai traditional performance.

In order to do that, throughout the play characteristics of Thai traditional theatre are included in both direct and indirect ways. When the actors begin rehearsing, a bench that they put in the middle of the stage represents a common concept of scene in traditional theatre, where the scenery is described by the chorus instead of having a set and props; only a bench is on stage. The change of scene, therefore, is based on the description that is sung by the chorus in each scene, not by changing props or settings. In the first part of my script, the way the director mentions the bench as several different places when they start rehearsing his first draft script demonstrates this traditional

concept of setting the scene. This point appears more explicitly in the second part where Tao San Pom insists that no lighting or further setting is necessary here.

Director **I am just the director. I look after other stuff like...lighting.**

Tao San Pom **You know we don't need lighting.**

Director **Or scenery. (*Looks at the bench*) We may need more decoration for the bench.**

Tao Sam Pom **We are fine with just the bench!**

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

As significant characteristics of original Thai theatre, traditional dance and singing are explored in their various possible functions in my adaptation. The Thai actress clearly states the importance of these two elements in both the first and the second part. The short scene of performing the traditional way of singing is also shown at the beginning of the second part of my play.

When the traditional dance is explored in my piece, not only am I concerned to find the suitable place to put it in my adaptation, but also the detail in the feature of dancing becomes another important experiment in this project.

The exploration of the function of dance in a contemporary play

Most Thai traditional theatre, as other Asian theatres, appears as dance-theatre. Dance is used as the way for actors to perform their characters. Each dance gesture presents meaning that is described in the text that is sung along with that dance.

Each character also has individual dance patterns and movements. The beautiful and elegant dance is considered one of the significant charms of Thai traditional theatre, especially in the past, when it was the important attraction for people to come to see the play. The high standard of Thai traditional dance has been maintained until the present. However, instead of attracting audiences, it turns out to be the feature that keeps modern audiences away. Requiring a deep knowledge in order to be able to understand the gestures of movement, traditional dance appears to be far too difficult for the audience to understand and appreciate in its beauty, which leads to decreasing interest in traditional performance.

In this project, therefore, I attempt to explore the way to present this important element of Thai traditional theatre in a contemporary play and make it understandable even for audiences who may not be familiar with Thai traditional theatre.

Unlike other artists who may try to simplify the dance, I believe that to preserve the high standard of dance and find a suitable way to put traditional dance in a contemporary play would be a better solution. During the rehearsals, I attempted to exploit presenting traditional dance in my piece, which finally appears in three different places with diverse functions in the play.

The first time that I used traditional dance in my play is in the second part, when the Thai actor performs the role of the king in their rehearsal. His dance presents his dialogue that he speaks to the princess. In order to make audience understand what he says, these dance gestures are translated by the Thai actress who performs the king's attendant.

Thai actor dances in the Thai mask style and looks strong and serious.

Non-Thai actress 2 Father!

Thai actor dances and the Thai actress translate the meaning of his dance.

Thai actress The king wants to know who is the father of your baby.

The princess doesn't answer.

Thai actress I really don't know who is the princess's husband.

He dances to show that he is so angry and then he prays to the god.

**Thai actress The king commands that the ceremony will be held for the
crown prince. The man from whom he chooses the sweet is
the father.**

*Tao San Pom stands up. He wears his old costume. The action presents that the
prince chose a sweet from him. Thai actor dances again, showing his anger.*

Thai actress This one? This man? He is ugly. He is nobody.

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

In this way, I intend that audiences should link his dance gestures to the meaning of them. The translation of these dance gestures into the dialogue represents the way these dances are reinterpreted in the traditional theatre. Each movement has its own meaning and performs the same role as dialogue.

In the middle of the second part, Tao San Pom does a short traditional dance. The traditional dance presented in this sequence is used as the tool to connect the scene when the discussion among actors is ended and the rehearsal is started again. The

actor begins to perform Tao San Pom character and retells the traditional story with a new interpretation.

The last sequence of dance was added after I had a chance to run through the whole play. I had a feeling that a long sequence of dance had been missing in my piece, which suggested a lack of importance attached to this element. Therefore, at the end of the second part, I decided to use the dance to underline the characteristics of traditional theatre. Tao San Pom stands at the middle of the stage with only the top light on him. He dresses in the traditional style trousers. He stands in the traditional pose. The song fades in and the Thai actor dances into the stage and move around him. After doing the modern dance, he then stops in the same pose as Tao San Pom. Tao San Pom begins his Thai traditional dance while the Thai actor waits until the last move before he begins to dance with Tao San Pom. Then Tao San Pom stops, while the Thai actor continues his dance in the contemporary style with the inspiration of the traditional dance still seen. Starting with the clear separation between the modern dance and the traditional one, the combination and hybrid nature could be noticed in the pattern of his dance. When the Thai actor finishes his dance and goes off the stage, Tao San Pom is left alone on the stage. In the silence, he begins to do his last traditional dance and then the light cuts out. Not only is this sequence an opportunity to show the beauty of the traditional dance, it also aims to illustrate the status and characteristics of traditional theatre. Despite the impact of the modern culture, the traditional theatre still keeps its own original pattern. The modern theatre, instead, is influenced by the traditional theatre and my adaptation is similarly affected. The last strong traditional dance at the end emphasises the image of a serious custom of traditional theatre in which faithfulness to the original the originality is considered to be the first priority in its performance.

Female characters in Thai theatre – the reflection of female status in Thai society

Female character is always one of the main aspects that most of the adaptations of Thai traditional literature discuss. The change in status of women in society has a direct impact on this issue. In my version, this topic is demonstrated throughout the play when the argument about the interpretation of a princess character is raised by Non-Thai actress 1. The accent on it becomes more precise when two aspects of the princess, illustrated by two non-Thai actresses, are presented on the stage at the same time in the rehearsal, in the second scene. This comparison not only aims to present the different reinterpretations of this heroine but is also intended to reflect the status of Thai women in society. Beneath the appreciation for the modern aspect of women in Thai society, it cannot be denied that admiration of the traditional norm of a good woman still has importance among Thai people. In the past, women are taught to be quiet and obey her husband. This attitude reflects in the characteristics of traditional female characters in which some of these characters are admired to be model role of a good Thai woman. I illuminate this idea through the way that the actors insist that the portrayal of the traditional princess is still necessary in their new play. Even near the end of this scene, this issue is still raised and Tao San Pom himself says that both aspects of the princess are essential in a contemporary play.

Tao San Pom **He finally has the princess.**

Non-Thai actress 1 **Which one, me or her?**

Tao San Pom **What?**

Non-Thai actress 2 **You said you have the princess, me or her?**

Tao San Pom **Do I need to make decision?**

Non-Thai actress 1	Yes.
Tao San Pom	But you both are a heroines.
Non-Thai actress 2	Pick me. I am what a heroine should be.
Non-Thai actress 1	I am what heroine should be!
Tao San Pom	I think you both are, actually.

(*Tao San Pom*, part 2)

- ***Traditional theatre – its current status***

As mentioned earlier, the attempt of Thai artists to transform the traditional literature into the modern stage come from their admiration of their own theatre. They hope that with these adaptations, the modern generation will pay more attention to their own national arts. To evoke the modern audience to turn back to traditional theatre is an aim of my research. In my adaptation, I have tried to find the way to point out this message.

The aspect of the inferior status of Thai traditional theatre in Thai society can be seen through many actions of Tao San Pom throughout the play. I exploit the character of Tao San Pom to convey this idea to the audiences. The feeling of being unimportant and unrecognised is portrayed in Tao San Pom's character and is hinted at through his words many times in the play. For example:

Non- Thai actress 1 **You must be the new one? I've never seen you before.**

Tao San Pom **Actually no, but I am not surprised that you do not recognize me...**

(Tao San Pom, part1)

Tao san pom **This script may be not that...interesting...maybe because we have to accept that there is no prince and princess, or because a fairy tale may be not that rational or believable anymore.**

(Tao San Pom, part 1)

Moreover, the attempt to adapt himself to the modern stage in order to become interesting to modern audiences is also mentioned in his conversation.

Tao san pom **Come on guys, I come here because I am really wanna know how you're gonna make this play work on this stage.**

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

Tao san pom **What are you doing? This is so crazy! Everything is so mixed up! I still don't see any point in this play! Just see you all mess up everything. I don't see any point why I am here? What am I doing?**

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

- ***Satirical adaptation –the current situation in the contemporary play.***

I believe that one of the possible approaches that could link a traditional play to modern audiences is to relate the traditional story to the current situation in society. In this adaptation, I insert my critical opinion toward the current political problem in Thailand through the argument between Thai and non-Thai actors. This idea is presented in an implicit way by using the colour of their clothing to satirize the two different political groups that use red and yellow to signify their identity.

Thai actress You know what? You look so stupid in that red shirt.

Non-Thai actress 2 Do you think you look that smart in that yellow?

