

**The Reinvention of Thai Traditional-Popular Theatre:  
Contemporary *Likay* Praxis**

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**to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of  
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## Abstract

This thesis examines contemporary *likay* praxis in Thailand through processes influenced by socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the ideology and methodology of making contemporary *likay*, a tradition-based contemporary approach to Thai popular theatre, including development, transformation, theatrical techniques, rehearsal processes, productions, and audience reception. The thesis provides a background of the duality of court and popular theatre forms; a performance history of traditional *likay*; a construction of artistic elements, conventions, and functions; and a socio-political context for Thailand's modernisation period, which impacted theatre development. An examination of contemporary urban conditions is conducted, which offers new creative and possibly alternative forms of thinking about traditional-popular performance, particularly contemporary *likay*, explored through examples of contemporary *likay* performances.

This study of contemporary *likay* praxis uses interviews with dramatists, practitioners and scholars, and documentary research. I investigate how the contemporary theatre troupes utilise the intra-cultural, inter-cultural and transcultural theatrical aspects, the format of hybridisation of Thai performing arts and the relevance of Western artistic to Thai theatre in their working process in reinventing *likay* performance, especially, Makhampom's contemporary *likay* productions. Analysis of *likay* reinvention or contemporary *likay* performance demonstrates the way that dramatists bridge traditional and contemporary, rural and urban theatre practices. I also demonstrate reflexive ethnography and practice-led research, in which I reflect on personal experiences in practising and performing both conventional and contemporary *likay* performances from 2001 to the present. The thesis is categorised into two key areas: the first part, highlighted in Chapters 1-3, reflects the socio-politic-economic contexts of Thai society, which shaped the cultural formation of the Thai theatre revolution. The second part focuses on contemporary *likay* practice and praxis from the 1990s to 2010, demonstrated in Chapters 4-6.

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#### Clip 2: *Ok Khaek*

Available at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7-1er6nqwM>> [Accessed 10 August 2012]

#### Clip 3: *Ok Khaek Ok Tua*

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#### Clip 5: Comedic Scene

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#### Clip 6: *Lukthung* Concert

Available at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOMUY5CwVr4>> [Accessed 29 November 2012]

## **DVD 2: Makhampom's Contemporary *Likay* Performances**

**The copyright belongs to Makhampom Theatre Troupe and Pradit Prasatthong (a written permission of this use is provided in appendix 3)**

### **Clip 1:** An example of a freezing technique

This clip is edited and modified from the video recording of *Suek Mueang Prae* (2004) performed by Makhampom Theatre Troupe at Thailand National Theatre, Bangkok.

### **Clip 2:** A clownish villainess exhibits sexual attack a hero.

This clip is edited and modified from the video recording of *Suek Mueang Prae* (2004) performed by Makhampom Theatre Troupe at Thailand National Theatre, Bangkok.

### **Clip 3:** An introductory scene that the main characters introduce themselves holding over-sized tools.

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This clip is edited and modified from the video recording of *The Message* (2008) performed by Makhampom Theatre Troupe at Lido Multiplex Movie House, Bangkok.

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## Introduction

### Rationale for Study

Having been raised in both rural and urban environments, I experienced traditional, folk, popular and contemporary performances. Since my mother is a huge fan of Thai traditional performance, particularly *likay*, I have always accompanied her to see *likay* since I was a little child, and she has provided me great opportunities to know and talk to *likay* performers. When I studied at primary and high-school levels in Bangkok, I obtained the opportunity to learn, practise and perform in varieties of traditional-folk Thai performances such as singing *phleng phuen baan* (folk song) and *lukthung* (country) songs. However, these kinds of performances are considered performances for rural people. Urban students or children from well-to-do families should learn ballet, piano, and English or pop songs. When I was a teenager, therefore, I sometimes concealed my genuine preference for *lukthung*, *likay* and other traditional folk performance.

During my university studies, I learned, practised, and trained in various kinds of contemporary performances which exploited Western theatrical techniques, alongside being a volunteer and guest performer in professional *likay* troupes. Since completing my M.A thesis, ‘Semiotics of Likay in Globalised Age, in 2002, I have been working as a lecturer in the Department of Speech Communication and Performing arts, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Apart from my teaching job, I have kept practicing and performing *likay* in both conventional and contemporary troupes. Furthermore, I witnessed that artists, who are competent in both traditional and contemporary performances, are often appreciated by audiences. As a professional singer singing for middle class audiences from 1997-2002, I realised that the audience was often surprised and impressed when I sang traditional folk and *lukthung* (Thai country) songs along with English and classical Thai songs. Therefore, I ceased to hide my genuine taste because I learned how to perform the folk popular arts combining them with Western and contemporary elements to suit the urban audiences. This awareness of the combination of popular and contemporary artistic elements within contemporary

Thai cultures has become the basis for my research into contemporary *likay* performance.

*Likay* is a well-known folk (popular) theatre style in Thailand. The performance combines spoken text, dance, song, music, ornate costumes, and decorations. The performers improvise their verses and dialogues following a scenario told by a director or storyteller. However, it is not widely popular among a middle class or intellectual audience, since it is stigmatised as a theatre for the working class and suited only to popular taste. This label seems to be just a social discourse, though, not a problem of *likay* practice.

I realise that *likay*, both its form and content, maintains the spirit of Thai entertainment that its elements are borrowed and applied in main stream Thai television drama. Additionally, *likay* performance can be performed in the contemporary style of *lakon wethi* (stage theatre), which communicates a contemporary message with *likay* forms in terms of traditional popular theatre reinvention, to suit contemporary audiences whose tastes are influenced by urbanisation, westernisation, and globalisation. This assumption can help explain how *likay*, traditional-popular theatre, can be reinvented with contemporary content and studied within a contemporary context.

Contemporary *likay* has come to the forefront of attention among middle-class and intellectual audiences when it was introduced. Contemporary *likay* serves to point out the reinvented traditional theatre by embracing interdisciplinary perspectives of a living theatre. There are a number of modern Thai theatre groups who are interested in experimenting with a new style of *likay* to serve and intrigue a contemporary audience. Makhampom Theatre Troupe<sup>1</sup> is the most prominent of contemporary theatre groups in Thailand which have produced this kind of contemporary *likay* so far, expecting to continue this tendency in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Makhampom Theatre Troupe was founded in 1980, as a non-profit organisation heavily using drama as a main tool for human and social developing. The Makhampom Foundation was accredited in November 2004. As a foundation, Makhampom is enabled to undertake program activities with Thai governmental and international agencies requiring formal legal status, also to develop theatre form which combines traditional and folk theatres with modern theatre to address contemporary issues. Makhampom's theatre works have become one of the main exponents of Thai contemporary theatre movement. The troupe is a pioneer who employed folk theatrical elements in its tradition-based creations (see Chapter 3). Since 1996 Makhampom studied and produced a number of contemporary *likay* productions for new audiences such as middle class audiences, foreigners, artists, the media and local communities. Makhampom's contemporary *likay* brings Thai theatre arts into a people's media in this globalised society.

I will investigate how the contemporary theatre troupes utilise the intra-cultural, inter-cultural and transcultural theatrical aspects, the format of hybridisation of Thai performing arts and the relevance of Western artistic to Thai theatre in their working process in reinventing *likay* performance, especially, Makhampom's contemporary *likay* productions.

This study goes beyond the reinvention of traditional Thai theatre by mixing Thai literature and classical performance with Western-style contemporary stage performance where both genres are considered arts for educated people. Analyses of *likay* reinvention or contemporary *likay* performance, on the other hand, can demonstrate the way that dramatists bridge traditional and contemporary, rural and urban theatre practices.

## **Statement of Research Aims**

The purpose of this doctoral project is to investigate the ideology and methodology of making contemporary *likay*. I principally scrutinise the background development, transformation, theatrical techniques, and rehearsing process, as well as the tradition-based contemporary methodologies of contemporary *likay* practices. The thesis will provide an explanation and interpretation of the contemporary urban conditions that I believe can offer a creative and alternative form of thinking about traditional performance. The first three chapters (Chapters 1-3) provide the narrative and argumentation of Thai theatre, both its historical accounts and its development. They include (1) the overview of the duality of court and popular theatre forms; (2) a comprehensive review of *likay* in a traditional style from its origin to the modern versions; (3) the comprehensive descriptions of Thai contemporary performance and Thai theatre in its contemporary cultural formats. These discussions are grounded in contemporary *likay* contributions. Part two (Chapters 4-6) consists of contemporary *likay* inauguration, dramaturgy, and praxis of Makhampom Theatre Troupe, in particular. They are (4) an onset of contemporary *likay* in Thailand; (5) the praxis of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* performance and its minor productions; and (6) major productions of Makhampom's contemporary *likay*.

Although there has been much research on the tradition-based contemporary or intercultural performance in Thailand that is put forward by contemporary dramatists and scholars, there is still an area that needs to be further explored; particularly, a contemporary *likay* form. I define contemporary *likay* performance as the mixture of intra- and intercultural techniques in performing arts, for example Western techniques, Eastern techniques, Thai folk, Thai conventional theatre, and Thai modern techniques, (East-West, global-local, modern-classic). Moreover, the stories of contemporary *likay* are modernised by employing social issues, incorporating political topics, and even applying Asian myth to expand the Thai middle class and Asian audiences.

Since the objective and goal of theatre reinvention in creating contemporary *likay* is as important as the production itself, I intend to carefully examine both the troupe's conceptual framework, which will indicate the precise principles behind each production, and investigate its process at every step. This study will present the underlying theoretical and practical praxis of contemporary *likay*, and its conditions anticipate the process of crafting new forms resulting from the intercultural and globalisation influences.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the significant elements in Thai performances and the key issues influencing their development, from cultural formation to contemporary construction?
  - What is the quality of Thainess and Thai culture that reflect upon and seen in Thai theatre?
  - Under which circumstances do people look at culture and think about where it should go; what is the policy; and to what extent does cultural ideology have an influence in Thailand?
2. What is the relationship between traditional Thai performance and contemporary Thai performance, and how do they influence each other?
  - Is a traditional performance in some ways unsatisfactory?
  - What are key issues of performance transposition between traditional and contemporary performance?

- What is the characteristic of tradition-based contemporary performance?
3. Why does *likay* remain one of Thailand's most popular theatrical forms, and how has *likay* had such a strong influence upon Thai drama?
    - Why do theatre practitioners choose *likay* to create contemporary productions in terms of traditional theatre reinvention?
  4. What are hybrid formats for contemporary *likay* dramaturgy and performance, and what, if any, are the underlying assumptions for such productions?
    - Which intracultural and intercultural theatre aspects have been used in contemporary *likay*? And what is the format of hybridisation of Thai performing arts and the relevance of foreign artistic practices to contemporary *likay* productions?
  5. Who make up the audiences of contemporary *likay* performance and why do they choose to see these performances?

Regarding these research questions, I would like to explore the whole picture of Thai performance, regarding its nature, artistic, and aesthetic elements, and the key factors of its development. Basically, this will provide a knowledge foundation of Thai performance from its beginning to a contemporary timeframe.

## **Research Methodology**

The core of my PhD research is an account of active participation, which brings me somewhere between ethnography and practice-as-research, since I have been involved in many conventional and contemporary *likay* productions as an actress, director, documentation staff and even audience. My study will be heavily informed by reflecting on, analysing and synthesising my personal experiences in both conventional and contemporary *likay* productions, so the core methodologies of this research would be 'reflexive ethnography' and practice-led research. Ellis & Bochner (2003: 211) explain reflexive ethnographies:



...the researcher's personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study. Reflexive ethnographies range along a continuum from starting research from one's own experience to ethnographies where the researcher's experience is actually studied along with other participants, to confessional tales where the researcher's experience of doing the study become the focus on investigation.

Alongside 'reflexive ethnographical methodology', 'practice-led research' is mainly used in this study in terms of practice leading to research insights. Taking consideration in this term, Linda Candy (2006: 1) suggests that 'practice-led research' is "concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice", whereas 'practice-based research' is an original investigation undertaken in order to new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice". The author explains further that "(If the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led. If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based (Cohen, 2006: 3). My experience in practising and performing conventional and contemporary *likay* performance from 2001 to 2008 and as a director of a contemporary *likay* production in 2006 can be seen as a process of practice-led research. Through these methodologies, I will analyse contemporary *likay* performances as well as my own production as follows:

Contemporary *likay* performances from other contemporary theatre troupes (Chapter 4)

1. *Likay Faust* (2002) by Moradokmai Theatre
2. *Chalawan: The Likay Musical* (2006) by Patravadi Theatre
3. *Likay Française: The Island of Slaves* (2007) by Kriangsak Silakong
4. *Sudsakorn* (2010) by Jitti Chompee

Minor Productions of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* and my own production (Chapter 5)

5. *The Winner* (2007a) at Phukhao Thong
6. *The Winner* (2007b) at Rachaprasong Road
7. *The Winner* (2007c) at Pattaya
8. *Chan Rak Thoe Samoe Ma Took Natee* (I Have Always Love You, 2006) by Sukanya Sompiboon

Major performances of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* (Chapter 6)

9. *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001)
10. *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003-2004)
11. *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006)
12. *Naga Wong* (2005-2006)
13. *The Message* (2007-2008)
14. *Likay Akaoni* (2009-2010)

These contemporary *likay* productions are analysed using a reflexive method in terms of memory-based recollection of data and note taking and secondary analysis of existing data (audiovisual recordings, reports, reviews, and articles). Interviews of theatre scholars, practitioners – conventional *likay* performers, contemporary *likay* directors, dramaturges and actors, theatre critics and columnists – were conducted. Questionnaires<sup>2</sup>, which were completed by 40 Japanese audiences, have been important for this thesis in terms of international audiences. Other features of qualitative research conducted, such as public and unpublic dramatic texts, programmes, photographs are included. The documentary sources, resources and archives were taken from both the libraries in UK and Thailand as well as publications provided via the Internet.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In this section, I would like to put together theories and concepts which are applied to the thesis. Following my specific questions, I have divided the topics and sources of my thesis as a foundation from which to reflect, impose, critique, and contribute to the status of contemporary *likay* performance. From the outset, interdisciplinary approaches are brought into the studies of traditional theatre. Patrice Pavis (2001) says that there are two broad areas within 'Theatre Studies' which have been characterised as interdisciplinary. The first concerns approaches inspired by the human and social sciences, and cultural studies. The second concerns artistic practices that may be described as interartistic, intermedial, and intercultural.

In terms of interdisciplinary of Theatre Studies, I identify both socio-cultural factors and artistic practices which influence each other. Thailand's cultural formation can be

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<sup>2</sup> A template of questionnaire is provided in appendix 4.

analysed through parallel and dichotomous structures in court and popular theatre forms, which are the consequences of imperialism, Siamisation, Cultural Revolution, and Western academic style. These aspects are the fundamental points which shape the analysis of contemporary *likay*. A contemporary framework, combining different axes of time and context, as well as genre and style of theatre, was created to be a model of contemporary status. The strategy underlying these ideas was to explore Thai performance from past to present with a focus on the contemporary, and to apply them to an investigation of Thai performance productions and receptions. It can be said that only through careful acclimatisation to Thai performance culture can the researcher understand its approach to adaptation, adoption, and reinvention, as well as the *why* and *how* it should be explored.

The flexibility and dynamism of theatre forms across the difference genres attest to their interrelation in content, style, idea, taste as well as aesthetic, for instance, which can reflect Thai cultural performance, from past to present day. The relevance of contemporary Thai performance to disciplines concerned with issues of production and reception, genre transformation and transposition will be closely examined. Such factors as historical interpretation, nationhood, aesthetic ideology, political ideology, class, modernity, nostalgia, ritual, popular, commercial and even mass media will also be considered.

In terms of a tradition-based contemporary theatre, this project will cover various dimensions, for example, the treatment of time in the performance: past, present, future. Then, context: ritual, popular, commercial. Next, genre and style: traditional and contemporary, respectively. In fact, it is not possible to study these features along only one axis or in just one context. Therefore, an essential part of my research project will explore productions of contemporary *likay* performances which are influenced by those factors.

In the scheme of Thai performance, records of popular theatre are fewer than those of classical or court theatre. *Pakkai Lae Bai Ruea: Wha Duay Karn Sueksa Prawatisart-Wannakam Ton Ratanakosin* (Pen and Sail: Studies of Literature and History in the Early Bangkok Period), written by Nidhi Eoseewong (2000), is an important source that focuses on popular Thai literature from Ayutthaya (1350-1767) to the beginning of the Ratanakosin Period (1782-1852), and reflects upon the socio-economical and socio-

political contexts of Thai society. I also found other sources that document the history of Thai dance, music, and dramatic arts. *Rong Ram Tham Phleng: Dontri Lae Natasin Chao Siam* (Singing, Dancing and Making Song, Music and Dance of Siamese People) by Sujit Wongthes (2008) suggests that Thai music, dance, and drama derived and developed from traditional performance within Siam and Southeast Asian countries before the influence of Indian culture, which was adopted by the court to fit into its tradition of divine kingship. Patravadi Phuchadaphirom's (2007) book *Wattanatham Banthoeng Nai Chat Thai Rawang 2491 to 2500* (Thai Entertainment Culture between 1948 to 1957) provides essential details about Thai theatre development from 1948-1957, the period after the ruling system changed from absolute monarchy to constitutional democracy. The author suggests that previous writing about the paradigm shift of Thai entertainment have been restricted by Phibun Songkhram's cultural policy, which seems to be a sufficient assumption. She further addresses that this change has necessarily contributed to other factors in Thai society.

Another book embracing the ground work of development of theatre in Thailand is *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand: The Process of Development and Modernization*, by Mattani Rutnin (1996). It provides fertile debates about Thai dance, drama, and theatre from the ancient times to the present through various significant influences, for example, the predominance of the royal family, Western influences, political impact, and Cultural Revolution, as well as contemporary Thai theatre. Although this book covers various aspects of Thai theatre from the past to the present, it does not take folk and popular theatre into account adequately.

The evolution of Thai theatre is strongly related to politic factors that are consistent with socio-cultural hegemony and dichotomy, seen as a process and result of Siamisation, contributions of Thainess, and the Cultural Revolution. In regard to this discourse, the essential sources are *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand Today* (1989) by Craig Reynolds, *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand* (2010) edited by Rachel Harrison and Peter Jackson, and "The Construction of Mainstream Thought on 'Thainess' and the 'Truth' Constructed by 'Thainess'", an article written by Saichol Sattayanurak (n.d.). These source texts demonstrate the Siamisation and nationalist ideology of Thai leaders which had a great impact on the theatrical forms.

In terms of the Cultural Revolution, Jiraporn Wittayasakpan (1992) has examined theatre in Thailand during the Phibun Period (1938-1944 and 1948-1957) in her doctoral dissertation *Nationalism and the Transformation of Aesthetic Concept: Theatre in Thailand during the Phibun Period*. This source outlines the concept of how politics and government had an influence upon Thai performance, and its content and style in particular. It also provides information about how theatre or performance adjusts itself through this regulation. Furthermore, Ubonrat Siriyuvasak's work "Cultural Control and Globalized culture" (2000), which was inspired by Jiraporn Wittayasakpan's dissertation, highlights on the nationalist ideology of a famous leader of Thai government, Phibun Songkhram, which had a great impact on the Thai theatrical form. She discusses how Thai society is ambivalent to modern forms of mass media such as fiction, drama, and the performing arts. Besides this, she also analyses the role of the state in censorship.

In terms of understanding the concept of a Thai aesthetic, Mattani Rutnin (1983) offers practical information in her presented paper "Transformation of the Thai Concepts of Aesthetic". It shows the relevance of Thai aesthetics and Buddhism, concepts of aesthetics in classical Thai dance-drama, influences from India or Hinduism, and also a transformation of the concepts of aesthetics in Thai dance-drama in the modern age. All of these issues potentially reflect on Thai contemporary performance. According to the Thai aesthetic concept, Nidhi Eoseewong (1995) points out in *Khon, Carabao, Nam Nao Lae Nang Thai* (Khon, Carabao, Still Water and Thai Movies) that an aesthetic virtue of (Thai) popular theatre is that the good characters must manifest their quality in their outlook, i.e., their persona, costume, physical appearance, and speech. They symbolise ideal human beings, while the antagonists must demonstrate their evil/bad quality in contradiction to the protagonists in order to reveal the dark human instinct. These are well reflected in the romantic content of Thai theatre. Other characteristics of popular theatre that connect to this romantic formula of melodrama are presented in "Popular Theatre: a Contradiction in Terms?" written by Bim Mason in the book *Popular Theatres?: Papers from the Popular Theatre Conference, Liverpool John Moores University*, edited by Ros Merkin (1994). Mason suggests the key elements in popular theatre, which are direct contact, participation, spectacle, craft, emotions, comedy, sex, horror, accessibility, and freedom.

Popular theatre in this thesis is informed by the sense of mass-popular or commercial-popular entertainment which is seen as a flexible theatrical form. This term is distinguished from theatre of people or theatre of oppression. Conventional *likay* performance can be called ‘popular tradition theatre’, which is placed in the middle between ‘folk traditional theatre’ and ‘court traditional theatre’ (Brandon, 1967: 85-86). Details and examples are in Chapter 1.

## ***Likay Studies***

*Likay* history as well as its evolution was the most frequent research topic in the earlier readings in 1980s. Followed by, *likay* functions as folk and popular performance and its artistic configurations have been repeatedly reflected. These aspects of research outcome are insufficient for analysing modern and contemporary *likay*. I, therefore, will fill the gap and provide the further knowledge about *likay* performance in this thesis by extending the information of socio-political aspects, socio-economical features and socio-cultural perspectives which influence to *likay*. Furthermore, I will demonstrate *likay* aesthetic elements as well as its relation to television’s soap drama in the discussion.

Fundamentally, I will draw upon four detailed studies, “*Likay: A note on The Origin, Form and Future of Siamese Folk Opera*” by Michael Smithies (1975), *Likay: A Popular Theatre in Thailand* by Surapone Virulrak (1980), *Likay, The Thai Popular Theatre Form and its Function within Thai Society* by Gary Carkin (1984), and *Semiotics of Likay in a Globalised Age* by Sukanya Sompiboon (2002), as key sources of this discussion. To analyse contemporary *likay*, Makhampom’s contemporary *likay*, in particular, I will draw from and upon Richard Barber’s doctoral thesis<sup>3</sup>, titles *Performing Praxis, Community Culture, and Neo-Traditionalism: A Study of Thailand’s Makhampom Theatre Group* (2007).

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<sup>3</sup> In Chapters 5 and 6, I will draw upon Richard Barber’s considerations on a great number of factors which foster Makhampom troupe to contribute contemporary *likay*: (i) it represents a living tradition; (ii) it is rooted in folk sensibility, both in terms of artists and audience; (iii) it incorporates various elements of the national Thai aesthetic, such that it looks Thai; (iv) it is a hybrid form in itself, deriving from multiple forms and codified by court theatre, and assimilating various elements of indigenous and foreign performance genres; (v) it personifies Makhampom’s culture of fun, with its self-deprecating, comic character; (vi) it is fundamentally subaltern, with its foundation as an extension of rural socio-economic structure; (vii) it has a recognised efficacy potential, which has been utilised for state hegemonic coercion and propaganda; and (viii) it offers the performer opportunities for personal gratification via the popular aesthetic of the *likay* artist (Barber, 2007: 257).

*Likay* history as well as its evolution, a function as folk and popular performance and its artistic configurations are popular areas of previous studies (Smithies, 1975; Virulrak, 1980, 1995; Likhithkun, 1981, Carkin, 1984; Possakrisana, 1995; Sitthithanyakit, 1995; Phraiphibunyakit, 1995, Sompiboon, 2000). Through academic record, the first PhD dissertation focusing on *likay* was written by Virulrak (1980), who provides a very comprehensive and detailed description of *likay* from its beginning (pre-1767 in the Ayutthaya period) to 1980. Virulrak's study offers three main topics of *likay*: history of *likay* in perspective, the constitutional elements of *likay* performance, and other significant information about *likay*. Apart from his fieldwork, the main primary sources he uses are: *San Somdet* (Letter of the princes, 1962), the letters and replies between Prince Dhamrong Rachanubhab (1862-1943), father of Thai history and Prince Naritsaranuwattiwong (1863-1947), Thailand's greatest artist; and *Karn Lalen Khong Thai* (Thai Recreation, 1997) by Montri Tramot (1900-1995), a Thai classical musician and national artist in Thai classical music in 1985. These two elemental collections are drawn upon in an attempt to rediscover and revise development of *likay* in Chapter 2. Although Wongthes (2006) states that the collection of *likay* written by Virulrak (1980) is the most complete information on the developing history of *likay*<sup>4</sup> and it embraces all elementary detail, it is chronological in its comprehensive description and serves a primarily descriptive function, and is limited in its argumentation. Afterwards, Virulrak developed his previous work in his later work, and offered further information about audiences' reactions and responses to *likay* broadcast on television (1995). Slightly different from the aforementioned source, the *likay* article written by Smithies (1975) offers a comparison between *likay* and court theatre, which is very significant in terms of historiography, in particular, that produced by court scholars.

Next, the dissertation written by Carkin (1984) has determined the meaning of *likay* and its function in Thai society. Chapters include *likay* history and development, the context and content of *likay* in its nature, and performance elements. His writing about the historical aspects of *likay* are as remarkable as the popular functions of it through Thai society, especially, the three doctrines of Thai beliefs: Animism, Buddhism, and Hinduism which are reflected by and reflected on *likay* performance. These ideas can be employed critically in the intersection between aesthetics of popular theatre and Thai

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<sup>4</sup> His study is drawn from the ancient time of *likay* until 1980, and it is used as groundwork. However, I draw upon this in terms of *likay* from its original until the twenty-first century.

beliefs. Taking into consideration an evolving process, Carkin (1984: 3) points out that his *likay* work is an attempt to build an understanding of *likay* in Thai social structure, and determine what and how *likay* achieves within the parameters of Thai society. Although Carkin claims that his work on *likay* builds upon previous studies, there are a few different aspects between Virulrak's work and previous research. Virulrak (1980) divides the origin and development of *likay* into five phases<sup>5</sup>, while Carkin (1984) separates the form in six parts<sup>6</sup>, drawing on Virulrak's findings. Having embraced all previous studies, however, all the topics can be divided into two core categories, following aesthetic aspects and socio-political influences.

Of somewhat lesser importance is the contribution written by Possakrisana (1995), which provides a brief introduction to *likay*. Similarly, the three pocket books about *likay* (Likhithkhun, 1981; Sitthithanyakit, 1995; and Phraiphibunyakit, 1995) are based on Virulrak's work, hypothesising *likay* historical development and its artistries in a simplified form. My own research, "Semiotics of *Likay* in Globalised Age" (2000), embraces both *likay* historical development and the semiotics of theatrical motifs, and its modification through modernisation. This ethnographic research, in which the researcher took the roles of participant observer and amateur performer, covers mainly theatrical elements and audience reception. However, at that time, there were no other new types of *likay*, such as the professional children troupes which exist today. Although this thesis provides current content, it is still somewhat restricted in its argumentation and discussion, especially regarding Thai cultural formation. As valuable as these publications are, they serve a primarily descriptive function. Viewing *likay* in

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<sup>5</sup> The first period deals with the origins of *likay* which existed before the end of the Ayutthaya Period in 1767 until the period of secularization in 1881; the second period presents the *yikay sipsongphasa* from 1881 until the second half of the 1890s; the third period is *likay songkhruang*, starts from the opening of the first public *likay* theatre during the second half of the 1890s until the Cultural Revolution in 1942; the fourth period is *natadontri*, another name of *likay* covers the Cultural Revolution periods from 1942-1944; and the fifth period is *likay* development after the end of WWII up to the present day (1980) of the thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Carkin divides the historical development of *likay* into 6 parts: (1) the origin of *likay* (pe-1767 to the 1820s), the inception in Muslim chant and practice in Thailand; (2) the second period (from the 1820s to the 1880s), the popularised of *likay* form, from ritual to secular performance; (3) the third period (from the 1880s to the 1890s), the transformation from *yikay* and *suat kharuhat* to *yikay sipsongphasa*; (4) the fourth period (from the 1890s to 1942), the period of *likay songkhruang* and radio *likay*; (5) the fifth period (from 1942 to 1944), *likay* in the period of Cultural Revolution; and (6) the sixth period (from 1944 to the present) after the Cultural Revolution until the 1980s (the period of Carkin's dissertation had been done) (Carkin, 1984: 16-26).



terms of a commoner<sup>7</sup>'s entertainment, early *likay* studies usually deal with the comedy and witty improvisation of the form, as well viewing it as a pressure-releasing tool for the audience. This previous research has rarely undertaken the analysis of the socio-political contexts and cultural significance of popular theatre, or the transfer and interrelation of content from *likay* to other media.