**Director Ok, stop! We can have different opinions but we can't
fight each other! We are here with the same objective,
aren't we? We are in the same team!**

(Tao San Pom, part 2)

In suggesting political opinion in this short dialogue, by avoiding explicitly stating it, there is an element of satire in the approach that I attempt to explore. This sequence is the first hint of this subject, that will be more clearly presented in the later part of my adaptation.

The final part – a contemporary play

Compared with the first and the second parts, I found that the last part was the most difficult part for me to write. This is because when I started the rehearsal, my

idea of this part still remained unclear. For the first and the second parts, I knew exactly how I intended to experiment. This last part, for me, was the ending that, and instead of trying to explore more materials, I should now show the concept of my adaptation or what I intended to communicate through this play.

I remembered how lost I felt when I handed in the first draft of this part to my supervisor and I could not answer his question that what the different functions of this part and the former ones were. I was more surprised when he said this ending part makes my script tend to say that adapting a traditional play is the wrong thing to do. He explained that the way I made this group of people finally fail to find the way to adapt the play is likely to convey the meaning that it is impossible to do a good adaptation of a traditional play on the modern stage. This goes totally against and is opposite to what I aim to say. This comment made me realise that I should not just try to end the story of the play, but I should concentrate more on what I am trying to present through my adaptation: I found that this might be a place for me to present what a good adaptation of a traditional play, I believe, should be like.

At the time that I rewrote this final part, the rehearsals of the first and second parts were already started. Therefore, I had a chance to see all the characters and the play performed on the stage. I spent time thinking about what I already saw and what previously was told in the former parts of my play, and I found that most things are already presented there, including the original story, the characteristics of Thai theatre and some reinterpretations of characters and story; but what was missing was the representation of this traditional story as a new contemporary play: a proof that a traditional play could be an valuable and interesting source to create an original Thai script.

Actors kept asking me how the script was going to be ended. What they wanted to know was how their characters were going to be at the end. This was a question I asked myself as well: how do I see these characters and the story finally?

Most Thai traditional plays are based on or influenced by Thai folktale. The stories have deep roots in Thai culture. In order to create a contemporary play based on this source, I researched many areas including Propp's morphology of the folktale. Propp's morphology analyses folktale by its components and their relationship to each other and to the whole.

For the sake of comparison we shall separate the component parts of fairy tales by special methods; and then, we shall make a comparison of tales according to their components. The result will be morphology (i.e., a description of the tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole.)

(Propp,1968:19)

Having read through his analysis, I found several parts of structure of the folktale could also be applied to Thai folktale. So if Propp attempts to identify the formula that appears in all folktales in order to show that "all fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure" (Propp,1968:25), can I apply this way of analysis to the case of Thai folktale and then create an adaptation based on this analysed structure? In that case, can this be another way to maintain the core nature of the traditional play in my new version?

One of the main aims in turning back to the traditional source is to find the story pattern that relates to a Thai audience. The Morphology concept allow us to go further than just to retell a traditional story, because it gives us a new sight of the original structure of a traditional play, that can be developed to create an original Thai

contemporary script that still retains the quality of the core structure of traditional version.

The study of traditional plays by their components can reveal patterns of stories that keep being retold in Thai cultural context. Through the analysis of the function of *dramatis personae* and other elements in folktales, Propp's morphology shows that there are repeating forms that appear in these stories. Consequently, based on this hypothesis, if the repeating models within Thai folktales can be identified by this way of analysis as well, they could be used as a primary structure in order to develop a new story which implicitly retains an essence of a traditional story. With this way, an adaptation can appear as a repetition of a traditional story, and this repetition can be a potential method to preserve the main characteristics of original Thai plays.

In the event, the actors were a little surprised when they saw the final script in which the characters seem to have an unclear connection to the characters they perform in the earlier parts.

Light fades in together with the sound of a cock which is well-recognised by Thai people to represent the atmosphere of rural area of Thailand. A bench is on the right side of the stage. Thai actors, dressed in Thai rural style costumes, enter with Thai cooking ware and ingredients. They sit on the bench and begin to talk in Thai. Two Non-Thai actresses come in from another side. They are in modern-looking costumes. Non-Thai actress 1 appears as a news editor. She comes to this village to interview the people in this area about the political situation in Thailand, accompanied by her friend who is a city girl and totally disagrees with her idea to come to this rural village.

The characters could not speak each other's languages, so it seems to be very difficult for them to communicate. The Tao San Pom character appears in dirty old

clothes and expresses his displeasure at the non-Thai actress 1, especially, when he sees her attempt to interview these villagers about the current political situation. He becomes mad and finally cannot stop himself speaking to them when they misunderstand what the couple says in Thai.

The non-Thai actress 1 is surprised when she realises the dirty man can speak good English. She tries to persuade him to help her with the interview, but he refuses. Then she begins to suspect his hidden identity and tries to force him to tell the truth. This leads them to argue about the political situation that happened in Thailand when this script was being written.

Non-Thai actress 1 **Tell me why you are here? (*He doesn't answer*) Fine, if you do not answer me, I will tell them my suspicion.**

Tao San Pom **Ok, I have some project here and I come here to do the research. Now, can you leave me with my business?**

Non-Thai actress 1 **If you help me with my interview.**

Tao San Pom **Please, the situation begins to relieve now, why you still need to talk about this.**

Non-Thai actress 1 **Relieve? Really? Ahhh...I know! You are one of them, right? The upper class people that looks down on the poor, some kind of aristocratic elite...**

Tao San Pom **I am not.**

Non-Thai actress 1 **Yes, you are! And you come here to try to convince them for something, right? Now you look even uglier with the way you treat...and lie... to this people.**

Tao San Pom **You know what is ugliness? It is the way people say that we have “classes” in our society and attempt to raise this issue to be reason for them to get what they want. It is easy to portray this as simply rich against poor, but it is much more complicated than that, as illustrated by the fact that the leader of the protester is in fact a multi-billionaire.**

(Tao San Pom, part 3)

Thailand has faced serious political problems during these few years. The situation came to a crisis in April 2010 when the different political opinions led to fighting and burning of buildings in Bangkok. Among the political problems that Thailand has faced, this one is claimed as one of the most serious political conflicts that has ever happened in Thai history. Starting with the corruption issue of the Thai politician, Thaksin Shinawatra, who was the prime minister at that time, the problem has grown bigger and led to the issue of ‘classes’ in Thai society.³⁸ Thaksin who gain supports from the poorer rural voters of northern and north-eastern Thailand was overthrown in a military coup in 2006. His supporters, calling themselves as Red Shirts, in order to gain sympathy for Thaksin, claimed that their leader was the first prime minister who paid real attention to the poor citizens. The issue of inequality in Thai

³⁸ For the background and analysis of this conflict, see Forsyth, Tim. (2010) ‘Thailand's Red Shirt protests: popular movement or dangerous street theatre?’, *Social Movement Studies*, vol.9, no. 4. pp. 461-467.

society is raised by these protesters. Even though the protesters claim that they are ‘a labour-based movement resisting Bangkok’s entrenched elite’, the conflict appears to be more complicated than that, as Forsyth states:

Much as many would like to see the Red Shirt protests of 2010 as a mass mobilization base of poorer classes seeking to overthrow entrenched elite, evidence suggests the purpose and formation of events reflected a series of planned and opportunistic actions by a combination of different actors. These different actors were, firstly, the deposed prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who brought his financial power and personal desire for retribution to the conflict; and, secondly, many poorer activists, who – with varying levels of militancy – wanted to exploit the opportunity posed by Thaksin’s dilemma and probable funding to use his case to force Thailand’s elites to take the lower classes more seriously. In turn, these actions triggered additional symbolic tactics: calling on most Thai people’s loyalty to the King; portraying the Red Shirts as lawless; and of the Red Shirts themselves presenting their members as unarmed victims. Despite the appearance of the Red Shirts as a mass labour movement, the main victor of this protest would always have been Thaksin Shinawatra, one of Thailand’s greatest capitalists.

(Forsyth, 2010:461).

This conflict leads to the loss death of 91 people, with more than 2,100 injured in the serious street battle between the Red Shirts protesters and the army, who were assigned by the government to take care of the situation. At the time, politics was a concern of every Thai person. It seemed to be that the topic was discussed everywhere. Although it was hinted at in the previous scene, this political issue is more explicitly presented in this final part.

I believe that the story of Tao San Pom still takes place in Thai society; it is retold in the new social context, in which the same plot and the same characters are reflected. In my adaptation, the story of a prince and a princess and the reaction of the people to his ugliness are reintroduced to modern audiences in different aspects. When

‘class’ becomes an important issue in society, the significance of the identity of a prince has changed from what it was in the past. While a traditional prince earned his status from his birth, who should a prince be in contemporary society?

In the situation where the conflict about ‘class’ is raised and questioned, I returned to question the status of a prince in traditional plays. While we still have ‘a prince’ and royal family in our culture, when some groups of people begin to question the privilege of this status, can ‘a prince’ still be ‘a prince’ in Thai society?