Recent studies of *likay* reveal a great number of alternative hypotheses and analysis of *likay*'s individuality, and the reciprocal influences between *likay* and society. The studies are clearly divided into two approaches: the traditional professional *likay* forms and the contemporary amateur ones. The former type, mostly comprising MA theses in Thailand, provide more in-depth coverage of new aspects such as *likay* troupes and predominant factors relating to *likay* presence in the twenty-first century: these include *likay* families, succession and community; *likay* artists and the significant factors related to their success and failure; *likay* as an 'edutainment' performance and rapport-contributing tool; the social significances and the cultural transmission through *likay*; and the relationship between the mass media and *likay* performance (Yongchai, 1997; Pongwat, 1997; Dokkhaeo, 2000; Limkarnchanapong, 2000; Khatnak, 2002; Phraiprueg, 2002; Sinsomrot, 2003; Tansakool, 2004; Deekhuntod, 2008). Despite the various aspects of *likay* studies, there is little discussion about popular aesthetic approaches which connect *likay* to socio-economic conditions of performance, class-based hierarchies and prejudices.

## **Intercultural and Hybrid Theatre**

There exists a rich body of research on intracultural, intercultural, transcultural and hybrid theatre, both theoretical frameworks and practices. Some provide studies of 'East meets West' as well as theatre hybridisation, while others present the means of theatre revitalisation and reinvention, coming together between traditional and modern formats, with regard to their conventional cultures. In analysing traditional theatre reinvention, I apply intracultural, intercultural, transcultural, syncretic, and hybrid theatrical concepts from Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (1990) *By means of performance: intercultural studies of theatre and ritual*; Patrice Pavis (1992) *Theatre at the*

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<sup>7</sup> In this thesis the terms 'commoner' and 'common people' are employed to characterise the people who do not belong to the royal family, nobility, elitism and upper class.

*Crossroads of Culture*, and *The Intercultural performance Reader* (1996); Erika Fischer-Lichte's work (1996) "Interculturalism in Contemporary Theatre"; Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert's article "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis" (2002); Richard Schechner (2006) "Global and Intercultural Performances" in *Performance Studies: An introduction*; and Christopher Balme (1999) *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama* as main sources.

### **Intercultural and Intracultural Performance**

There are two significant concepts in performance encounter and exchange: 'intercultural' and 'intracultural'. Intercultural performance is "a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions" (Lo and Gilbert, 2002: 36). The theories of intercultural performance include a binaries model between 'top-down' and 'back-and-forth' directions. The first theme can be seen in Patrice Pavis's famous 'Hourglass' model. It demonstrates a vertical communication from the top to the bottom, from a source culture to a target culture which is considered as a one-way cultural flow based on a hierarchy of privilege and it cannot demonstrate other collaborative forms of intercultural exchange (Lo and Gilbert, 2002: 41-42). This model has been challenged by other alternative means of intercultural performance. Three other models are, firstly, Bharucha's 'Pendulum' (1993, 241) which presents reciprocity of intercultural theatre and its two-way exchange; a weight suspended from the axis swing sideways or in a back-and-forth movement from its equilibrium position, demonstrating the equal exchange, which allows for circulation in both directions between reciprocating cultures. Secondly, Lo and Gilbert's childhood toy found in Australia or Malaysia; it is a disk suspended between two pieces of elastic wherein intercultural exchange is represented as two-way; "positioned at the tension between source cultures, intercultural exchange is characterised both by gain and by loss, attraction and disavowal" (Lo and Gilbert 2002: 44-45). Lastly, a new concept presented as my idea is to turn Pavis's hourglass from a vertical perspective to a horizontal direction that allows the theatrical elements from the two sides of the bulbs mutually flowing and linking between each other.

Intracultural performance is a sub-genre of intercultural performance, distinguishing it from extracultural performance (Lo and Gilbert, 2002: 37-38). While extracultural performance designates theatre exchanges in a binary pole along a West-East or North-

South axis, intracultural performance is an internal diversity and interaction or the coexistence of regional and local cultures within the boundaries of a particular region or nation (Bharucha, 2000: 9 as cited in Lo and Gilbert, 2002: 38). While intercultural theatre involves a journey outward from self to a spatially or geographically distant other, crossing racial, national, ethnic or group boundaries, intracultural theatre is inward by borrowing elements within one's culture. Intracultural journey crosses time boundaries, but stays within racial, national, or ethnic group boundaries (Brandon, 1990: 95-96). The intracultural model can be also seen as the reinvention and transformation from traditional performances to the tradition-based contemporary styles that one artist looks back through time for searching the familiarisation of that society in the past that might be lost in the present time in order to rediscover and exemplify ethnic characteristic in traditional theatre (ibid.).

### **Post-traditional and Post-Modern Concepts**

The prefix 'post' is used to identify the coexistence or combination of two theatrical elements in a contemporary sense. Definitions of post-traditional and post-modern theatre are related and overlap to each other. Both are seen as the theatre of deconstruction in which the binaries and paradox of theatrical genre, style, content between traditional and modern, or local and global elements are combined (Lehmann, 2006: 25 and Pavis, 1992: 48) in order to recuperate the theatre form from the modernist domination.

In this thesis, I employ the term 'post-traditional' performance to emphasise a hybrid theatre form which is seen as a restoratively traditionalist theatre; the combination between elements of traditional Thai and modern (Western) performances by means of tradition-based contemporary performance. This aesthetic amalgamation is able to connect theatrical and artistic traditions as Thailand's heritage and uniqueness to the global theatre forms. The term 'post-modern' performance is focused on the content that goes beyond modernist principles or somehow ironically rejects those principles as such, satirical stories about capitalism and materialism, negative results of modernisation. Furthermore, issues of discrimination, such as gender, race, class, education are often applied. However, as a tradition-based contemporary performance, a contemporary *likay* performance uses both principles of post-traditional and post-

modern performance embracing the conventional form of *likay* and modern theatrical elements and demonstrating social concerns in its content.

In analysing tradition-based contemporary practice, contemporary *likay*, in particular, the amalgamation of Eastern traditional theatre qualities in *Theatre East and West: Perspectives toward a Total Theatre* by Leonard Pronko (1967) and Western modern stage-play characteristics in Steve Tillis's article "*East, West, and World Theatre*" (2003), are applied. Contemporary *likay* can be described as the combination between two perspectives: the former includes audience participation, total integration of theatre resources, and stylised performance techniques, and the latter employs an intellectual rationale for its content, selectivity in its deployment of resources, and realistic performance techniques.

I also investigate hybrid theatre, an aspect of intra- and intercultural procedure, as a post-traditional structure, and the cultural negotiations which occur within the influence of localisation and globalisation. Furthermore, when it comes to theatre hybridisation, the interrelation between performances genres, namely traditional, folk, classical, ritual, commercial, popular, and modern are crucial. These genre interconnections are shown in 'spheres of performance genre' by Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swann, and Phillip B. Zarrilli (1990). I also found that conceptualisation of comparative study of major traditions of theatrical theory (ancient Greek, India and Japan) in "Aristotle's Poetics, Bharatamuni's Natayasastra, and Zeami's Treatise: Theory as Discourse" by Graham Ley (2000) useful because this comparative study of the paradigms underlying other geographically traditional theatrical aspects can be a tool used in exploring and reinventing Thai traditional theatre.

Chetana Nagavajara (2004) addresses the thought that the Brechtian dramaturgy is not at all too remote from traditional Thai theatre. His studies "the aesthetics of interruption" and "the aesthetics of discontinuity" provide a rich source of comparable approaches between Thai traditional theatre, specially, *likay* and Brechtian theatrical principles. In his point of view, performers would have to be versatile, able to shift from singing to dancing, and then to spoken dialogue. This is the underlying artistic principle in what he calls 'aesthetics of interruption'. As with Brecht's Alienation technique, this interruption aims to convince audiences that they are watching a play, not a real life situation. The empathy and sympathy between the audience and actors might be broken

down. *Brecht and East Asian Theatre: the Proceedings of a Conference on Brecht in East Asian theatre*, edited by Tatlow and Wong (1982), argues that only after the fourth wall is broken down can the principles of acting before an audience be clearly established, and the techniques employed by Brecht be justified in terms of a stage production to achieve the alienation effect (such as singing, reading out loud, sub-title screening, self-introduction of characters and commentary).

## **Contemporary Transformation and Globalisation**

More recent and emerging studies in contemporary theatre and the influences of globalisation are also considered (Koanantakool, 1982; Eoseewong, 1995; Dowsey, 2002; Nathalang, 2004; Diamond, 2006; and Cohen, 2007). These studies take into consideration the transformation of traditional and contemporary theatre, new interpretation of characters in a contemporary world, and the transposition of classical literature to contemporary stage play. Eoseewong (1995) clarifies an important critique of the present-day transformation and transposition of Thai theatre in *Khon, Carabao, Nam Nao Lae Nang Thai* (Khon, Carabao, Still Water and Thai Movies). The writer discusses the idea that popular theatre in the past could deal with any new genre as long as the old content of everyday experience had a place to fit in. Thai movies, or in our case television drama, in its zenith was similar to other genres of popular theatre such as *likay* and *nang talung*. They were new artistic forms (during their time) that contained old messages of the life-world of the peasantry.

New interpretations of plot lines and characters are also considered in contemporary performances. Siraporn Nathalang (2004) identifies the changes of Thai *chakchak wongwong*<sup>8</sup> serials in “Thai Folktale Drama on Television: Tradition and Modernity”. Several plots are more modern and special effects such as *Star Wars* movies are more used in order to please new generations of target audiences. Similarly, a feminist concept is used to explore the shifting perspective toward women’s roles in modern Thai culture, influenced by both Buddhist and Western ideals. Using Diamond’s (2006) “*Mae Naak* and Company: The Shifting Duality in Female Representation on the Contemporary Thai Stage”, I conceive of a new interpretation in contemporary *likay* in terms of tradition-based contemporary performance.

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<sup>8</sup> a kind of drama based on traditional Thai folktales

The transformation of folk theatre forms across the globe has become visible as an ordinary phenomenon nowadays. “Contemporary Wayang in Global Contexts” instructed by Cohen (2007) is a very good example of the transformation of traditional to modern performance in the contemporary period by employing an intercultural approach. The author presents that much of the most interesting contemporary Indonesian *wayang* work today is taking place along transnational axes. *Wayang* has been embraced by international artists and companies in order to tell idiosyncratic myths and celebrate the sacred and the ethereal. Paul Dowsey- Magog (2002) writes a brief introduction to the form and explains changes in contemporary performance of *nang talung*, a shadow puppet theatre of Southern Thailand, in “Popular Workers’ Shadow Theatre in Thailand.” In a case study, the author discusses current performance trends, that is, “...*Nang talung* may be moving away from a traditional and instructional format to a densely woven, popular, contemporary entertainment. This progression is reflected in its audiences...” (206). Following this, Paritta Koanantakool (1982) also studies *nang talung* to analyse the relationship between the drama and the surrounding social conditions by taking a new phenomenon as the theme for analysis. This paper was presented in “Traditional and Modern Styles in Southern Thai Shadow Puppet Theatre Form”. One of the results is that there is a change in *nang talung* theatre which appears to correlate with changes in the social setting of the performances. I will draw on these studies to analyse the changing elements and processes of Thai traditional theatre forms which serve a contemporary period and contemporary audiences.

## **Audience Analysis**

Audiences are an exceptionally important part of every kind of performance. It can be said that “without audiences, there would be no performance” (Sayre and King 2003: 49). Moreover, there is no restriction on type of audiences. These are varying throughout the demography: gender, age, education, profession, socio-economy, belief, attitude, taste, etc. These factors vary according to time, context, genre, style, and even place.

Therefore, I will investigate contemporary Thai audiences whose tastes are influenced by globalisation and urbanisation. I aim principally to analyse the aspirations of contemporary *likay* audiences, who are typically middle class or part of an intellectual elite, so as to reflect their responses and reactions to this new *likay* direction. Susan

Bennett draws on inseparability of production and reception in her book *Theatre Audiences: a Theory of Production and Reception* (1997). Since contemporary *likay* productions are targeted to the contemporary audiences, this concept is useful in exploring the characteristics of contemporary *likay* audiences and the reasons they choose to see this kind of performance.

Additionally John McGrath's (1981) "Behind the Clichés of Contemporary Theatre", in *A Good Night Out Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*, is very useful for audience analysis, particularly, in popular culture. McGrath has brought up the difference of value between the two main kinds of theatre audiences: *the educated* middle-class audience and *the philistine* working class audience. He also said that he did not accept the assumptions that art is universal, capable of meaning the same to all people; that the more 'universal' it is, the better it is; that the 'audience' for theatre is an idealised white middleclass, etc., person and that all theatre should be dominated by the tastes and values of such a person (3-4). He has given more interesting details of these issues in 'Mediating Contemporary Reality' (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> talk) which exemplifies some fairly generalised differences between the demands and tastes of bourgeois and working-class audiences, including comedy, music, variety, effect, immediacy, localism and sense of identity (with the performer) (54-59).

## **Thesis Organisation**

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1, "Thai Theatre of Duality: Court and Popular Form" will focus on the duality of Thai theatre and mutual influences between court and popular theater which led to the formulation of Thai theatre and its traces in the present. This provides the general and specific background of Thai theatre and also offers practical knowledge to better understand *likay*. Chapter 2, "Thailand's *Likay*: Review of *Likay* through the Popular History" will discuss conventional *likay* history, construction of artistic elements, conventions, and functions. The origin of *likay*, until the major paradigm shift in 1975, is the main basis of ancient *likay* and the period after that up to the present is a picture of its modernisation.

Chapter 3, "The Development of Modernised and Contemporary Thai Theatre: Intercultural Approach to Theatre Hybridity" will scrutinise the impact of cultural

control and patriotic theatre in the ‘Cultural Control’ period, working to explain the issue of ‘corrupted ideas’ which have continued to the present period. Despite stringent control by the state, *likay* thrived as the most popular theatre as opposed to the national theatre. This point will also be discussed. The development of contemporary Thai theatre will be the main purpose of this chapter by means of focusing on the creations and reinventions of ‘contemporary Thai productions’. The interplay between forms and contents of popular and contemporary forms, and the revitalisation of Thai traditional performance will be incorporated in the discussion. Consequently, the problems of perception and reception of Thai audiences through Thai traditional or popular performance will be investigated, in particular, the factors and influences which change audience tastes according to time and place. There have been many reworked theatre productions in Thailand. These kinds of theatre practices –called *revitalisation*, *reinvention* and *experimentation*– are categorised in contemporary works. One significant approaches of these ‘new types’ of performance is to combine traditional and local theatre with modern or Western conventions. Since many traditional theatre forms have declined because of a lack of audience, I am curious why traditional works ‘work’ in reworked productions. This chapter, therefore, will also analyse how traditional works are reworked in a modern social context, and in which direction these kinds of Thai theatre have developed. This knowledge will provide the groundwork for analyses of ‘contemporary’ *likay* in Chapters 4-6.

The purpose of Chapter 4, “Contemporary *Likay*: Tradition-Based Contemporary Theatre Contributions”, is to introduce Thai contemporary *likay*, in other words, *likay* productions which have made efforts to adjust some theatrical elements to suit urban or middle class audiences, as well as younger generations, by borrowing theatre motifs from varieties of genres such as classical, modern, and Western and combining them into new styles of *likay*. I will focus on the questions ‘which circumstances have made *likay* a major choice for adaptive or contemporary work and why?’ The documents, profiles and inspirations of theatre troupes involved in this work will be studied. This chapter will present theatrical motifs of conventional *likay*, which are flexibly adapted to contemporary *likay*. Characteristics of *khon chan klang* (middle class) audiences who are the main spectators of contemporary *likay* are closely analysed. Case studies of contemporary *likay* productions, which will be investigated, include *Likay Faust* (2002) by Janapakal Chandruang, a director of Moradokmai Theatre Group; *Chalawan: The Likay Musical* (2006) by Patravadi Mechudhon, a director of Patravadi Theatre Group;



*Likay Française: The Island of Slaves* (2007), a classic comedy of French theatre, by Kriengsak Silakong, a well-known Thai film festival director; and *Sudsakorn* (2010) by Jitti Chompee, a choreographer of contemporary dance.

Chapter 5, “Makhampom’s Contemporary *Likay* Praxis”, will embrace Makhampom’s praxis in *likay* performance, a process beyond practice. The troupe’s politics in practice and practice in politics, *likay* inaugurations and minor productions, and their *Likay* Academy School are also discussed. My contribution to contemporary *likay* as a dramaturge and director, which reflects Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* theoretical and practical conceptual frameworks, is elucidated. Correspondingly, I propose to investigate the major productions of Makhampom from 2001-2010 in Chapter 6, “Makhampom’s Contemporary *Likay* Praxis and Major Productions.” They demonstrated the troupe’s background of development, from the initial thoughts of the core members, prior to developing their own styles of performing contemporary *likay*, to the constant enhancement and transformation of its training and performance praxis, its theatrical aspects, its aesthetics, its techniques, and the current state of the performance. To meet those purposes, I focus on the performing analysis in the case studies through the following topics: (1) the multiple objectives conducted in contemporary *likay* productions (2) the formation of ideas on a dramaturgy (3) the script writing process and the process of making a performance (4) the production rehearsing processes (5) the performances’ venues, subsidies, and audiences, and (6) details of performing techniques and outcomes in each production.

## Chapter 1

### Thai Theatre of Duality: Court and Popular Form

Thai theatre in the twenty-first century can be viewed as a diverse combination of residue from the past and what is currently emerging. If we trace its development from the mid-1850s to the present, Thai theatre has been characterised by either reciprocity in the relations between its forms or competition amongst them. This has obviously led to changes in the forms, styles, and contents of performances and audience perceptions. Therefore, keen awareness of how contemporary forms of theatre have developed and been supported in modern-day Thailand is necessary.

In the more than 700 years since Thai performing arts began to be recorded, there has been continual change. From the early pre-Sukothai period (before 1238 AD) to the twenty-first century, many features have evolved and manifested their contributions to Thai culture and society. Common to early and recent studies of Thai theatre is the use of a chronology<sup>9</sup>, which includes the pre-modern, modern, and contemporary periods and covers the epochs of Thai dynasties. Moreover, many previously published theses and studies<sup>10</sup> have focused heavily on court theatre forms and on forms in contact with the West, as well as on the relationship of Thai theatre to other genres in Asia. This chapter, developed from those readings, will discuss further the duality of Thai theatre, as this pertains to court and popular forms. I will analyse cultural influences and contexts, socio-economic factors, and socio-political events, which have all influenced Thai theatre. This chapter attempts to present the characteristics, developments, functions, and status of court and popular theatre forms in terms of their mutualities and differences. It can be said that popular theatre has been insufficiently studied and that

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<sup>9</sup> Typically, the three periods which practically reflect Thai theatre and performing arts are used. Firstly, the 'pre-modern period', which covers the pre-Sukothai period (pre-1328), the Sukothai period (1328-1350), the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767), the Thonburi period (1767-1782), the reigns of King Rama I (1782-1809), II (1809-1824), and III (1824-1852) in the beginning of the Ratanakosin period. Secondly, there is the 'modern period', which embraces theatre history from King Rama IV (1852) to 1960s. The final period is the 'contemporary period', which presents Thailand's theatre from the second half of the twentieth century up to the present: the twenty-first century.

<sup>10</sup> (Faubion, 1956; Pronko, 1968, Virulrak, 1991, 1999; Rutnin, 1996; Mittinen, 1992; Wittayasakpan, 1992, 1997; Brandon, 1989, 1993; Kerdarunsuksri, 2001; and Puchadapirom, 2007)

any records that exist are in oral, rather than written form, communicated by people with no authority. By contrast, court performance, as well as the later theatre forms of the nobility, which were influenced by Western theatrical conventions and patronised by rulers and aristocrats, is widely studied in Thai academia. The argument I would like to make goes beyond acknowledgement of eulogies of the court and elite theatre forms that are acclaimed as ‘state theatre’ and said to represent Thainess. This chapter attempts to elucidate the terminology and features of popular Thai theatre that can at least provide well-balanced perspectives of Thai theatre’s development. These features are the background to contemporary Thai theatre, reflecting the mutual development of the court and popular theatre forms and illustrating further the aesthetic hegemony of popular Thai theatre in the contest that is Thailand’s cultural formation. This chapter, therefore, embraces the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts of the development of theatre in Thailand, which is seen, fundamentally, as a melting pot of arts, a mix of varied resources. Theatre’s function as ritual and entertainment is discussed, as are the characteristics of the court and popular theatre forms, Western influence, and the commercialisation of theatrical forms.

The discussion focuses on the following four key aspects:

1. Towards Thai Theatre: dynamics and multiculturalism
2. Courtly forms and later commercialisation
3. Non-court forms: popular theatre
4. Parallel and dichotomous structures in court and popular theatre form: aesthetic judgement

## **1. Towards Thai Theatre: Dynamics and Multiculturalism**

When discussing the foundations of Thai theatre, I find, first of all, that Thai theatre has been seen as a theatre of amalgamation and cultural cross-over, stemming from the Thai people’s willingness to change. This is in keeping with Bowers’s suggestion that Thailand is ‘a country of change’ (1956: 131). Such change has ensured that Thai arts are vivacious, vigorous, and dynamic (Bowers, 1956: 132). Reciprocal exchanges between the performing arts of different societies within Thailand, such as between rural and urban parts of the country, is evident. Although, in general, peasant and rural communities are considered resistant to change due to the political powers (rulers) that

repress them, Thai peasants and rural communities are rarely resistant to accepting and including some aspects of urban culture in their ways of life. Sujit Wongthes (2008: 10), the renowned Thai historian, explains this by pointing out that a propensity for accepting newness, exoticism, and modernism is a long-standing characteristic of Thai or Siamese culture. He explains that ancient Thailand was a 'Tribal Society' in which people scattered, settled, and individually developed in groups. Those tribes gradually formed a 'Peasant Society' that combined features of many other cultures with their own traditional way of life; theirs was a loosely-structured, conflict-avoiding society (Bell, 1982: 4 and Wallipodom, 1978: 176-177). The most significant characteristic of Thai peasant society was its enthusiastic and humble readiness to change, in the sense of 'acculturation', rather than 'assimilation'. Concurrently, peasant society generally preserved the cultural heritage of tribal societies as its parentage and basically tended to adopt and adapt new or modern traditions from urban society as it modernised its own traditions. Thai peasant society, therefore, had a tendency to accept the cultural ideals of Thai urban populations: the 'little tradition' or popular culture of rural society and the 'great tradition' or court culture of urban society had reciprocal influence on each other.

The 'great tradition', including a written language, was seen as a preserved culture and tended to be used and controlled by the elite, who were generally literate and authoritative; on the other hand, the 'little tradition' was seen as a set of local beliefs and practices, found in all human groups and communities, that were more flexible and/or changeable (Ashkenazi, 2003: 4). Village wisdom usually penetrated the court, and, in the same manner, the common people adopted myths that derived from the court for their own local purposes (Ashkenazi, 2003: 5). The circulation of two cultures was evident. The court used popular traditions, of which I will discuss the details later in this chapter, as its cultural foundation - but made them more refined and transferred its adaptations to rural peasant society. This exchange was not politically suppressed via enforced compliance, but it was reciprocal. Since the new creations resulted from an amalgamation of court and popular forms, rural peasant society easily accepted them.

Apart from the importance of the domestic amalgamation of artistic cultures in Thailand, foreign influence was also significant. Thai performances were greatly influenced by Indian, Southeast Asian, and indigenous Thai groups, as well as Westerners, who settled in Thailand; each played a vital role in the emergence and evolution of Thai performing arts. In other words, various nationalities and races who

have resided in Thailand, such as the Thai, Tai, Cambodian, Mon, Laotian, Vietnamese, Burmese, Malay, Chinese, and Westerners have acculturated to and absorbed distinctive features of one another's cultures and participated in the conglomeration of Thai culture. The broad conclusion to be drawn seems to be that all artistic works in Thailand, including the dramatic arts, have been commonly influenced by both domestic and imported elements and that Thailand can be called, therefore, a melting pot of arts.

The degree of foreign cultural influence on Thai performance has been varying and dynamic. Intracultural and intercultural approaches have been derived both from indigenous cultures and foreign forms. For example, Jukka O Miettinen, a theatre scholar (1992: 48), indicates that Khmer (Cambodian) was a very important source of dance traditions after Thailand conquered Angkor in 1431. What is more, the forcible capture and abduction of dancers during the wars of this era was another source of theatrical fusion in the region surrounding Thailand. Khmer court dancers were taken to Ayutthaya, while Thai dancers were abducted to Burma in the sack of Ayutthaya in 1767. Similarly, as Thai power expanded, many countries in Southeast Asia also adopted Thai dance (Miettinen, 1992: 48-54). Immigrants who had settled in Thailand - for example, Chinese, Laotians, and Cambodians - brought their own arts, such as music, dance, and theatre, with them for religious and recreational purposes (Virulrak, 1999a: 71) and distributed them to Thai artists. Srisak Wallipodom (1991: 18) explains that neither foreigners nor their arts were treated as second-class. Thai music and Thai songs with distinctive vocal tones from Laos, China, Cambodia, and Java were created as a result of such interactions. Such mixtures, even now, play an essential role in traditional Thai performing arts. These mixtures of artistic forms and elements exist in both court and popular theatres, in diverse modes, and serve purposes that I will analyse in the following section.

### **1.1 Diversity of Thai Theatre Modes**

Socio-political factors, socio-economic conditions, and theatrical constituents, such as audiences, content, purposes, venues, aesthetic standards, and genres of theatre, are the main factors that distinguish the genres of Thai performance.<sup>11</sup> However, there is no

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<sup>11</sup> Richmond, Zarrilli and Swann (1990: 10) divide a performance in general into five genres, which relate to one another, namely ritual or devotional, traditional or folk popular, classical, modern, and commercial

strict set of theatre genres and functions; they serve varied purposes while having reciprocal relationships. Some groups are distinguished chronologically (as traditional or modern forms), some are classified by geography (rural or urban), and some are differentiated by class (popular and court). All, however, may be divided into four genres - folk, popular, court, and modern - with two main functions: ritual and entertainment.

The first two genres of Thai theatre, folk and popular, are classified as theatre for the common audience, while the other two kinds of Thai theatre, court and modern (Western), are considered performances for the nobility and educated-middle class. Despite the fact that folk theatre, to a certain degree, relates to village rituals, whereas popular theatre has evolved as commercialised entertainment, there is a relationship between these two, in terms of content and taste. The popular form can be found in villages, either sponsored or paid for by audience admission charges, as commonplace entertainment and is to some degree similar to the folk form. Performance styles and stories might be taken from folktales, myths, and legends, which satisfy common audiences, who mostly attend performances purely for entertainment. However, when folk and popular forms borrow from each other, the latter form often predominates in theatrical elements and perceptions. Court theatre forms are seen as older accounts of the classical traditions that were performed in the inner-court, demonstrating the kings' regalia. The court form was influenced by Western theatre after the return of King Rama V and his fellows from European countries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became a newer theatre form - namely, modern theatre. Modern theatre emerged as more aristocratic theatre was performed at court and became an elite commercial form that was linked to the upper class and academics, especially those who had graduated in the West. However, the older court genre was preserved as part of Thai national heritage as the Western aspect of Thai theatre continued to evolve and as more contemporary trends took hold in educated circles, particularly academia.

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theatre; these genres are called a 'Sphere of Performance Genre.' Next, Brandon (1993: 234) classifies Thai theatre modes into four major types: village animist-influenced performances; court forms which refer to performances in the palace; modern popular genres; and modern spoken drama. Followed by Barber (2007: 191), Thai theatre can possibly be classified into the four modes of theatre: classical, folk, popular, and modern; these have been characterised by the process of adaptation and assimilation.