The character of Tao San Pom in the last part of my play presents my contemporary interpretation of ‘a prince’. Though this character, I aim to point out that the status of ‘a prince’ comes not only from his birth but also from his goodness and good will for society. The ugliness in my contemporary context is no longer just about ‘the appearance’, but it is the way the differences in political opinions are used by some groups of people as a tool to get what they want without caring that it could lead to disunity in Thai society.

Underneath this reinterpretation, I put across my opinion about the way current society judges people, in particular, in relation to appearance and class. Thus, this adaptation is a retelling of a traditional play as an ironic reinterpretation with the intention of reflecting and criticising the recent significant situation in Thai society.

In my attempt to do this, this final part is purposely written without a clear connection to the previous parts. Despite the fact that the cast members are still the same, the scene is not identified as a part of rehearsal and the characters in this part appear independent from the former parts where they are the actors. However, some reflections could be seen in small detailed elements: for example the sweet that Tao San Pom gives to his son in the rehearsal in the second part is the one that Tao San Pom in

this part is making while listening to the interview, and the ugly clothes that he wears are the same one that he uses in the rehearsal in the former part of the play.

I believe that with minor indicated connections the audience are still able to recognize the repetition of this traditional story within this part. Consequently, it could be said that the reflection of the story of *Tao San Pom* could still be seen in the current situation in Thai society. Not only do I aim to prove that some parts of this traditional story remain relevant to the society, but the new message regarding the reinterpretation of the status of ‘prince’ and ‘ugliness’ in this part aims to satirise the political situation in Thailand.

This scene ends with two villagers singing the poem from this play for their guests. This is also the part of our old culture where the traditional theatre is the basic entertainment for Thai people. All characters freeze when she finishes singing the poem. The director, sitting quietly among the audience from the beginning of this part, stands up slowly and, unhurried, walks back to the stage area. He turns and looks at the audience. “Ladies and Gentlemen” he says and then pauses for a few seconds, “Thank you very much”. The light cuts out.

This ending is based on two ideas. First, it is typical of Thai traditional plays that the priority tends to be given to the conclusion, when the hero and the heroine are happy together, rather than to what leads to this ending. In other words, until the happy ending, the rest of the story is of little importance to the audience. Second, the way the director comes on the stage implies a relationship between this part and the former parts which, at the end, connects all the features of this play together.

In this project, I have investigated into the core characteristics of the traditional plot, characters and elements of traditional theatre and applied them in my

new adaptation. With this, I believe that not only will a new play be directly relevant to Thai audiences but also it could satirize the contemporary society. By referring to traditional literature and comparing it with the current society, the adaptation provides a new message to modern audience which indicates its value and its ability to be a rich source for creating a Thai contemporary play.

Tao San Pom

Presented at Roborough Studio

on 24th June 2010

PART ONE

- *The light fades in.*

A man sits at his desk with a laptop. He is typing something. His face looks serious. His typing illustrates the idea in his head that sometimes flows and sometime discontinues.

Two stage crews enter the stage to start their work. When they see him, they walk toward him but he raises his hand up to stop them. So they go off the stage without disturbing him.

The other actors come into the stage, a Thai actress, a Thai actor and two non-Thai actresses. They greet each other quietly and then begin to warm up their bodies.

Tao san pom, a Thai actor, enters. He looks around as if he is not sure if he has come to the right place.

Tao San Pom (ask non-Thai actress1) Excuse me. Is this the rehearsal for a
NEW play?

Non-Thai actress 1 Yes.

Tao San Pom Thank you.

He is waiting there without joining the warm-up.

Non- Thai actress 1 You must be the new one? I've never seen you before.

Tao San Pom Actually no, but I am not surprised that you do not recognize me...

The conversation is interrupted by the voice of the director.

Director Yes! Finally it's done! Oh, hi everyone.

The stage crew enters the stage. The director gives his jump drive to her.

Director Print everyone a copy.

Thai actress The script is finished? Is that good?

Director Of course, it is! Thank you everyone for coming, especially when you don't know what we're gonna do. Anyway, the script is already finished.

-The stage manager gives the script to everyone.

Director I wrote everybody's name on it.

Thai actress (*Excited*) Who is the heroine?

Director It must be Maria.

Thai actress Why? Isn't it a Thai play?

Director Eerr...Yeah, you can say that.

Thai actress So why don't I get the heroine role? Am I not the only Thai woman here!

Director Oh, we are not gonna perform in that old style anymore. But don't worry, you get the important part in the play anyway.

Thai actress Really? More outstanding than the heroine?

Director Well...ummm...(try to change the subject) Any other question,
other people?

No, ok, that's great. Have a quick look at the script and we will
start the rehearsal in three minutes then.

***Other actors go to find their own space to read the script, except Tao San Pom, who
comes to talk to the director.***

Tao San Pom Excuse me.

Director Yes?

Tao San Pom I am Tao San Pom, you talked with me few days ago.

Director Oh, it's you. I am so sorry for my poor memory. Let me
introduce myself, my name is Henry and I am director of this
performance. It is an honour to have you here.

Tao San Pom Thank you for letting me have a part in it.

Director A part in it? You are the heart of this performance.

The stage manager points at her watch.

Director Ok, we better start now before it gets too late.

The stage manager brings in the bench.

Director That's the palace hall. You sit there and start when you are ready.

Tao San Pom goes to sit at the bench. Thai actor sits on the floor in front of him in the traditional posture.

Everyone is quiet and waits for the rehearsal to begin.

Tao San Pom Err...what am I supposed to do?

Director Oh...just read the script.

Tao San Pom Oh, ok. (Looks at the script and reads it) My name is Chinasan, the prince of Srivichai city. I heard that the princess of Triyatrung city is so flawless in beauty. I might wish see her with my own eyes. If the rumour is true, I will get her to be my wife.

Director Ok, second scene, the princess.

Non-Thai actress1 (*proudly*) Yes.

Director You are sitting there. And this time it is your palace hall.

Non-Thai actress1 Ok.

She looks at her script and then she smiles and then she sits like that and does nothing.

Director Ok, great! Next scene.

Thai actress What??

Non-Thai actress 2 Just that? What is that?

Non-Thai actress1 I did my scene.

Non-Thai actress 2 That? You act already? What is that scene about?

Non-Thai actress1 Read the script! See? The princess's perfect beauty is admired by everyone. So I try to express my beauty, which actually in fact I don't need to try.

Director I said NEXT.

Thai actress My scene, mine mine mine!

Director Ok, now that is the bench in the palace garden.

Thai actress goes to the stage and she tries to concentrate and remember the line.

Thai actress Ok, I am ready.

Tao San Pom stands there. The princess is still sitting on the bench.

Tao San Pom The princess wants to see you.

Director Sukanya, now the prince pretends to be just an ugly gardener. So, you know, your reaction toward him shouldn't be like he is the prince.

Thai actress Ok, say it no more, I got it.

She acts so exaggerated this time. She looks at him up and down.

Thai actress The princess wants to see you.

Director (*speechless*) Ok, we will go back to that later. Ok, next scene when the hero and the heroine meet each other. May I say this is the very very romantic scene.

While the director describes the scene, the actors act what he says.

Director The prince disguised himself to be a poor gardener, in a very ugly body. He sees the princess and found that she is the most beautiful girl he has ever met. So he prays to the god that if in the past life he and the princess had merit together, she must know he is the prince. So when the princess looks at him, she realises from his eyes that this guy is not just a gardener. He is the prince!

Then he writes her a love letter. We need props on this scene.
Props!

Stage manager Yes! In a minute!

Director Because he is the gardener, so he writes it in the leaves of vegetables and sends the whole basket to the princess.

Stage manager Actually, we couldn't find that kind of Thai vegetable here, so...

Stage manager gives her an eggplant.

Non-Thai actress1 You've got to be kidding.

Director Tomato tomato. Can we continue?

They fall in love immediately and secretly meet each other until the princess is pregnant and they have a very very cute son.

Thai actor (*Exaggerate his acting to present himself as a king*) (*Read the script*) Who? Who is your husband, the father of my grandson? What should I do? Only the god can answer my question. Soldier, bring all the men in my city, asking them each to bring a single

sweet. If my grandson chooses the sweet from any guy, then he must be his father.

Actress acts like she hold a baby and then Tao San Pom acts like he gives something to him and he accepts it.

Thai actor No! That's man who you chose? I can't believe it!

Non-Thai actress1 (*silent*).

Tao San Pom Yes, this is my son. And I will take the princess with me.

Thai actor Stop talking! Freak!

Tao San Pom I am not who you think. I am better than what you see. My army is outside and they can destroy your city if I order them to.

Thai actor It cannot be true!

Tao San Pom Do you hear that?

- *The sound of the army comes.*

Thai actor No way.

Tao San Pom I will take the princess with me.