Accordingly, the four types of Thai theatre cited above may be regarded as having two main functions or purposes, which are the most important factors in determining whether a performance is for the purpose of ritual or entertainment. Ritual takes the role of a tool that usually provides celebration to the court and practical change to the community, while entertainment mostly serves to give pleasure, show off, be beautiful, or pass the time (Schechner, 2005: 71). Although Stromberg (2009: 103) suggests that “play is about fun, but ritual is not about fun”, these two modes are not absolute binary opposites. They constitute poles of a continuum that depends mostly on context and function (Schechner, *ibid.*); theatrical forms can be used as sacred means of communicating sanctity in ritual, but they may also be used as forms of secular entertainment and recreation. It can be said that the major purposes of the performing arts are ritual, which has a sacred quality, and entertainment. Furthermore, each purpose may have a specific meaning for its area and era. Thus, when society changes, theatre also changes. Additionally, earlier genres may influence or be at the heart of adaptations or the creation of newer genres (Virulrak, 1999a: 78).

## **1.2 Ritual and Popular Entertainment: The Dual Functions of Thai Theatre**

### **1.2.1 ‘Theatricalisation’: A Performance for Ritual Ends**

In Thai culture, the natural world is often divided into three parts: the human, the natural and the super-natural (Phutharaporn 1998: 196-200). The first refers to the world of people living together in the community. The second refers to life in rural conditions, which depends on natural resources, such as water and fertile soil. The third is animistic in belief; in paying respect to supernatural beings, people plead with these beings for protection and control of nature. The lives of rural Thai involve agriculture, work, and dependence on nature. Animism<sup>12</sup>, which holds that spirits with supernatural powers exist in every natural object, such as trees, rivers, mountains, the sky, rice, crops, and some animals, is a significant belief system. Belief in the human, natural, and supernatural worlds plays a vital role in the ancient periods of Thailand. Offerings are made when people ask the gods or supernatural powers to solve their problems or when thanks are offered. Song, dance, music, and theatre are essential tools for expression,

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<sup>12</sup> It is the belief that there is no separation of human being and non-human beings (i.e. animals, plants, rocks, mountains, rivers) and spiritual presences. Animism in Thailand can be highly regarded to anonymous gods and phi (ghost, spirits) from the natural phenomena.

“ritual end-fulfilment” (Richmond, Swann, Zarrilli, 1990, 13), and the answering of prayers. A mixture of Animism, Buddhism, and Hinduism is embraced, and, in addition to animism, *khwan*, or vital essence, according to Hinduism, is believed to exist in natural subjects and human beings. *Khwan* retention is seen as crucial to the well-being of both the individual and the community. Additionally, the beliefs of Animism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, which are combined in performances, are a significant part of court ritual, and religious worship.

Thai people believe that many important stages of life should be enacted ritualistically, to bring luck and prosperity. To further understand this belief, it is appropriate to think of the *liminality* of social practice in ritual performance. Victor Turner sees the ‘*liminal*’ in rituals as symbolic characteristics of “the state and process which is betwixt-and-between the normal day-to-day cultural and social states” that “have a common intellectual and emotional meaning for the members of the community” (Turner, 1977: 33, 45). This process leads to ‘*liminoids*’, the creative process where society can be reformulated through the world of play (Turner, 1982: 32 as cited in Jungwiwattanaporn, 2006: 374). This is witnessed in the use of play or theatre in ritual, since ritual itself, seen as religious or superstitious ceremony, is a conservative and fairly restrictive activity (Stromberg, 2009: 103). Entertainment activities can be combined and used in ritual ceremonies, for the purpose of enhancing accessibility and incentive to participate. Therefore, such aspects of performances as role play, dance, song, music, story, costume, and setting, which can be called ‘theatricalisation’, are used to make events more interesting and attractive. Both the royal court’s and commoners’ rituals and ceremonies are frequently theatre-oriented, because it is believed that goals can be reached through the process of theatricalisation (Chantavanich, 1988). Correspondingly, Virulrak (1999: 69) has indicated that Animist, Hindu, and Buddhist rites require the use of certain kinds of performing arts to facilitate communication with humans or with gods. Vishnu, Shiva, and Buddha are seen as sources of spiritual power during worship (Brandon, 1967: 15).

Thanks to a belief in animistic kingship in Asia, including Thailand, kings were expected to accumulate more spiritual power than all other people, writes Brandon (1967: 14). Therefore, the typical ritual ends of court performances mirrored the power and elegance of the sovereign monarch and were ways of maintaining these. To celebrate the king and his power, particularly his spiritual power, Hindu rituals were



exploited in court conventions and were seen as symbolically representing the king as god incarnate, legitimising the grandeur and the virtue of monarchy (Keyes, 1989 as cited in Mitchell, 2008: 224). Furthermore, such rituals glorified the nation-state and religious worship. For example, a number of court ceremonies were focused on religious and political ritual, such as the ‘ploughing ceremony’, a farmer’s blessing for the crop, which was celebrated by Brahmins impersonating *deva*, or angels, and ordinary people. *Chak nak dukdamban*, a very holy performance, depicted a mythical Hindu episode and was performed in the ‘*indrapisek*’, or coronation, ceremony in the palace as shown in the following description:

... the royal pages and military officers dressed as characters in the *Ramakien* and pulled the great serpent, ‘Anandha Nakharat’, in a tug-of-war between the gods and demons (*yak*) to decide who would get the sacred water of immortality. There is a record of ‘*Chak nak dukdamban*’ in the 1496 chronicle of King Ramathibodi II.

(Rutnin, 1996: 46)

On the other hand, ritual performances in village communities served as affirmation that villagers’ lives relied on natural phenomena and supernatural belief. They focused on the immediate concerns of communities and families, including social responsibilities, agriculture, and health (Ashkenazi, 2003: 4). Ritual performances or theatricalisations in a community made real the possibility of a unified ‘*communitas*’, which has been described as ‘the social anti-structure’, in which participants are “genuinely in between distinctions, beyond the limits of ordinary social sanctions, and unconcerned with the mundane affairs of everyday life” (Rowe, 2008: 128). In other words, *communitas* provides an unstructured community where feelings of social equality and togetherness coincide with an overlap between the sacred and the secular. In terms of theatricalisation, dance or dramatic performance, which occurs in the *liminal*, lies in the members of the community, who become the conjurors, representatives of the gods, or even persons capable of making contact and communicating with gods. Myths, tales, collective imagination, art, ritual, and the interactions of *communitas* are embraced in ritual performance (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2006: 375). For example, a prayer for rainfall or a rain-making rite in the dry season is seen as *hae nang maeo* (the procession of a female cat), combining a song and dance caravan with a cat put into a cage as a mascot and carried on a litter by participants. The cat is thrown a little water by some of the caravan people; pleas are made to the cat to maintain a sufficient amount of rain and to

protect the farms from drought. Another ritual related to giving birth: a new-born baby is laid in a threshing basket, and an old woman (normally a mid-wife), speaking in a loud voice, asks who the mother is, then the mother of the baby claims that it is hers. In case the mother is unconscious, any woman presents at the birth can accept the baby as hers. Ancient Thai belief held that this saves the baby from evil spirits by giving it a human mother. It is thought that invisible ghosts and devil spirits lurked around the birthplace, waiting to take the baby's soul. Therefore, the declaration that the baby has a mother can expel those demons and protect the mother and new child. These practices can still be seen in remote areas where ancient customs are encouraged.

### **1.2.2 Popular Entertainment: Secular Concerns for Audiences**

An entertainment purpose with a less strict emphasis on sacredness seems to have captivated audiences' attention more than rituals. Looking back to the ancient period, Wallipodom (1991: 14-15) claims that the music, dance and drama of the early of Ayutthaya Period (1350-1456), and at the end of the Ayutthaya period (1456-1767) were significantly different. Performances of the first period were wholly sacred and religious at the royal court, while performances in the second period were sanctified to a lesser degree, since they manifested the luxury and power of the king. Performances were solely for entertainment and were held at the royal palace; for instance, *wong mahoree*, a grand symphony orchestra that was chiefly composed of stringed instruments, played lulling music for the kings (Wallipodom, *ibid*). *Lakon nai*, another performance form, which emphasised sophisticated dance movements and excellent music and singing, suited the refined tastes of court members.

Concurrently, folk and popular performances, which customarily originated in sacredness, gradually became a form of popular entertainment in a non-religious commercial context. For example, although a part of the shamanistic healing or therapeutic ritual in *lakon nora* that called on dancers to pay homage to animistic spirits still exists, the remainder of this type of performance is viewed as secular entertainment. Likewise, *nora chattri*, which was widely recognised as the first type of popular theatre to originate in the Ayutthaya period, can be seen, as Brandon (1993: 235-236) argues, to have transformed from a holy and sacred form into a secular performance. Originally, the troupe heads, only men, were believed to be sorcerers who had spiritual powers and could impart a magic aura unto their performances, such that they were called upon to

enact holy orders and perform sacred ceremonies. This started to change in 1972; varieties of popular stage shows have since replaced older traditions. Women can now perform in troupes, and more than three actors, the standard number of performers in the past, can now be on stage. Present performances include Western music, bands, songs, costumes, and short comedic plays.

Outside of the court, commoners sang and played instruments for the purposes of enjoyment and relaxation in their leisure time. Komolbootra (translator, 1967: 305, as cited in Puchadapirom, 2007: 18-19) notes that Simon de La Loubère, a French delegate visiting Ayutthaya in 1687, described how ordinary people often sang together in courtyards while beating a drum called a '*tone*' in the evening for their enjoyment. Singing and dancing while working, especially in agricultural activities, has been much in evidence. Unlike performances at the royal court, which, on a regular basis, relied on written literature or ancient dramaturgy, the vaudeville of villagers was normally based on improvisation and witty dialogue. The skits and sketches derived from scenarios in a rice field, a meadow, a vegetable garden, a river and a canal. Plays performed in rice fields, for instance, are called *ten gam ram keiw* - literally, folk harvest dances. Lyrics reflect farmers' ways of life, and dances are lively and joyful. Performers hold scythes in one hand and bunch of harvested rice in the other. Flirting repartees and everyday banter between men and women are improvised in song and dance and ad-libbed throughout the show.

*Phleng phuen baan*, a Thai traditional folk song, also plays an important popular role in the lives of commoners. This is a kind of secular entertainment performed by a group of men and women, basically accompanied by hand clapping and mostly-quick-tempo music from clapping or percussion instruments, such as drums, gongs, wooden rhythm clappers, and small cup-shaped cymbals. A leader or master or one of the performers reacts to other performers by singing impromptu rhymes after the opponent finishes his/her part; a chorus increases joyousness. Basically, folk singers learn and memorise lyrics and melodies by heart, and written scripts are rarely used (Kriengkraipetch, 2004: 147-148). The contents of the lyrics mostly relate to flirtation, naughtiness, and the obscenities utter between men and women. However, more refined court performances are also used. Today, traditional Thai folk songs are performed in various spaces and venues, depending on the occasion or festivity. Venues include courtyards, temple courts, paddy fields, or canal banks.

Temple festivals are significant venues for many popular performances, although they are for secular, rather than religious, purposes. This is because popular performances are frequently given after the granting of boons at temple fairs. However, Barber points out that the entertainment purpose of popular theatre has overcome its ritual foundation. He also states that popular theatre performed at temple fairs relates now more to the ‘fair’ than to the ‘temple’ (2007: 185). This is simply because popular Buddhist practices have become features of festivities. Keyes (1989: 127, as cited in Mitchell, 2008: 224) notes that ‘Cosmological Buddhism did not simply retreat and ultimately become irrelevant’, since the sensuous and spiritual sustain each other, reflecting the inseparable connection of pleasure, entertainment, and contentment in popular Buddhist practice. As a result, stages for performances are either temporary or permanent in most temples, providing for such types of popular entertainment as *likay*, *lamtad*, and *mawlum*.

Since popular entertainment plays a vital function in Thai theatre and is also a focus of this study, I want to further analyse its characteristics by dividing theatre for entertainment into two genres: court and popular theatre forms. These are seen as constituting the duality of Thai theatre.

## **2. Courtly Forms and Later Commercialisation**

### **2.1 The Performances of the King’s Regalia**

There are two types of theatre of the king. The first type performed by male actors includes *nang yai* and *khon*, which relate to the symbolism of royalty. The second is *lakon nai*, performed by women - typically, in the past, the concubines in the king’s harem –who surrounded the king and his many attendants. This performance successfully displayed the king’s power. *Nang yai* and *khon* also relate to the great power of the god-king system, which is influenced by Hinduism. The Thai version of the Indian legend of *Ramayana*, or *Ramakien* (the Fame of Rama), therefore, was the main script for royal performances. Details of those performances are presented below.

## ***Nang yai***

To begin, *nang yai*, which literally means a “big carved leather puppet,” was the first type of shadow puppet theatre recorded in Thailand, dating to 1458, soon after the Thai invasion of Cambodia (Osnes, 2001: 233). *Nang yai* is a type of shadow and silhouette play put on by dancing puppeteers. According to Miettinen (1992: 46-47), the two-dimensional five-foot-high giant puppet was, historically, not exclusively for public entertainment. It was intentionally utilised in many rituals and court ceremonies, such as royal cremations and coronations. *Nang yai* puppeteers hold figures that are painted heavily on cow or buffalo hides, so that they will be seen as dark shadows, and move in front of wide white screens. Shadows are cast by the light of flames in coconut shells on either sides of the stage. Two narrators sit to the side of the screen, performing all recitations, dialogue, and song.

*Nang yai* is unlike *nang talung*, a popular shadow puppet performance that is similar to *wayang kulit* of Indonesia. *Nang talung* is smaller in scale and involves the manipulation of puppets by rods attached to the puppets’ joints. In *nang talung*, a puppet can move its legs and hands and open its mouth when a puppeteer who sits behind a screen uses only his hands to manipulate it. Instead of an articulated puppet that its mouth can open, *nang yai* uses still images that depict figures sitting, walking, sleeping and fighting. Each image presents a single action, and multiple images are displayed in succession, to create a full scene, such as of combat or love. Unlike *nang talung*, where the puppeteer is hidden, in *nang yai*, the puppeteer is visible and dances along with the images.