Director And then, they live happily ever after! The end!

Everyone That's it?

Director Yeah, great job everyone! How long is the play?

Stage manager 8 minutes.... includes everything, it must be around 5 minutes when we go smoother.

Thai actress	Unbelievable.
Director	(<i>smile</i>) You like it?
Thai actress	It sucks.
Director	What?
Non-Thai actress 2	Nothing in that could be called a play.
Thai actress	You have only couple of dialogues and sorry, except me, their acting sucks. (<i>Look at non-Thai actress1</i>) She does nothing.
Non-Thai actress 2	And I do not even have a part!
Director	Come on. This is just the first reading.
Non-Thai actress 1	Yeah, like we have something to read!
Director	Ok, all smart people, do you have any better idea? Huh? Do you know how hard it is to adapt the play that was written 100 years ago?
Non-Thai actress 1	This play is that old?
Director	Yes and I have tired my best to adapt it!
Non-Thai actress 2	Yes, we can see that from your script.
Director	You can say that because you know nothing about Thai theatre, they have rules and customs...
Non-Thai actress 1	May I ask you something? So why do we have to do it?
Director	What?

Non-Thai actress 2 She asks why we have to use this old story?

Non-Thai actress 1 Isn't it easier if you just write a new play?

Director This is a new play.

Non-Thai actress 1 This is a very very old story. The prince, the princess, the disguise...just another typical fairy tale.

Director Hey, you have just looked through it, you never read it. (*Begins to get mad*) Am I still the director here? We gonna do this play and we gonna make it work.

Silence.

Tao San Pom We can make it new.

Non-Thai actress 1 What?

Tao San Pom I said we can make it new. This script may be not that... interesting... maybe because we have to accept that there is no prince and princess, or because a fairy tale may be not that rational or believable anymore.

Thai actress But something in this story might still make sense.

Tao San Pom Yes.

Non-Thai actress 2 And more than that it may create a good play.

Director Yes! That's all what I was trying to say.

Non-Thai actress 1 Ok, drama people, can we stop this "ideal" talk and try to do something now?

Nobody says anything.

Non-Thai actress 1 Hello? Any ideas, anyone?

Director I had but you think it's horrible.

Non-Thai actress I am not gonna argue about that.

She looks at other girls.

Non-Thai actress 2 I am an actress. I know nothing about writing a script. This is a
Thai story, right? so?

She looks at the Thai actor.

Thai actor I can dance.

Non-Thai actress 2 What has that got to do with this?

Thai actor You need a dance in this piece anyway, don't you?

Non-Thai actress 1 Good, now we know that we gonna have a dance. Ok, if we leave
now, I think we're still in time for another audition at the
Northcott.

Thai-actress Why we don't begin with Thai traditional theatrical performance?

Non-Thai actress 1 What do they do?

Thai actress They describe the story with very own unique style...a kind of
singing, like introducing the hero.

Director And can you do that?

Thai actress Of course I can.

Non-Thai actress 1	That may be interesting.
Thai actress	And you know what that means?
Director	What? They have some subtext meaning? Or any sacred ritual behind that?
Thai actress	It means I will be the one who opens the show!
Tao San Pom	The play.
Thai actress	Whatever.
Director	Oh, yes and then we can have a dance as well.
Thai actor	I am so professional.
Director	Great!
Non-Thai actress 1	And if you don't want it to be the "pure" traditional, I can be the modern one? Like modern perspective?
Director	Ok, cool! And yes, we can add some stuff that makes this play more contemporary. And yes...oh...alot of idea is coming! Ok, we can discuss about this. I will write new script and we're gonna see what we can do!
Non-Thai actress 2	Before we do that, may I ask you something?
Director	Yes?
Non-Thai actress 2	Do you forget me, again?

Director Oh...yeah..no I mean no, I don't forget you. You know, we can't have just Thai or us in here, we kinda need someone in the middle anyway. So I am sure we will find something for you.

Non-Thai actress 1 We need you. Let do this together, ok?

Non-Thai actress 2 Ok.

Director Cool. Now we're ready for the new play!

Everyone starts to talk and discuss the rehearsal, leaving Tao San Pom alone on the stage. He looks at the script.

- *Thai traditional music fades in and then the light fades out.*

PART TWO

- *Light fades in.*

- *Spot light on the Thai actress who is sitting on the floor on stage left.*

She begins to read, in the traditional way, the quotation from original version of Tao Sam Pom.

Thai actress	เมื่อนั้น	องค์พระชินเสนผู้รุ่งฟ้า
	เป็นโอรสขงทรงศักดิ์ดา	แห่งจอมอาณาศรีวิไชย
	ทรงฤทธิ์กำแหงแรงรณ	ประชาชนนิยมนาน้อยไม่

แต่ยุพราชนั่นไซ้ ยังมีได้มีคู่ครอง

(the poem describes the character of the hero)

Tao San Pom is sitting on the bench and then he changes the cloth.

The non-Thai actress1 comes on the stage.

They look at each other and then they sit together on the bench.

- *The sound of the thunder cuts in.*

Thai actor enters the stage and does the ballet to present the anger of the father.

Director Stop! Hmm, I don't think ballet works here.

Non-Thai actress 1 But I think it is interesting.

Director it does not go along with the other parts.

Non-Thai actress 1 But...

Director Can we try that scene one more time? With a Thai dance.

- *The music fades in*

Thai actor tries to do the Thai dance. But it turns out to be not the right one.

Director Stop! I said Thai dance.

Thai actor Yes.

Director You said what you just did is the Thai dance?

Thai actor Yeah.

Director	That is not Thai.
Thai actor	I..I...รำไทยไม่เป็น...
Director	What did he say?
Thai actress	That he can't do the Thai dance.
Director	What do you mean, but in your cv...
Thai actor	Ballet, contemporary, hip hop
Director	and Thai dance.
Thai actor	<i>(points at himself)</i> A Thai ... <i>(dancing)</i> dances.
Non-Thai actress 1	How come you know everything but not the Thai dance? You are Thai.
 <i>He sighs.</i>	
Director	How can we do a play without a Thai dance?
Non-Thai actress 2	Is that important?
Director	Yes, it is.
Tao San Pom	I can do some Thai dance.
Director	Really?
Tao San Pom	Yes.
Director	Oh, that's so great!

Non-Thai actress 1 May I remind you something, again? I think so far we still do too much traditional?

Director what do you mean “too much traditional”?

Non-Thai actress 1 He’s gonna do the Thai dance, she got the whole beginning part.

Thai actress Hey, stay away from my part.

Non-Thai actress 2 Be fair, I....I mean “we” want a part too!

Non-Thai actress 1 I am a heroine, I don’t even do anything!

Director Well, the heroine doesn’t have to do things. She just waits for the hero.

Non-Thai actress 1 and that is a point. How can you make this play be rational when female characters don’t do anything!

Director Ok, you have a point. Ummm...ok..let’s do it this way, we throw away everything. You don’t have to be a prince, no Thai singing

Thai actress No!!!

Director We will make this play a modern one. Yeahhh.. so you can do the ballet. It will not be awkward anymore!

Tao San Pom But how can I be modern?

Director Good question...we can discuss about that. First, you are not the prince.

Tao San Pom So who am I?

Director	You can be a rich celebrity, a rich businessman, an heir of rich people ...someone who was born with everything, upper class in society...
Thai actress	Politician?
Director	yes!
Tao San Pom	ok.
Non-Thai actress 1	Great, so I don't have to be a princess anymore.
Director	No. I think you still have to.
Non-Thai actress 1	Why?
Director	The heroine has to be somebody and by somebody I mean not an ordinary person.
Non-Thai actress 1	Excuse me, I'm gonna argue about that. You said it's gonna be a modern play. So there's no point that I have to be ...somebody. I can be just a girl who is working hard and then gets the man she loves.
Thai actress	That's what you think.
Non-Thai actress 1	What?
Non-Thai actress 2	A princess has to be a "princess". You can't change that. The normal girl can't be a princess, like a prince cannot be ugly, that's a rule.
Non-Thai actress 1	So, if I was just born ordinary, I can't marry the prince?

Thai actress The prince won't look at you in the first place.

Non-Thai actress 1 It's not fair at all. If you don't change that I won't be a part of this old fashioned staff.

Director (*looks at non-Thai actress 2*) You can perform the heroine then.

Non-Thai actress 1 What?

Non-Thai actress 2 (*smile*) Really?

Non-Thai actress 1 No... no... no...Listen to me. You have to accept, no girl wanna see this character as the way it was anymore. Come on, you need me to perform this role.

Director I don't know. Ok. I think you both can perform this role then.

Non-Thai actress 1 What? How?

Thai actress Ok, that's great. Now both of them can perform this role but I can't!

Director Can we stop questioning? We've going nowhere!

Everybody is quiet.

Tao San Pom Come on guys, I come here because I'm really wanna know how you're gonna make this play work on this stage. Ok, we can start with my character then.

He walks into the middle of the stage.

Tao San Pom Ok, I am a son of the prime minister, I have studied abroad and I will be the next talented politician who has potential to be the

next prime minister in the near future. So I need to find a woman who is qualified in order to support my career.

Director Keep going.

Tao San Pom I heard that the daughter of ..somebody... is very beautiful and still single. Anyway, it is my intention to see her with my own eyes before I decide if she is the one.

- *Light changes.*

- *Fade in the Thai traditional music.*

Tao San Pom begins to do Thai dance to present that he disguises himself to look poor and ugly.

Tao San Pom Here she is.

Two actresses sit on the bench.

Non-Thai actress 1 I know you are somebody. You have something special.

Non-Thai actress 2 Your eyes.

Non-Thai actress 1 The way you talk

Non-Thai actress 2 You are the prince.

Non-Thai actress 1 Are you gonna tell me who you are?

Non-Thai actress 2 I know you are the prince.

Tao San Pom Is it necessary to know? I can be a gardener, I may be a rich guy, it's gonna be me, anyway.

Non-Thai actress 2 It's important, you need to be a prince.

Non-Thai actress 1 No, but I will know how hard you have to try in order to get me.

Tao San Pom I know, you are very rich.

Non-Thai actress 2 I am the princess.

Non-Thai actress 1 I am smart, I've got PhD.

Tao San Pom And you are so beautiful.

Non-Thai actress 1 I know.

Non-Thai actress 2 Yes, I have to be beautiful.

Non-Thai actress 1 Secret? La mer every night.

They laugh.

- *Then the music fades in. The lyric of this song comes from the famous poem of this story.*

Two Thai actors enter the stage with microphone in their hands.

Thai Actress ในลักษณนี้ว่าน่าประหลาด เป็นเชื้อชาตินักรบกลับนักล่า

เหตุไฉนย่อทำอรورا หรือจะกล้าแต่เพียงวาที่

Thai Actor เห็นแก้วแวววับที่จับจิต ไปไม่คิดอาจเอ๋อมให้เต็มที่

เมื่อไม่เค็มจะได้ยังไงมี อันมณีหรือจะโหดไปถึงมือ

Thai Actress อันของสูงแม่ปองต้องจิต ถ้าไม่คิดปิ่นพายจะได้หรือ

Thai Actor มิใช่ของตลาดที่อาจซื้อ หรือแย่งยื้อถือได้โดยไม่ยอม

Thai Actress ไม่คิดสอยมัวคอยดอกไม้อั่วร่วง

Thai Actor คงชวดดวงบุปผาชาติสะอาดหอม

Thai Actress ดูแต่ภูมรินทร์เที่ยวบินคอม

Thai Actor จึงได้ออมอบกลิ่นสุมาลี

(Isn't it ridiculous?

For a great warrior's descendant

To become easily discouraged

Or courage is just a word.

Seeing a desirable precious gems

What keeps you from reaching it?

If you do not try to reach it yourself

It's impossible for the gems to leap into your hands

Because it's neither a simple product for sale

Nor something easily grasped.

If you choose to wait for the flower to wither and fall,

You will miss a its fragrance and freshness.

Look at the bees that keep visiting flowers

So they are capable to taste their fragrant sweetness.)

- *The sound of the heavy drums cuts in.*

Thai actor dances in the Thai mask style and looks strong and serious.

Non-Thai actress 2 Father!

Thai actor dances and the Thai actress translates the meaning of his dance.

Thai actress The king wants to know who is the father of your baby.

The princess doesn't answer.

Thai actress I really don't know who is the princess's husband.

He dances to show that he is very angry and then he prays to the god.

Thai actress The king commands that the ceremony will be held for the crown
prince. The man from whom he chooses the sweet is the father.

***Tao San Pom stands up. He wears his old costume. The action presents that the
prince chose a sweet from him. Thai actor dances again, showing his anger.***

Thai actress This one? This man? He is ugly. He is nobody.

Non-Thai Actress 1 He is somebody. Tell them.

Non- Thai actress 2 (*say nothing*)

Non-Thai actress 1 Why do you say nothing now?! You kept saying he was the
prince a few minutes ago!

Non-Thai actress 2 (*still quiet*)

***Thai actor begins to dance again with very strong rhythm from the music but this
time his dance is so messed up that none of the Thai style is left.***

Tao San Pom stops him.

Tao San Pom (*Talk to Thai actor*) What are you doing?

Non-Thai actress 1 (*Talk to non-Thai actress 2*) Seriously, you won't say anything?
You will just wait here and let everyone misunderstanding? Say something!

Non-Thai actress 2 looks at her.

Tao San Pom What you just did is so not Thai.

Non-Thai actress 2 (*answer non-Thai actress 1*) This is Thai.

Tao San Pom You lose all the beauty.

Non-Thai actress 2 I try to keep the beauty.

Non-Thai actress 1 Great! I hope god comes to help you this time!

Thai actor This is what I can do. If you don't like it, do it yourself.

- *Song cuts in.*

Thai actress is singing the Western song, "And then the story goes" which cuts through all the serious moments on the stage.

Tao San Pom Stop!

Everybody stops.

Tao San Pom What are you doing? This is so crazy! Everything is so mixed up! I still don't see any point in this play! Just see you all mess up everything. I don't see any point why I am here? What am I doing?

Non-Thai actress 1 By I, you mean the Tao San Pom character.

Tao San Pom	Yeah.
Thai actress	I don't want to say this, (Look at non-Thai actors) but it's them who mess it up.
Non-Thai actress 1	What!?
Thai actress	You two keep arguing about nothing.
Non-Thai actress 2	Oh..so you think the way you two dance and sing are smart?
Thai actress	Hey, music and dance are important elements in Thai theatre!
Thai actor	We just try to make them into fusion!
Non-Thai actress 1	Or confusion!
Thai actress	You know what? You look so stupid in that red shirt.
Non-Thai actress 2	Do you think you look that smart in that yellow?
Director	Ok, stop! We can have different opinions but we can't fight each other! We are here with the same objective, aren't we. We are in the same team!

Everybody nods quietly.

Director	So now, can somebody tell me what should we do next?
Tao San Pom	Tao San Pom disguises himself to be an ugly guy because he wants to see the world in a way that depends on nobody knowing who he really is. Her father asks him to surrender and give up his kingdom if he wants to marry her. So he comes here with a plan,

the plan to get his princess. And he does it. He finally has the princess.

Non-Thai actress 1 Which one, me or her?

Tao San Pom What?

Non-Thai actress 2 You said you have the princess, me or her?

Tao San Pom Do I need to make decision?

Non-Thai actress 1 Yes.

Tao San Pom But you both are a heroines.

Non-Thai actress 2 Pick me. I am what a heroine should be.

Non-Thai actress 1 I am what heroine should be!

Tao San Pom I think you both are, actually.

He looks at director.

Director I think you know the best. I am just the director. I look after other stuff like...lighting.

Tao San Pom You know we don't need lighting.

Director Or scenery. (*look at the bench*) We may need more decoration for the bench.

Tao Sam Pom We are fine with just the bench!

Thai actress Ok, who are you?

Tao San Pom Who am I?

Thai actress Yes, you are here. You are talking. You claim that you know all about this story. You keep making decisions. Who are you?

Tao San Pom I just try to give an opinion, the one that I think may make things more interesting.

Thai actress How can you know? You may look like a Thai but I don't think you are! Something in you is not normal "Thai".

Director Umm...

The director tries to say something but the Thai actress stops him.

Thai actress (Talk to the director) Don't say anything. I don't know why you chose him to perform the hero. I don't know what you see in him.

Tao San Pom Errr...

Thai actress (Talk to Tao San Pom) Listen, you are new, you are not Thai, so you better stay away and listen to us who are professional and know a lot more than you. Ok, can we go back to my idea?

Tao San Pom No. (sigh) I am Shinnasen.

Non-Thai actress 1 huh?

Tao San Pom Shinasen, the prince of Srivichai city....I am Tao San Pom.

Everybody looks at the script.

Tao San Pom Yes, I am the character in the story that all of you try to perform.

Non-Thai actress 1 You mean you come from the book?

Tao San Pom Yes.

Non-Thai actress 2 So that is why you know everything.

Tao San Pom Yes.

Non-Thai actress 2 Is he crazy or we are dreaming?

Thai actor pinches her.

Non-Thai actress 2 Ahhhh.

She hits him.

Thai actor What? I'm just trying to prove that you are not dreaming!

Tao San Pom I am real.

Non-Thai actress 1 Is it true?

Director Yes, I thought it might be interesting to have him here and I don't want to tell you because...

Tao San Pom I asked him to. I want to see how you will perform my story without knowing that I am here.

Non- Thai actress 2 This is weird.

Thai actress (*so excited*) Oh my god, you are real. You are the real one! May I have your autograph? I so adore you! I have read your story like a thousand times! Actually, I kinda guess that you are someone since first I saw you, it's something in your eyes. Oh my god, it is exactly what the heroine see in the prince! Is it the coincidence??