## ***Khon***

The second type of court theatre is *khon*, a form of pantomime masked dance drama. *Khon* is one of the oldest classical forms of Thai performance and is believed to have derived from *chak nak dukdamban*, *krabi-krabong* (martial arts fencing with clubs and swords), and *nang yai*. Historically, its performers were former *nang yai* manipulators. Although there is still no knowledge of *khon*’s derivation, it can be assumed to have been in existence since the Ayutthaya period, following Brandon’s (1993: 237) suggestion that *khon* was first performed at the 25<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of King Ramathibodi II, the king of Ayutthaya, in 1515. *Khon* performance is principally

accompanied by a *piphat* orchestra (a classical Thai musical ensemble), with off-stage singers and a chorus. As with pantomime, actors only perform their characters by employing expressive gestures and dancing through the vocabulary of Thai classical dance (Miettinen, 1992: 55). *Khon* actors do not speak their lines, because the *kampag* (dramatic text written in poetry for the performance) that comprises their elegant verses reflects the superior manner of the sovereign. Lines are spoken by a commentator who stands on one side of the stage. Songs are sung by singers and a chorus behind the scenes. The themes of *khon* are derived from *Ramayana*, the battle of Phra Ram or Rama, and the demon-king Thosakan or Ravana. The performance presents noble characteristics in elegantly exquisite dances and martial arts; it offers grand combat scenes, such as those between Rama's troupe of monkeys and Ravana's troupe of giants. The audience's enjoyment, therefore, lies not just in its comprehension of the story, but also in its artistic appreciation.

Due to the fact that *khon* was the theatre of the royal court, it had to conform to the rigid rules governing court propriety, and the practices of courtiers' performers manifested conventional Thai court etiquette (Miettinen, 1992: 55). *Khon bandasakti*, or *noble khon*, an example of royal repertoire, emerged during the reign of King Rama VI and was performed by male members of the royal family (Faubion, 1956). Impersonation was a significant characteristic of ancient Thai theatre. This was so because the Thai people believed that only men could enter monkhood and that this made men more respectable and honourable than women. For this reason, men were the principal performers in sacred or religious functions. *Khon*, like many sacred Thai performances, was initially performed solely by males. Female impersonators played women's roles. Although *khon* was cultivated in the royal court as if a sacred pageant, it has experienced many changes; over the years, it has lost many of its sanctified features and has become a form of popular entertainment (Montrisart, 1995: 116). The masculine authority of *khon* has combined with the softer elements of *lakon nai*, yielding performances that are, to some degree, smoother and more graceful (Osnes, 2001: 176). As a result, women, instead of female impersonators, are able to perform female roles in today's performances at the Thailand National Theatre, as well as at private venues.

## *Lakon nai*

*Lakon nai* (literally, ‘inner-court play’) is a form of female dance drama that was performed by women in the palace for the king’s pleasure and enjoyment. This type of performance can be dated back to the fourteenth century and said to be part of the aftermath of the Thai invasion of Angkor, Cambodia; Cambodian court musicians and dancers were taken to Thailand and performed in the Thai king’s private harem (Osnes, 2001: 189). *Lakon nai*, which has variously innovated and adapted from *khon*, *rabam* (suit dance), and *lakon nok* (outside-court play), is known as the most refined form of dance drama, with slow-moving dance used to perform the whole vocabulary of Thai classical dance. A singing chorus accompanies the *piphat* orchestra during dances. Dancers neither speak their lines nor sing their parts, as in *khon*. Postures, movements, and dance styles, as well as songs and melodies, are adopted from the court *rabam* (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 22). Initially, *lakon nai* was exclusively the privilege of the god-king, who was surrounded by splendid female dancers, and no one was permitted to enact or rehearse this type of performance by themselves, not even princes, courtiers, or noblemen. The performance could be viewed solely by the king himself, his royal guests, and the royal court attendants. When a king died, the new monarch would dissolve the previous troupe, who would train new dancers (Foley, 1993: 237). The prohibition against anyone other than the king having a troupe was later cancelled, during the reign of King Rama III (1824-1852), who disbanded the royal female dance-drama troupe. The princes, princesses, and nobles, who once clandestinely had female dance-drama troupes, began training and presenting their *lakon nai* openly. The private troupes of commoners also gained the right to perform *lakon*.

Eoseewong (as cited in Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 22) suggests that the court made three significant changes to *lakon nai* that brought it closer to *lakon nok* (a dance drama troupe performed by males outside the palace): it replaced all female performers with male performers; introduced standard tight-fitted costumes with jewels, precious metals, gemstones and head-dresses borrowed and adapted from *khon*; and instituted the composition of written dramatic texts. Additionally, *lakon nai* was traditionally focused on refined dance styles, while *lakon nok*, by contrast, emphasised the accompanying story, most of which stemmed from the *jataka*, Thai folktales that are derived from the Buddha birth stories. For example, *Sangthong*, a story about a prince born as a conch shell, and *Suwana-Hong*, the tale of a prince who climbs a kite string to find the

princess of his dreams, were very popular. As symbols of the king's status, reflecting his power and virtue, the stories of *lakon nai*, on the other hand, were principally based on the stories of divine kingship derived from Hindu texts, namely *Ramakien* and *Unarut*. Another story that was conventionally performed in *lakon nai* is *Inao*, a legend of the chivalry of a Javanese king. Although *lakon nok* was the prototype for dance performances with dramatic text, and although its numerous elements were borrowed and used in *lakon nai*, *lakon nok* was excluded from the aesthetic standards of court theatre, because it was considered the theatre form of commoners.

These three types of performances - *nang yai*, *khon*, and *lakon nai* - were traditionally the king's prerogative. However, their celebratory purpose gradually transformed as nobility and commercialisation integrated; a great number of new types of noble performance were later introduced. Correspondingly, some of the stricter rules for performing and practicing these court theatre forms deliberately became unconstrained. The division of sexes in performances was abolished after the reign of Rama IV (1851-68). As a result, male casts were allowed to dance together with the royal ladies, and female dancers were allowed to perform outside the court.

## **2.2 New Types of Elite Theatre: Modernisation and Commercialisation of the Nobility**

There were fundamental changes in many old Thai views and beliefs under the rule of King Rama IV (1852-1868), due to the impact of Western imperialism, which was coming closer to the Thai kingdom at that time. Formerly, Brahmanism and Hinduism had exerted strong influence on Buddhism. While Buddhism had depended on Hindu cosmology and revolved around The Mountain of the Gods, the modern world map, introduced by King Rama IV, replaced conventional views of the universe and the earth. Brandon (1967: 13) notes that there were no Indian armies and warships to intrude on or subdue the native kingdoms of Southeast Asia. He also points out that there is no record of any Southeast Asian state ever having been ruled by an Indian state, but it might be possible that a few Indians ruled as kings over Southeast Asian states. Brandon (ibid.) believes that these kings introduced Indian customs and religious practices, not political control, and he says



Neither, apparently, did the Indians come to Southeast Asia in large numbers. Nor did they come as the Pilgrims came to America or the French to Canada or the Dutch to South Africa, to establish communities that would eventually grow into politically sovereign states.

Craig Reynolds<sup>13</sup> makes a similar point, observing that Indianisation, which had strongly influenced Thailand in the past, did not have the same strength as more recent westernisation. This is because westernisation spread with ‘greater political’ and ‘economic power’, rather than by ‘purely cultural’ means, as Indianisation did. Indian civilisation, which took centuries to become established in Thailand, was acculturated and transformed into Thai culture. For example, Thai *Ramakien* is not an Indian *Ramayana*, although it originated from *Ramayana* (Eoseewong, 2000: 414).

In an effort to avoid colonisation, the King Rama IV also reconstructed Buddhism and other superstitious beliefs, to make them more similar to the scientific, or rational, approach of Western countries. As a result, Eastern orientation and Indianisation were supplanted by westernisation. Western influence increased, while that of Hinduism decreased. This immense shift was much more in evidence after the return of the royal family and aristocrats from Europe during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1911) and VI (1911-1925). Their new worldviews and the decline of traditional styles of dance-drama came alongside new competition in theatre commerce, since private troupes outside the palace were allowed to take over their business. They directly utilised Western theatrical motifs in innovative ways or combined some parts of Western theatre with the remnants of Thai classical performances, leading to the introduction of new types of theatre.

The first private noble theatre, Prince Theatre, was introduced in 1882 as a commercial theatre troupe that charged a ticket fee for entry. The theatre’s name followed the typical titles of Western playhouses and was chosen by Chao Phraya Mahin, a cherished courtier during the reigns of King Rama the IV (1852-1868) and V (1868-1911). This theatre, however, was a playhouse mainly for well-to-do and elite viewers who wanted to separate themselves from common theatre-goers. The expression of differentiation between upper class and lower class is marked in the following statement:

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<sup>13</sup> At this point, Professor Craig Reynolds has offered a comment on the distinction between Western and Indian influences on Thailand (see Eoseewong, 2000: 415).

...there was a graceful and stylish performance for ladies and gentlemen who preferred to pay for a show rather than viewing a free performance in a casino or a trifling show and being crowded with low class people. These elite people conceived a dislike for the poor who wore stinking clothing or no upper parts which revealed their smelly sweat and disgusting incrustation. To be touched or petted by strangers, particularly men, in a throng was basically objected to by aristocratic women.

(*Chod Mai Het Siam Samai* [The Siam Samai Chronicle], Vol. 2, 1884  
as cited in Phuchadapirom, 2007: 39, author's translation)

*Lakon panthang*, or a 'thousand ways' of mingled theatre, was first performed at Prince Theatre. The drama of Chao Phraya Mahin, the pioneer of this form of theatre, and Prince Narathip, who later collaborated with him, was originally derived from *lakon nai* and *lakon nok*. New stories from literature and chronicles, both Thai and foreign, were adapted, to attract audiences and take them on exotic experiences by means of the depiction of foreign characters. *Rachathirat*, from the Mon historical record; *Sam kok*, from the Chinese story of dynasties; and *Phra Aphaimani*, from Thai literature, for example (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 38), were performed on stage. Audiences saw ethnic costumes, designs, dance styles, and characteristics and listened to music and songs that were adopted and adapted from foreign cultures and intermingled with Thai styles. One of the important characteristics of *lakon panthang* was its lessening of emphasis on Thai classical dance and movement. *Lakon panthang* employed the simplified *ram chai bot* (dance with singing and speaking) more than it used *ram naphat* (dance following specific gestures and songs). As a result, other foreign arts, such as Chinese martial arts, were combined with Thai-style dance-drama (Miettinen, 1992: 69).

Another form of modernised and commercialised drama was *lakon dukdamban* (literally, 'the ancient drama'), a dance play that necessitated spectacular and semi-naturalistic scenery. This kind of theatre was named after the playhouse initiated by Prince Naris and Chao Phraya Thewet. Although it originated from *lakon nai*, performers spoke and sang their own parts, rather than moving and gesturing in pantomime alongside an offstage chorus. Passages describing each scene, as in *lakon nai*, were removed. A dance style which that quickly told a story, called *ram chai bot*, was more often used than *ram naphat* (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 39). These new theatrical forms borrowed and adapted techniques from Western theatre; for instance, three-

dimensional stage designs, special effects, lights, and the sounds of natural settings were employed.

The trend towards modernised theatre was also introduced in *lakon rong*, or ‘singing drama’, an adaptation of Western opera that was inaugurated by Prince Narathip. The use of simplified movements that were more natural, the singing of songs without *auan* (intoning or chanting between words), and the portrayal of stories of ordinary people, made *lakon rong*, perhaps, the most modern of the new forms of theatre, and it became extremely popular among urban middle-class audiences. The second generation of *lakon rong* was called *lakon phleng* (a musical play in which Western-style music replaced the Thai *piphat* orchestra) (Virulrak, 1999a:77). All of these types of performance, although mingled with Western theatrical elements and popular performances, were introduced and modified by members of the royal family and courtiers. Refinement and delicacy were, therefore, the main qualities of the resulting bodies of work.

When the Great Depression occurred and recession at the Thai palace took hold,<sup>14</sup> modernised theatre declined in Thailand. The other factor that led to this development was a socio-political change from absolute monarchy to democratic monarchy in 1932, followed by the cultural-revolution during the Phibun period<sup>15</sup> (1938-1944 and 1948-1957). These events greatly impacted elite modernised performances. Newer kinds of theatre were introduced and replaced older theatrical forms. Patriotic theatre<sup>16</sup>, proposed

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<sup>14</sup> The recession of the palace occurred in the reign of King Rama VII (1925-1935) resulting from the impact of the world economic crisis and the financial effects of this. As a result, the king balanced the national budget by reducing all less necessary expenses including those of the Department of Royal Entertainment (Virulrak, 1999: 76). In 1935, court artists were transferred from the Ministry of the Royal Household to the Department of Fine Arts (DAF), when Plaek Phibun Songkram (Phibun) was Prime Minister (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 261).

<sup>15</sup> After the revolution leading to the establishment of the constitutional monarchy in 1932, Thai performing arts underwent radical evolution in the period under Prime Minister Plaek Phibun Songkham (the Phibun period). His ‘Cultural Revolution’ policy had a great impact on most of the Thai performances. Under the rule of the ‘commoner government’, Thai performing arts faced the rigid control of genre categorisation. The new approach of reforming and renaming many art forms was enforced. The Prime Minister and his colleagues made an attempt to frame the new concept of grouping performances in order to form the proper standard of Thai aesthetics. Besides, there were a great number of patriotic theatres contributed by chauvinist, poet, and nobleman, Luang Wichitwatakarn. His histrionic plays, which employed the antecedent stories of Thai heroes and great men, were very popular.

<sup>16</sup> The theatre, which was created by Luang Wichit, exploited the ancient histories and myths of Thailand and Thai heroes, particularly commoners, in order to arouse a sense of patriotism and nationalism. The use of theatrical elements from Western-style dialogue and the shaping of a modernised national identity to represent a new power as well as to instil nationalist ideology were employed (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 201, 255). Sentimental plots and emotional elements were also effectively used to capture audience’s feelings (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 60).

by Prime Minister Phibun to promote nationalism, was pioneered by Luang Wichitwatakarn<sup>17</sup> (1898-1962), and the *lakon rong* of Phranbun<sup>18</sup> (1901-1976), which was more modern and more easily accessible to ordinary people, gained popularity amongst commoners. The classical dance drama and theatre that had originated in the court and been modernised by the nobility were preserved as national treasures by the Fine Arts Department.