Director Nice try but no.

Non-Thai actress 1 Ok,Let's do it.

Tao San Pom Do what?

Non-Thai actress 1 Continue our rehearsal.

Tao San Pom Do you think we can do that?

Non-Thai actress 2 Yes, now we have you here, it should make thing a lot easier.

Director Err...I have no idea here.

Non-Thai actress 1 We know that. Come on, Let's start before it's getting late.

Tao San Pom Do you think it will be interesting.

Non-Thai actress 1 of course it will.

They walk out back stage, leaving only the director on the stage with confusion on his face. He shrugs his shoulders and gives a cue for the lights to fade out and goes to sit on his chair.

PART THREE

- *Light fades in.*

Two actors are on the stage.

- *Music fades in.*

They begin to dance.

The dance presented the transformation of the traditional story. The two different kinds of theatre face each other and how they connect and influence each other. Finally, one actor stands in the middle when another dances around him. He does the traditional Thai dance to present the image of the traditional theatre that is surrounded by the innovations in the society.

- *Light fade out.*

- *Light fade in*

Two Thai actors are on the stage. They dress in the Thai north-east villagers style. They are preparing their dinner.

Non-Thai actress 2 Eleni, why we need to come this far? I am tired.

Non-Thai actress 1 Because we need to know what they think.

Non-Thai actress 2 Why don't we just interview them in Bangkok or at least in the city?

Non-Thai actress 1 Because we will never know the truth. They will set up everything, don't you see what happen to CNN? We need to come here quietly and by ourselves in order to know the truth.

Non-Thai actress 2 You are always like this, if I am not your friend...

Non-Thai actress 1 Hi, my name is Eleni. Do you mind if I interview you?

Two Thai actors talk to them in Thai with I-San accent.

Thai actress แหม่นนี่มันพูดอะไรแก๊วไหม (Do you understand what they say?)

Thai actor โง่จริง มันบอกว่ามันหิวน้ำ (You are so stupid. They say they are thirsty)

Thai actress กินข้าวด้วยกันเลยไหม (I see, do you want to have dinner with us as well?)

They understand nothing, so they smile and nod.

Non-Thai actress 1 May I ask why don't you go to Bangkok?

They look at her and say nothing.

Non-Thai actress 2 I don't think they understand you.

Non-Thai actress 1 Can you translate what I say then?

Non-Thai actress 2 No, I told you, I can understand some but I can't speak.

Non-Thai actress 1 (*She tries to translate what she said by her action*) Go...Bangkok

Thai actress ประท้วงนะเธอ ไม่ไปหรอก ต้องทำงาน (The protest? No, I have work here)

Thai actor เขาไปกันหมด เขาว่าไปแล้วเราจะได้อิน เงินนะ เงิน มีกินนะ
(Everybody goes, they said they will get money, money...you know?...to have something to eat.)

Non-Thai actress 2 They said something about money.

Non-Thai actress 1 This might be very interesting.

They realise that there is a dirty man standing behind their backs with very unhappy face. They feel a little frightened when they see him. He says nothing and goes to help the couple prepare their dinner.

Non-Thai actress 2 Please, can we go home now?

Non-Thai actress 1 Soon, after I get all information I need. So which colour are you?

She brings up the papers of red and yellow colour. The dirty man crumples them up and throw them away.

Non-Thai actress 1 Hey!

Non-Thai actress 2 (tries to speak Thai to the couple) Nun -Kai -ka? (Who's him?)

Thai actress มาจากไหนก็ไม่รู้ แต่ไม่ต้องห่วงหรอก นิสัยดี ชอบมาช่วยงานคนแถวนี้ (I don't know where he come from but don't worry. He is good person. Always help everyone here.)

Thai actor ก็บอกแล้ว หลงทางมานั่นแหละ ดูไม่ค่อยจะเต็ม ไม่ค่อยรู้เรื่องอะไรแถวนี้ ซักกะอย่าง (He might be get lost from somewhere. I don't think he is normal. He knows nothing about living in this village even the basic stuffs.)

Non-Thai actress 2 They said he is the good guy.

Non-Thai actress 1 If he is good, (says it to that man) stay away!

He looks at them with angry eyes. They feel a little afraid and wonder if he understands what she just said but they think it is impossible.

Non-Thai actress 1 gives the newspaper to the couple.

- Thai actor จะถามเรื่องนี้หรือ เขาไปเรียกร้องประชาธิปไตยกัน เขาเรียกอะไรนะ ดี
- โม เกซี่ (I see, you want to ask about the protest in Bangkok. They
- ask for the democracy. What do they call? Demo crazy...)
- Non-Thai actress 1 Democracy.
- Thai actor ใช่ๆ เขาไปกันหมดเลย เขาบอกว่าเพราะไม่มีอะไรนี้เราเลยจน ลุงบอก
- เพื่อนไปแล้วนะ ว่าให้ถ่ายรูปมาให้ดูด้วย อยากเห็นว่าหน้าตามันเป็นยังไง (
- Yes Yes, everybody go there to ask for it. They said if we have it,
- we will not poor anymore. I ask my friend to take the picture for
- me. Really want to know what it looks like.)
- Thai actress แต่ทำไมต้องขนาดเผาบ้านเผาเมืองด้วยก็ไม่รู้ (Don't understand why
- they have to burn down the city)
- Thai actor ก็ดี โอ้วพวกคนกรุงเทพจะได้รู้ได้เข้าใจคนจนอย่างเราบ้าง ไม่งั้นก็ไม่เคย
- เหลียวแล (Why you have to care? Nobody there care about us
- here. So now they can understand what the poor like us feel)
- Thai actress เหมือนพม่ามาตีเมือง มองไปทางไหนก็มีแต่ไฟ
- ไหม้ เจ้าพระคุณ ขอให้อย่าตีกันอีกเลย (It's like when we lost the city

to Burma. I saw fire everywhere..dear god, I wish it will not happen again)

Non-Thai actress 1 Any ideas?

Non-Thai actress2 They say something about the fire...Maybe they say they agree with it.

Tao San Pom They didn't say that.

Non-Thai actress 1 (*Surprised*)He speaks English?

Non-Thai actress2 Maybe just Thai language that sounds like English.

He gives a sign for them to follow him to other side, so the couple will not hear what they talk.

Tao San Pom They said they don't want to see Thai people fight each other.

Non-Thai actress 2 Ok, I think he can speak English.

The couple asks her to help as they prepare the dinner, leaving only Non-Thai actress1 and Tao San Pom who talk to each other.

Non-Thai actress 1 Can you be the translator for us then or can I interview you?

Tao San Pom No, I don't think I am the one who you intend to come here to do the interview.

Non-Thai actress 1 Yeah, I can see that. Who are you?

Tao San Pom I live here.

Non-Thai actress 1 But you are not one of them. You must come here for some reasons.

Tao San Pom I don't think it is your business.

Non-Thai actress 1 Tell me why you are here? (He doesn't answer) Fine, if you don't answer me, I will tell them my suspicion.

Tao San Pom Ok, I have some project here and I come here to do the research. Now, can you leave me with my business?

Non-Thai actress 1 If you help me with my interview.

Tao San Pom Please, situation begins to relieve now, why you still need to talk about this.

Non-Thai actress 1 Relieve? Really? Ahhh...I know! You are one of them, right? The upper class people that looks down to the poor, some kind of the aristocratic elite...

Tao San Pom I am not.

Non-Thai actress 1 Yes, you are! And you come here to try to convince them for something, right? Now you look even uglier with the way you treat and lie to this people.

Tao San Pom You know what is the ugliness? It is the way people say that we have "classes" in our society and attempt to raise this issue to be reason for them to get what they want. It is easy to portray this as simply rich against poor, but it is much more complicated than

that, as illustrated by the fact that the leader of the protester is in fact a multi-billionaire.

Non-Thai actress 1 You can tell me more about that then.

Non-Thai actress 2 Eleni, they try to make me eat something like the smelly raw fish!
Can we go back now?

Tao San Pom I told you things is very complicated. I don't think it can be explained in a day.

Non-Thai actress 1 I can stay longer.

Non-Thai actress 2 Eleni!

Non-Thai actress 1 And when we finish things here, we can go back to Bangkok together and you can help me with more interview there?

Tao San Pom I can show you around Bangkok actually.

Non-Thai actress 2 (*look down*) On an elephant?

Non-Thai actress 1 I think he has a car, maybe more than one...

He doesn't say 'yes' or 'no' but smiles.

Non-Thai actress 2 Oh, in that case, I think I am ready for the dinner.

Thai actress sings the poem from the traditional story in Thai villager style. (singing in an entertaining way).

โอ้ แก้วแวววับที่จับจิต จะใคร่ปลิดปลดมาดังถวิล

โอ้เอื้อมสุดล้ำดั่งฟ้าดิน จะได้สมดังจินต์ฉันใด

- *Light fades out and the top light fades in at the middle of the stage.*

The director walks there. He looks at the audiences. He says nothing for a few seconds.

Director Ladies and Gentlemen. *(Pause)* Thank you very much.

The End

CONCLUSION

An awareness of the tremendous influence of Westernization has encouraged some Thai artists to search for their own version of an identity for modern Thai theatre. As it directly adopted its form from Western theatre, the development of modern Thai theatre appears to have little to do with indigenous performance. Traditional and modern Thai theatres are different in their aesthetic concept and original forms of performing, so the links between them are tenuous. By emphasising the preservation of the traditional way of performing, established theatre has become less relevant to modern Thai audiences. While modern Thai theatre relies on Western ideas and influences, contemporary Thai artists aim to find a new inspiration and identity.

Even though the clear separation between traditional and modern Thai theatre occurred in the mid-1960s, when Western-style theatre was re-introduced to Thai society as a part of drama curriculum in universities, in fact the influence of Westernization on Thai theatre began during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910). However, during that earlier period, Thai artists had adopted Western elements in order to enhance the traditional form of dance drama, creating new kinds of Thai performance to suit the changing tastes of Thai audiences under the impact of Westernization; Rutnin (1996) mentions the theatre during this time as 'the harmony of combination'. She further states that 'However, it seems at the present that the harmony between the classical and the modern, the old and the new is no longer a strong point' (1996:252). Her opinion is that a combination like this is rarely seen in the current period.

My aim in conducting research in this area is not to create a great work like these Thai artists in the past, but arises simply from my awareness of the difficulties in

the development of Thai scripts for the modern stage. This, I believe, is part of the problem that there is a lack of connection between traditional theatrical characteristics and the current creation of our modern stage plays.

Traditional Thai theatre has its own unique way of performing, in which dance and music are used as the main elements to tell a story. Each dance gesture illustrates the expression of the script in which the characters' actions and dialogues are described. The script is sung together with dance patterns either by actors or choruses based on the individual style of each genre. A traditional play is composed in verse form. Each theatre genre has its own repertoire; some stories, such as *Ramakien*, restricted to court performances. Buddhist beliefs and Thai moral lessons commonly appear in the themes of these stories. Most of the scripts that are currently performed are adjusted from the texts that were written more than a hundred years ago. Traditional theatre tends to be regarded as a national heritage rather than entertainment for Thai people, and traditional scripts are familiar to audiences as classical literature which is taught in schools.

With the dominance of Western theatre's influence on modern Thai theatre, some Thai artists have turned to their own traditional theatrical sources in an attempt to create modern plays that communicate with Thai audiences better than translated Western scripts. Kertdarunsuksri (2001) claims that the transformation of traditional literature on the modern stage was a popular trend during the 1990s when more than twenty adapted productions were created. After that period of growth, some well-known artists still continue their exploration in this area. These artists share a personal interest in traditional theatre with a belief that it could be a valuable source in creating a contemporary performance that could communicate with modern Thai audiences. Among these artists, there are four Thai theatrical practitioners whose works have been

examined in this thesis in order to explore the significant approaches used in the adaptation of traditional plays within current social contexts. These artists are Patravadi Mejudhon, Pornrat Damrhung, Makamphom Theatre Group and Dangkamon Na-Pombejra.

In order to transpose traditional literature onto the modern stage, Patravadi modernized a traditional story in order to re-present it within the current social context. The original plot was deconstructed in order to emphasise the theme of a traditional story. Characters in her new version were adapted to be well-rounded and appeared relevant in a contemporary sense. Her deep interest in her own cultural roots and her intention to present the value of traditional literature is seen in the way quotations from the original source appear to play an important part in her adaptation. Finally, the traditional elements such as dance and singing are juxtaposed in her pieces, to enhance the performance and appeal to Thai audiences.

While Patravadi tries to interpret traditional literature with the aim of modernizing the story, Pornrat Damrong chooses to present through her works a new interpretation of traditional literature. Her works focus on the main female characters instead of the males. Her productions usually portray the suffering of these female characters due to social inequality, with the intention to arouse the audience to understand traditional works from a modern point of view. The impressive spectacle of her performances comes from her unique style and modernizing of traditional elements, especially traditional dance and music which are adapted and used as important tools to deliver the message to audiences. Apart from her feminist views, the presentation of her performance has become one of her most significant hallmarks.

Makhampom troupe applies familiarity with traditional literature as the main tool in delivering the social message to their audience. In their adaptations, only well-known plot and characters are conceived as to be a bridge to connect their performances with the audience. Consequently, their main aim of reconstructing the plot and reinterpreting the characters is to address the group's new social message rather than put an importance to the old theme of the original.

The attempt to modernize traditional literature by reinterpreting it from a modern perspective can be seen in Dangkamon's adaptation of *Sang Thong*. In his work, a traditional story is re-interpreted by comparing it to contemporary society. Apart from the reference to the original story, in his production Western techniques are more prominent than traditional Thai elements.

In re-presenting traditional literary works, these practitioners have their own ways to adapt traditional plays which create a unique quality in their adaptations. The analysis of these artists' works led to the four approaches which are further investigated in my practical research. In order to retell a traditional story to a modern audience, **reinterpretation** needs to be made of a traditional script in order to make it relevant to the current social context. The study of previously adapted works shows that there are two different ways that Thai artists use to reinterpret a traditional message in their plays. First, the original theme is maintained and emphasised in its adaptation; Kerdarunsuksri (2001) clarifies this as 'modern mythmaking'. This example can be seen in Patravadi's works while the core message of the original play is implicit in most of her adaptations. Other artists, on the other hand, choose to present a new message in their adaptations. Pornrat is one of the artists who apply re-interpretation as the method to criticize in and pass comments on the established understanding of traditional literature. Kerdanrunsuksri (2001) classified this kind of re-interpretation as 'revisionist

mythmaking'. Makampom's works provide another example of this kind of re-interpretation in which a traditional story is reconstructed in order to present the troupe's new message on the issue of social development. Both re-interpretative approaches have their own strong points as well as some overlapping ideas. The significant difference between these two approaches is the extent to which an original text and its message are retained in its new version. Reinterpretation is an early step of adapting a traditional play as to make it become coherent to its 'new' audience.

One of the advantages of creating a play based on traditional literature is that Thai audiences might feel familiar with the plot, characters and context. Therefore, **reinforcement of a sense of familiarity** can be a method to deliver a new message to audience. This approach provides an audience with a comfortable feeling of seeing things that they know or feel familiar with. Moreover, there is further support for the emergence of a new message when an adaptation deals with the parallel image of traditional stories and contemporary society; the satire involved in this comparison may be more comprehensible to an audience who 'knows' more of a previous version.

Seeing a traditional play from the modern perspective implicitly adds **a contemporary context** to an adaptation. This contemporary sense creates a connection between a traditional play, through its adaptation, to the current society. The expression of this contemporary sense can be seen through the modernized 'messages', changes in the reinterpretation of the characters and the insertion of a contemporary situation or setting. This contemporary context not only reflects the current society but also stresses differences in the significance of some social issues through the comparison between the traditional text and the new contemporary version.

In order to transform traditional plays to the modern stage, not only do these artists make use of the original script, but they also borrow some traditional elements and experiment with them in their adaptations. So the **application of the traditional elements** presents the admiration of Thai artists toward their own traditional style of performing; the exploration in the performance presentation even becomes the significant hallmark of some artists. However, it is claimed that the full interpretation of these elements requires a deep-knowledge of their meaning; so they are adapted in order to make a production ‘accessible’ and ‘attractive’ to the modern audience. Adopting traditional elements in a modern adaptation can be claimed as another way to find an identity for contemporary Thai theatre (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 247). In order to avoid damaging the aesthetics of traditional Thai theatre in the process of adaptation, it is necessary to find an appropriate balance between preservation and change. These elements should be applied in a way that retains their original concept of beauty and, moreover, gives them the opportunity to present the most of their beauty and value.

My first practical project was started in October and finally the adaptation script was presented in January 2009. In this project, a well-known Thai traditional play, *Sang Thong*, was chosen to be adapted. The approaches that were used in the first practical project are gathered from my research on Thai theatre which is represented in Chapter two and three. In this research not only were characteristics of traditional theatre and dramatic literature analysed and studied, but also productions on the modern stage that related to the traditional Thai literature are analysed. In addition, approaches that have been used by Thai artists were selected to be further investigated.

The adaptation script is divided into six parts; in each part, different approaches are explored with an aim of finding potential ways to adapt a traditional play in contemporary context. Four actors participated in this project; they performed two

Thai and two non-Thai characters as to present an idea of the relationship between Western influences and Thai traditional theatre. The original theme of judging people from their appearance is intended to be kept so as to present the aspect of this unchanged value judgment in Thai society.