### 2.3 The Decline of Court Theatre

One reason for the decline of court theatre is, of course, the performance itself; some were unable to adapt or had a strict standard which it was impossible to modify; some were solely the preserve of courtiers and the nobility, and there was no room for commoners. Another cause was the absence of royal support as a result of the socio-political change. Eoseewong (2000: 67-69) explains the causes of the decline of some earlier court performances; for instance, *nang* (*nang yai*) was created in the early Ayutthaya period (1350-1456) and was an archetype of *khon*. However, at the end of the Ayutthaya period (1456-1767), *khon* was more popular than *nang*, and this caused the eventual decline of *nang* by the end of this period. The principle behind this is because *khon* is performed by humans, it is easy to change the gestures and movements. On the contrary, *nang* is a giant carved leather image, which could not move by itself. Additionally, *nang* requires a lot of time for the skilful and delicate creation of a new image, so the troupe usually used old ones for performing. The audience could become bored as a result of a lack of innovation or renovation. *Khon* gained more popularity than *nang* for a while, but it later declined when *lakon* was introduced. Faubion indicates that *khon*, with a sole male cast, lost its popularity among audiences since *lakon* allowed women to perform in it. This caused *khon* to become gradually obsolete (1956: 139).

More to the point, the inaccessibility of court forms of theatre was much in evidence. Richmond, Swann and Zarrilli note that in India the permission to adapt and develop

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<sup>17</sup> A Thai scholar who was the first director-General of Fine Arts Department (FAD) in 1934 and a key figure in carrying out Phibun's national cultural policy, and the foremost author of nationalist or patriotic plays. (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 171, Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 59).

<sup>18</sup> The head of the Lakon rong troupe named Cantharophat who introduced a new style of lakon rong by using Western music in the performance instead of Thai traditional music, piphat orchestra.

classical or court performance was principally given only by the senior masters and the chief patrons (1990: 8-9), due to its court origin. Similarly, some performing arts such as *nang yai* and *khon* were very sacred and unable to be adapted, and by reason of the fact that most of the *khon* story relates to either royalty or supernatural entities, the appropriate casts to fit special roles such as hero, heroine, demon, and monkey is required. The kings, royal princes and noblemen were usually the selectors of those performers on account of their status and their many dependents (Montrisart, 1995: 117). This reflected the inaccessibility and conformity to rule of the court theatre. Thus, other new forms, which were able to be modified, were substituted in order to please the audience and fit with the social conditions. It can be said that strictly conservative performances were replaced by new forms which exploited some artistic elements drawn from Western and popular theatre elements. Besides, labour without cost was of primary importance in forming and maintaining a theatre troupe of a nobleman. The troupe progressively declined because of a lack of performers and crew team when the decree of *prai* and *tat* (free labour and slave) abolition was declared in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1911).<sup>19</sup>

The global economic regression after World War I significantly affected Thai economical and socio-political contexts. It was also a reason for the decline of court theatre. After the revolution leading to the establishment of the constitutional monarchy in 1932, Thai performing arts underwent a radical evolution; in Barber's words: "the end of the court's absolute control of *lakon* effectively ended at this time" (2007: 170). Faubion (1956: 139) points out that *khon* lost the privilege and elegance that the courtiers and elite class gave to it since many of these patrons became limited their powers. The royal court was no longer a centre of performing arts, but it still played an important role in conserving classical performing arts. King Rama VII (1925-1935), the last king of absolute monarchy, cut redundant disbursement and spent less on inessential items. This economical problem significantly affected *khon* and other classical dances, with they were eventually authorised under the government's Fine Arts Department after the political evolution in 1932 (Faubion, 1956: 134 and Miettinen, 1992:72). The private theatre companies became steadily popular amongst audiences. The most

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<sup>19</sup> The abolition of slavery was evident in two major acts. The first one was the Act of Siamese Slavery Retirement (พระราชบัญญัติพิทักษ์กระเบียดถูกลทาสดูกไทย) which was announced in 1874, followed by 'the Act of Slavery Abortion' (พระราชบัญญัติเลิกทาส) in 1905. The *prai* abolition was finally announced in 1915, in the reign of King Rama VI.

popular kind of theatre was *lakon phleng* (musical play), which replaced *lakon rong* (singing drama) accompanied by the *piphat* ensemble (Thai traditional music band). The new theatre employed western style bands instead. Majority of actors, directors and staff of *lakon phleng* became important figures in Thai cinema and Thai televised drama afterwards.

### **3. Non-Court Forms: Popular Theatre**

#### **3.1 Concept and Quality of Popular Theatre**

Due to the fact that there have been limitations in terminology and theory on popular theatre in earlier research, a definition and interpretation of such theatre is offered here. Richmond, Swann, and Zarrilli (1990) explain that popular performance is characterised by ease of understanding and involves the enthusiastic communication, sometimes via direct speaking, of messages to common public audiences through performance. Therefore, the establishment of a firm aesthetic standard for popular theatre is superfluous. However, popular theatre is not only an entertaining and straightforward form, but is also a progressive form of people entertainment. Bertolt Brecht (1938 as cited in Willett, 1978: 108), for instance, notes that popular theatre is “intelligible to the broad masses, taking over their forms of expression and enriching them, adopting and consolidating their standpoint, representing the most progressive section of the people....”

Popular theatre appeals to the general populace and masses both in rural and urban locations; aims for secular entertainment (although some performances are partly performed for ritual or devotional ends); involves the direct conveyance of messages to audiences; is a readily and immediately communicable form that does not require the establishment of sophisticated aesthetic principles during performance; is performed *for, by, and through* commoners; and is excluded from court and classical forms. Mason, 1994: 3-5) suggests that the key elements of popular theatre are direct contact, participation, spectacle, craft, emotion, comedy, sex, horror, accessibility, and freedom. Obversely, classical, or court, performance is interested in establishing refined performance techniques that impress and are admired by noblemen. Popular theatre can be named a non-classical form, when compared to classical court theatre. Eoseewong (1991: 152) suggests that these two approaches are really different in their development

as an art form. Popular performance adapts easily to other theatre forms. It has never lost an early impulse toward socially conscious theatre that “clothe[s] subversion with wonderment at the skills and delights of high theatricality” (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009: 51). Court theatre, on the other hand, is seen as a preserved performing art that has changed very little since its inception.

As a flexible theatrical form, popular performance can be seen as the main form of Thai theatre, since it combines with other forms easily. For example, *lakon chatri*, one of the oldest Thai folk dance dramas, transformed into *lakon nok*, an entertainment form that was, as its predecessor, without religious intent. *Lakon nok* was, to some extent, adopted and adapted for use in *lakon nai*, a type of court dance drama. *Lakon nai* and *lakon chatri* scarcely had the chance to directly influence each other, according to Brandon (1967: 85-86).

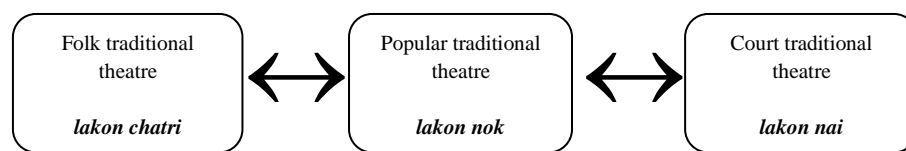


Figure 1: the mutual relation between *lakon chatri* and *lakon nok*, and *lakon nok* and *lakon nai*

This relationship may suggest that popular theatre is an adaptable theatre form, standing between the folk and court theatre forms.

### 3.2 Aesthetics in Popular Theatre

Since popular theatre has been easily adapted through time and social change, it has never disappeared since the earliest history of Thai theatre. Wittayasakpan (1992: 33) points out that although the standards of the theatrical repertoire set by the court inevitably affected the perception of the ordinary people, they did not strongly impact on the popular aesthetic concepts relating to styles of presentation. There are many reasons behind the existence of popular theatre and the maintenance of popular morale as outlined in the following paragraphs.

According to Nai Ploi Ho Phra Samut (1897: 41-42), possibly a librarian in court library in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1911), as his title implies, a good performance

should consist of striking appearances and costumes, beautiful dances and movements, harmonious singing, witty and clever dialogue and a flamboyant setting. Some of those qualities were reflected in *lakon chaobaan* or popular theatre, which was performed in casinos and public stages. Correspondingly, Eoseewong (2000: 71) indicates that the composition of popular literature and theatre in the early period consisted of four elements which are typical of popular performance: singing, storytelling, dancing accompanied with song, and improvisation. Wit and verbal skills are also significant characteristics. As Nai Ploi Ho Phra Samut (ibid.) and Eoseewong mentioned, *lakon chaobaan* frequently satisfied its audiences by creating new works. Eoseewong also pointed out that many new plots were more attractive to audiences than the old ones. Nonetheless, the time-honoured and everlasting stories such as *Krai-thong* (a hero who defeated a miracle crocodile which impersonated a human being) also gained popularity amongst audiences, and it was performed in different versions. *Lakon chaobaan*, therefore, enabled the performance of classical stories, popular works, and new plots adapted from well-known ones. Conversely, court theatre usually used classical texts of ancient dramaturgy or classical literature. The appreciation depended on audience's awareness of refinement and superiority of performance rather than being based on an amusing story.

*Likay*, a Thai folk opera, has been popular amongst Thai audiences since it developed from its beginning in the Ayutthaya period. It is popular because *likay* has made the effort to adjust the performance to suit Thai audiences' taste. Phraya Petchpani, the owner of the first *likay*'s *wik* (*likay* performed in a playhouse instead of an open-air setting and demanding payments from audiences) in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), developed his troupe to please audiences by performing with beautiful costumes, comedy and fast movement. Those qualities are still the main presentation styles of *likay* today. Additionally, popular performance, in particular, *phleng phuen baan* (traditional folk song) can be a medium to express indecent messages by using metaphoric verses to compare a sexual organ to any other natural object and sexual activity to agricultural activities; for example, a vagina is compared with a rice paddy and a penis is compared to a pushcart or a tractor. A normal activity such as a man placing a flower behind a woman's ear is recognised as sexual intercourse, inserting the flower which then drops, and repeating the action again. Spoonerisms, playing with and on words, are also frequently utilised for this aim. Both methods persuade audiences to use their imagination and elicit a reserved smile or a loud laugh. These approaches



make it possible for a taboo or a prohibited expression to be represented in a public space.

As stated, popular theatre has continually modified itself through time and space. Its core aesthetic elements have transformed into non-traditional forms of staging and mediated performance when traditional staging has been less admired. *Phleng lukthung* (a type of Thai country song), for example, is a modernised form of *phleng phuen baan* (a type of Thai traditional folk song), which is normally present in ballads. Stories of rural habitants who migrate to the capital to live and work in the capital have been regularly depicted in lyrics, instead of ways of life in the countryside. Western music and bands, talented singers accompanied by *hangkhrueang ensembles* (groups of dancers) in ornate costumes, and head-dresses are frequently employed. Likewise, clowns from *likay* transform themselves into *talok cafés* - literally, troupes of comedians who perform in cafés or restaurants. Farce, slap-stick, and grotesque drama have been used more often than black humour or sophisticated joking. Popular theatre that employs such traditional styles as *likay*, *lakon chattri*, and *nang talung* has basically used *chakchak wongwong* themes as story lines. These repertoires, stories of the royal family based on Thai legends, fables, and tales, have been at the heart of the dramatic texts of Thai folk or popular theatre. Such stories are of love affairs, jealousy, battles, and vengeance, as Nathalang notes:

...*chakchak wongwong* is a genre of Thai folktales, the stories of which are about adventurous and polygynous life of princely heroes. In most, the hero goes out to find a spouse and almost always sneaks into a princess's castle and sleeps with her. He is usually caught by the princess's father, and eventually there is a fight between them. The hero usually acquires additional wives later on in the story, often leading to jealousy between the co-wives.

(Nathalang, 2004: 1)

These kinds of stories particularly reflect the reality of extended families in Thai rural areas where son-in-laws usually reside with their wives' families. Conflicts between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law do happen. Furthermore, Nathalang (2004: 4-6) suggests that when rural Thai men are away from home, working elsewhere, they regularly find new wives to take care of them both as 'wives' and as 'house workers'. This situation creates conflict between co-wives. Nathalang further points out that these two situations can be seen in *chakchak wongwong* stories, reflecting the conflict between in-laws and

the co-wives in Thai families. However, at the end of *chakchak wongwong* stories, protagonists often forgive antagonists, who realise and admit their wrongdoings. Furthermore, characters usually find solutions to their conflicts and live happily. This may portray a basic Thai belief in Buddhist philosophies. For example, the forgiveness often seen in *chakchak wongwong* plotlines is considered an ultimate merit in Buddhism, as is the notion, ‘*tam dee dai dee, tam chua dai chua*,’ which translates literally to, ‘good deeds beget good results, while bad deeds beget bad results.’<sup>20</sup> These ideas are implanted in Thai belief.

### 3.3 Towards Popular Theatre in Thailand and Its Development

In general, there are a number of theatre forms each of which can be found in ‘living theatre’ forms in each region of Thailand. To begin with, *lakon chattri* is the well-known form found in Petchaburi province in the southwest; yet many *lakon chattri* troupes, which perform for *kaebon*<sup>21</sup> purposes, can be found in Bangkok and other provinces. Next, the main form of popular theatre in Thailand is *likay*, which is performed all over the country, particularly in Bangkok and central Thailand. Due to its amusing repertoire and flexible presentation style, *likay* has obviously been emulated by other popular forms. When it comes to the northeast or Isan districts, *mawlum* plays an important role as regional theatre, and *lakon sor*, the theatre of the north, is positioned in the same way as *mawlum*. Lastly, *nang talung*, the puppet theatre of the south, has been popular amongst audiences for centuries.

#### *Lakon chattri (nora chattri and lakon kae bon)*

Drawing on historical records of Thai theatre and descriptions from the descendants of previous “*lakon chaobaan*” troupes (non-court dance drama troupe), Yuangsri (1991: 48-49) claims that *lakon chaobaan* was derived from *nora-chattri*. The masters were some of Thailand’s southern inhabitants who migrated to Bangkok because of hard conditions and famine in their hometown during the reign of King Rama III (1832). The troupe has performed in Bangkok from the past up to now in *lakon nok* styles. Due to the development of form, *nora-chattri* is now known as *lakon chattri* or *lakon* which regularly performs *chakchak wongwong* stories and *lakon nok* manuscripts. Song lyrics

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<sup>20</sup> This proverb can be used in English version as ‘He that sows good seed, shall reap good corn.’

<sup>21</sup> to redeem a vow to God

are told by a director in normal speech and actors sing after that; dialogues and lines are improvised as in other popular theatres. *Lakon chattri* is frequently hired to perform in the ceremony of repaying the gods when one's desire is fulfilled.