In the first part, **the introduction**, dance is explored as a main method to present a firm indication of the development of Thai theatre. The contrasting picture of traditional Thai dance and ballet portrays the impact of Western culture on Thai theatre. Every change of song and dance presents the significant changes that occurred in Thai theatre history. The story of *Sang Thong* is re-told in the second part, **Adaptation**, through four characters each of whom presents different attitudes toward an adaptation of a traditional play. The negative aspect of the character of the ogress in traditional literature is explored in part three, **Phanthurat**, by putting an emphasis on the point of misjudgement of her character. With the aim of making an “old” text” able to communicate with a “modern” audience, an application of a current social issue is explored in part four, **Rochana**, where some of the traditional contexts are replaced with some modern features, including the insertion of current political issues. Thai dance is also experimented with in this part to create a new meaning and function for it in a contemporary play. Three aspects of a Thai traditional heroine are discussed through the presentation of female characters in my play: the belief in marriage, karma and the status of woman in Thai society. **The ending**, the fifth part of the play, presents the transformation in Thai female characters and my own question on the ending of traditional literature. In part six, when the light fades out and all the actors come back on stage, their conversation presents an idea of this adaptation; the journey of how that play is created is the important message I intend to share.

In this investigation, three significant approaches are explored in this practice of adaptation. The traditional story was retold through the 'reinterpretation' of the plot and characters in the new version. Through this reinterpretation, some Thai values, such as the judgement on an appearance, are pointed out while some comments and opinions from a modern perspective on these traditional values are given. My attitude toward the change of Thai woman's status in the society is shown and explored through the re-presentation of traditional female characters. 'A contemporary sense' is given through the insertions of a modern context through a parallel between the traditional story and the current situations in society. Finally, 'the traditional theatrical elements' are exploited in this adaptation in order to present traditional aspects of traditional theatre's characteristics.

This piece functions as a reflection on the various aspects of my research on Thai theatre. This work serves the purpose of introducing both Thai theatre and my sense of the problems and possibilities in adapting Thai traditional plays. However, I found that it does not contribute to my aim of creating a new principle for developing the idea of an original Thai script for modern stage. Therefore, in my second project I have tried to create an original Thai playscript that is more complete than that of my first project. In this project, the script should not only tell the traditional story but should also use sources from traditional literature in order to create its own plot, a contemporary plot, which I believe will suit the taste of Thai modern audiences.

Therefore, in the second project, I have investigated the structure of the traditional plot and the distinguishing characteristics of the main characters, and have adapted and placed them into my new version. *Tao San Pom*, a traditional play based on a recognizable Thai folktale was selected to be adapted for this project. In order to create a contemporary script that maintains the generic characteristics of the traditional

Thai play, I clarified my new plot based on this storyline. My new script is divided into three parts; each part serves a different function in this project.

The new version is a story of a group of people trying to represent an old tale, *Tao San Pom*. There are eight characters in this play, namely a director, two Thai and two non-Thai actors and two stage managers. Exploiting the characters to represent different identities, as I had done in my first project, is an approach also used in this adaptation. The six main characters are divided into two groups: Thai and Non-Thai characters in order to illustrate a suitably balanced image of Western influence and the original 'Thainess' of Thai theatre. Apart from the hero, the other two Thai actors depict the important characteristics of the traditional Thai theatre through their abilities to dance and sing. The Thai actress is also used to express the attitude toward female characters in Thai literature. In addition, her comic personality imitates the Thai sense of humour that regularly appears in traditional theatre and receives enormous popularity and appreciation from Thai audiences. Non-Thai characters present an opposed attitude toward Thai theatre. For example, non-Thai actress 1 presents herself as a modern woman who opposes the traditional belief in the inferior status of female characters, while non-Thai actress 2 seemingly understands this convention and tries to find a balance between modern and traditional values.

In the first part, the original story of *Tao San Pom* and the perception of my adaptation are presented. The audiences learn the original story through a new script that the cast tries to rehearse. The characteristics of traditional theatre are mentioned by Thai characters, along with some attitudes toward the idea of adapting a traditional play. In the second part, the audiences experience together with the cast the problematic of adaptation. The difficulty in finding the appropriate balance between preserving and changing traditional elements in order to be adapted into a contemporary play is

expressed in the disagreement between the cast members. Through their argument, the comments on traditional female characters and issues on the current situation of traditional theatre in Thai society are implicitly stated.

The last part of my adaptation was created with an intention to prove that a traditional play could be a valuable and interesting source to create an original Thai script. In order to do that, the final part appears to have an unclear connection to the earlier parts. A serious political crisis in Thai history, which occurred during the time that this adaptation was written, is exploited in this part to prove my belief that the story of *Tao San Pom* has relevance today in Thai society. The story is retold in the new social context, in which the same plot and the same characters are still presented.

The status of 'a prince' is re-presented in this part by emphasising that it is not only the status the main character receives from his birth but also from his goodness and good will for society. The ugliness in my contemporary context is no longer just about 'the appearance'; it is also the way in which differences in political opinions are used by some groups of people as a tool to get what they want, without caring that this could lead to fragmentation in Thai society. Here, I attempt to indicate the critical meaning of my interpretation: the new meaning of this traditional tale in the contemporary context. This adaptation is not only a retelling of a traditional play from the modern perspective, but is also an ironic reinterpretation of the story, with the intention of reflecting and criticising the recent significant situation in Thai society.

Having a chance to conduct a research based on practical works gave me the opportunity to work both as a researcher and a practitioner. The experience of working in various roles throughout my practical study provides significant advantages to my research that is worth being mentioned.

I began my work as a researcher. I was looking not only for an inspiration but also the relevant sources that could help developing some ideas in creating a play. The aims of each practical project were set before I started developing the plot. I found they became a guideline in making the plays, and finally, they helped answering the research questions, or in other words, became more successful in the way I wished my play will turn out to be. Moreover, throughout the process of script development, it was enjoyable to play with some knowledge I have got from my research which contributed to the development of the plays. As a playwright, I found it helped to expand my imagination, and also challenging me to find the way to reflect the information in my play, and make sure the messages I intended to say be delivered to the audience.

Having a chance to present a play on the stage allowed me to perform another role as a director. It was the next step to be able to recheck how successfully my ideas were presented as a stage performance. Rehearsal became one of the significant tools in script development. From time to time, I found the actors' opinions reflected another side of the plot and characters I had created. This reflection, thus, allowed me to see my own play at a deeper level, and also made me realize that the reinterpretation of the play could go further than I expected when I first wrote the first draft. In some parts, the script was also developed along with the actors' interpretation, which made my work go beyond one person's work, as a playwright, and became the collaborative work between actors and myself as a director.

The most remarkable step came later, when the performances were finished and I had to step out and performed a role as a researcher again. At first, I found it difficult and unusual for a practitioner to be forced to think back, and analyze the process of his/her creativity, and to explain how all the ideas were formed. The most

challenging part was when I also had to evaluate my own process of thinking in order to confirm what I had found ,and how to develop them in the future. Step by step, I had learned to explain the critical thinking behind my own works. At the end, the research indicated the potential methods of script adaptation that could be a useful guideline for other practitioners to develop their thinking and understanding of the process of creating an original play for Thai modern theatre. Finally, I hope my research will fill the gap between theories and practice which appears to be an advantageous research area of Thai theatre that has been rarely examined.

With the limit of time, my research could not go further than two script developments and a small scale of productions. I do hope that, in the future, my script could be possibly further developed either by working with other directors, or professional actors from Thai traditional theatre, it might render other new perspectives that may not be discovered yet in this research. In addition, I wish my research would encourage other artists to conduct the research in the similar area which could contribute significant advantages to the original script development in Thai modern theatre.

As a playwright and dramaturge, with the opportunity to conduct the practical research that informed by extended study, I felt that I have experienced the central issue of the possibility of drawing on traditional theatre to create contemporary performances. The approaches that have been explored in my practice depict the main purposes of my research in retaining the main characteristics of traditional theatre and also simultaneously developing them in order to create an original script for the modern Thai theatre. The study has helped me realize and learn how to achieve the balance between the traditional and contemporary dramatic contexts, and also the balance between contemporary expectations in the audience and the quality and impact of

traditional theatrical elements. My exploration benefited from the former Thai artists whose works had shared similar interests and a belief in the potential value of Thai traditional theatre as the basis to create Thai contemporary scripts. However, I found my script adaptation different from other previous works in the way that it did not only reinterpret the original scripts from the modern perspective but also made use of an investigation into the core nature of Thai dramatic literature, which I believe shares a social and cultural context with the current Thai society.

With my strong interest in traditional Thai theatre, and my belief in the potential of traditional literature to become an efficient source for the creation of a contemporary Thai script in my research, I hope that my study will not only be the initial step in creating an identity for the modern Thai theatre, but also a significant way to prompt Thai playwrights to discover an originality for their contemporary scripts that avoids a predominant reliance on the Western theatre.

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