### ***Mawlum***

*Mawlum*, a parallel form of *likay*, is an Isan or north-eastern popular performance, comprising a song and dance drama accompanied by *pin* (a lute-stringed instrument with a pear-shaped body and a long fretted neck), *khaen* (mouth reed) and other Isan instruments, rather than *piphat* ensembles as *likay*. The stories include Isan folktales and modern fictions, which are spoken and sung in Isan dialect, are fundamentally exploited. *Mawlum*, however, demonstrates some of the same theatrical elements as *likay*; for example, costumes with more splendid fabrics and elegant patterns and precious stones like crystals or artificial diamond ornaments are regularly exploited in order to attract audiences. *Mawlum* today has two major popular types: *mawlum rueang* and *mawlum ploen* as Virulrak (1995: 225) points out. The latter is modernised, and more vibrant, and appeals to the younger generation with its inclusion of western music and modern north-eastern pop songs in its performances than the former style.

### ***Lakon sor***

*Lakon sor* is a sung-drama accompanied by *salaw*, *sor* and *sueng*, the northern stringed musical instruments. Sookcharoen (2004) notes that the stories about social problems, family issues and melodramatic stories from televised drama are now more popular than the local storytelling and *jataka* tales (the Buddha birth stories) which prevailed in the past. *Lakon sor*, however, remains presented in a traditional performance. Improvisation, expanded from storylines (Foley, 1993: 240), is the main motif as well as songs interspersed by conversations in northern dialects and official Thai. The music ensemble is placed on the left side of the stage, the same direction as for *likay*, as Virulrak (1995: 226) clarifies. Performers basically sit on the stage floor or on a bench in the front part of stage and hardly ever move around the stage. Scenery is usually of the wing-and-drop type. The ordinary, northern-style costumes are worn rather than ornate ones as they are in *likay* and *mawlum*.

## ***Nang talung***

A shadow theatre using a leather puppet called *nang talung* is believed to have originated in Pattalung province situated in southern part of Thailand where the word *talung*, a homophone of the province, became a name of the play. Virulrak (1999b: 75) states that *nang talung* was an adaptation of *wayang kulit*, a Javanese leather puppet. Another name of *nang talung* is *nang khuan*, according to Dowsey-Magog's (2002a: 185) explanation. He points out that King Rama III had seen a performance of *nang khuan* performed by villagers from Khuan Maphrao village in Pattalung province in 1876. This type of play has some similar elements to *nang yai*; for example, there is a leather puppet manipulated by a puppeteer, and the play is performed at night or in a dark setting with a white screen and light shedding on the screen to make a shadow silhouette, with a music ensemble accompanying. However, there are significantly different motifs between the two. *Nang yai*'s story was conventionally based on *Ramakien*, whereas *nang talung* emphasised local histories, myths, and legends. The sacred characters like a *deva*, a god, and an angel, which derived from *Ramakien*, are exploited in a prologue or a sanctified scene, and they are used as hero and heroine characters. The melodramatic or soap opera plots of *likay* and cinema, including the western characters such as operetta heroes and heroines, even cowboys are utilised in *nang talung* (Miettinen, 1992: 69). *Nang talung*'s puppeteer is called *nai nang*; he normally acts as the main manipulator, and a narrator accompanies him with assistants and an orchestra. They all sit on mats laid on a low scaffolding stage behind a translucent white screen set apart from the audience.

## ***Likay***

*Likay*, a hybrid theatre form from varieties of traditional / folk performances, as Virulrak notes, is residue from a combination of *suat kharuhat* (commoner chanting), *suat khaek*, *phleng*, *lakon nok* and *lakon panthang* (1999b: 75). Originating in a ritual element in chanting, *likay* has developed itself and eventually become an entertainment form of commercial popular theatre. Type-characters generally improvise dialogues, verse libre and song lyrics which are expanded from storylines and stock rhymes. Sparkling costumes and glittering headdresses including crystal crowns and ornaments are *likay*'s symbol.

*Likay* can be claimed as a national popular form since it developed in every region of Thailand. The form exists in every region but diversely shaped by the different dialectic, traditional, and socio-economic contexts (Barber, 2007:174). In the south it is called *likay pa*; *likay klong yao* in the northeast or Isan; *likay lanna* or *likay phayap* in the north; and *likay* in the central part and Bangkok. *Likay* characters are able to use both standard Thai (central Thai) and their local dialects. However, a clown is particularly designated to speak the local tongues which directly communicate with audiences. The southern Thais call *likay* of central Thailand *likay mueang* (urban *likay*), while *likay pa* (forest *likay*) refers to a performance played in a forest area or in a rural place. The main characters in the repertoire are *khaek daeng*, a hero of pseudo-Indian or Arabian ethnicity; *yayi*, a heroine; *chao mueang*, a governor; and *sehna* or a clown character. They all wear local Muslim costumes. Stories from legends, myths and folktales are regularly performed, including the practice of occult; local dialect is used in lyrics and dialogues. As in other popular theatres, witty repartees and singing skills are necessarily required (Noonsuk, 1995). Next, *likay klong yao*, is a hybrid theatre between the central *likay* and *mawlum*, an Isan dance-drama. It presents local stories in the local dialect and features the *khaen*, a local reed organ; *klong yao*, a long drum; and other Isan local instruments. The singing style is a mixture of intonation between the central *likay* and *mawlum*. Lastly, *likay lanna* or *likay phayap* has the same basis as central *likay*, except the language, in the same way as other *likay*; northern dialects are used in terms of local uniqueness (Sanguanserivanich, 1995: 62-63).

It can be said that *likay* is the main popular theatre which is adaptable and modifiable in the modernising state, and is regularly emulated by other popular forms. This is because *likay* contains numerous motifs in the frame of ‘Thai taste’ according to Barber (2007: 174):

*Likay* is a dual ritualistic and entertainment function; classical dance and movement aesthetics historical source literature and folk tales; the dynamic scenario-defining role of the storyteller; the use of improvisation, melodramatic and comic presentation; the incorporation of modern stories and techniques; and contemporary social commentary.

Correspondingly, all of these popular theatre forms: *likay*, *mawlum*, *lakon sor*, and *nang talung* have been modernised by audience’s demands. Modern stories from social events and television are commonly used together with Western music and bands. A concert or song-and-dance show is frequently presented before or after the main

performance in order to attract audiences and gain more financial rewards. Popular performance principally utilises ‘improvisation’ as a main theatrical mode. Performers regularly improvise their dialogues and song lyrics throughout a show based on a scenario which was provided and told to actors and actresses by a story teller, either a whole story or scene by scene. Since improvisation is ‘the heart’ of popular theatre, the actors’ skill of inventing more dialogues, verses and lyrics from a plot in each scene is required. Furthermore, in every popular theatre clowns present vulgar or profane dialogues, and are very popular among audiences. They can also speak directly to audience, both following a script but also making asides on topics such as politics, economics, entertainment and miscellaneous issues in their locality.

Consistent with Thai theatre records, popular theatre depends on market or audience support since, from the past to the present, it has had hardly ever been patronised by the previous rulers, monarchs, the government, or bureaucrats. The concern, therefore, has been to serve popular taste. Popular theatre can be performed both for ritual and devotional ends through animistic beliefs and for agricultural purposes, such as the fertility of soil, absence of drought and an abundance of crops. Entertainment value, however, is now the main intention of this kind of performance, with the sacred elements very faint, and it is usually subject to income from contracts or ticket sales. Kerdarunsuksri (2001: 34) also mentions the features of employment in the theatre business during the period of King Rama V (1868-1911), which covered both noble-commercialised theatre and popular performance. This can be divided into three types: *ngan chak*, *ngan plik*, and *ngan mao*. The first type with a high wage but performed for a short period of engagement was *ngan chak* (lit. a ‘backdrop job’). This kind of performance was for the nobility at grand celebrations. Secondly, a ‘trifling job’ called *ngan plik* was a short sequence of performances staged at festivities for the commoners. The stage was not as sophisticated as that for the first performance. The third sort was staged to the longest period of time, namely *ngan mao*, literally a ‘wholesale-hired job’. This type was generally performed at gambling houses where there was more income guarantee for the troupe because of the longer period of engagement.

## **4. Parallel and Dichotomous Structures in Court and Popular Theatre Forms: Aesthetic Judgement**

Thai theatre can be defined by the reciprocity and dichotomy between the court and popular realms. The majority of previous research has focused on court performance, as well as the bourgeoisie's dramatic arts and their considerable influence on popular theatre. This is because early records were made by scholars and artists at court, as Wittayasakpan (1992) notes. As a result, few studies of the interplay between popular theatre and royal court or elite theatre have been done. Therefore, the basis of interchange and differentiation between popular theatre forms and court performance is focused, in the following section, on cultural formation and the complex process of cultural exchange, in which cultural elements are preferred, absorbed, revised, or rejected (Chandler, 2008: 16).

### **4.1 Nexus of Theatrical Motifs: the Reciprocal Influence of Court and Popular Performance**

Court theatre, which is called the Thai 'great tradition,' portrays sophisticated, refined, and graceful styles of theatre. Popular theatre, on the other hand, known as the 'little tradition', is less refined and elegant, but has existed since the primeval period and has served as a basic element of the great tradition. Although different in sources, these two theatre genres have mutual resources and intermingle their theatrical ingredients; many of their performances have the same main motifs but different details. The purposes and distinguishing factors of such performances are significant and need to be accounted for. They are the poles between *hun luang* and *hun krabok*, *nang yai* and *nang talung*, and *lakon nai* and *lakon nok*. The first genre in each pair is from court theatre, while the second is from popular theatre. Although the two types of performance can be thought of as two poles, the circle of reciprocal influence between court and popular theatre is continuous.

*Lakon nok* was introduced to the royal court, adjusted to be more refined, and then called *lakon nai*. It was subsequently presented to an audience outside the palace, whose appreciation was not of its exquisite style, but of its amusing and humorous aspects, as Phuchadapirom (2007: 14) remarks. Although *lakon nok* basically shared some common

theatrical motifs with *lakon nai*, the two were different in many ways. *Lakon nai*, more refined than *lakon nok*, was influenced by court artistic standards, such as *khon*. The latter derived from *lakon chatri*, which emphasised amusing stories, rather than graceful dancing. The faster tempo of *lakon nai*'s music and its actors singing songs themselves were also unique. *Lakon nai*, in the beginning, performed only three stories of the court dramaturgy, portraying the great traditions of the court- namely, *Ramakien*, *Unarut*, and *Inao*. Eventually, Brandon (1993: 234) indicates that *lakon nai* began to imitate the dramatic stories of *lakon nok*, such as *jataka* stories, local histories, folk tales, and legends. Such new theatre forms, coming from the court, have been shown to the commoner and have been adjusted to suit popular tastes once again (Wongthes, 2008:11). This type of interchange is described as a circle of reciprocal influence between court and popular theatre.

More evidence of the reciprocity between popular and court theatre can be seen in the teaching approach of *lakon nai*, in which a male *lakon nok* master was allowed to teach women on forbidden ground. Yuangsri (1991: 57) points out that there were generally three restricted areas in the Royal Palace, which were accessible to varying degrees but were typically only open to the privileged. The exterior part allowed men and women, noblemen and commoners, to pass. Access to the second site, the middle, was permitted only to courtiers and bureaucrats. The most rigidly prohibited quarter was the interior part, to which only the royal family and the ladies of the court were admitted. A male dance-drama master was not allowed into this area but legitimately had access to instruct performances in the middle area, instead. As a result, maidservants or female volunteers could learn dance-drama in this area. Yet, when these former female performers were chosen to be the king's plebeian concubines or consorts of members of the royal family, they had to reside in the inner, forbidden part of the palace. As a result, they subsequently began to coach the noble women of the court. Dance-drama training by women of women emerged at that time. Even though the performance of *lakon nai* by women in the palace initially prohibited and excluded common people - men, in particular - this prohibition was often relaxed to allow male dance masters to teach and train *lakon* to noble women inside the palace. The gender of the performers in the two types of theatre, at the beginning, was different. In general, *lakon nok* was performed by male casts, in keeping with the decree of Prince Dhamrong (1964), while *lakon nai* was performed solely by woman players. By the middle of the nineteenth century,



however, women were allowed to perform publicly in *lakon nok*, instead of female impersonators.

Although court and popular theatre have interacted since their beginnings, popular theatre far from the palace has been considered less of an artistic form. This type of theatre was performed as part of the public entertainment at festive celebrations (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 24-25). Moreover, Thai noblemen at court who had graduated from European universities seemed to discriminate against rural people by distinguishing them and also their arts from more cosmopolitan people. Popular forms have also encountered a dramatic challenge in the form of discrimination and exclusion from national art forms by those in power, since 'official' Thai theatre has often included only those forms in contact with the former nobility or Western adaptations (Mitchell, 2008: 223). City residents who have high levels of education should appreciate classical Thai performances, new styles of theatre imported from Western countries, and modern genres that are in vogue, instead of folk or popular forms. This preference for classical and modern theatre over popular theatre has led noticeably to aesthetic criticisms of the latter theatre form.

## **4.2 Aesthetic Dichotomies: Differentiation between Court and Popular Theatre**

### **4.2.1 Thai Aesthetic Concepts and Socio-Cultural Formation**

Geertz suggests that aesthetics are a sense of beauty or the ability to respond intelligently to artistic works (1980: 1473-99). Similarly, Storey (2003: 92) points out that aesthetics is a method of seeing objects aesthetically, rather than recognising the intrinsic aesthetic properties of objects, so that everything can be seen aesthetically. However, one should keep in mind that class interests and cultural values play vital roles in aesthetic judgement. The aesthetics of art, as a cultural form, which is presented as a part of the whole society, is not an autonomous enterprise, but participation in a symbolic system of forms within society. Geertz (ibid) proposes that a semiotic interpretation suggests that art is a means of communication and thought and that aesthetic conceptualisation is a product of collective experience in a particular culture. Correspondingly, Mitchell (2008: 219) states that theatre is like other forms of cultural production that must be located within historical and political contexts. These are rooted in culture and manifest various expressions of everyday practical existence, since the

variety of artistic expression stems from the variety of conceptions men have about the way things are. When social and cultural forms change, the aesthetic concepts or semiotics, as well as the theatre forms, of the people are inevitably affected.

After World War II, Prince Wan Waithayakon (1891-1976) coined the term *sunthariyasat*, which was imported from Western concepts of aesthetics (Rutnin: 1983:7). Wittayasakpan (1992: 22-24) explains that Thai aesthetic conceptualisation genuinely relates to Buddhism and court refinement, while Satayanurak (n.d.) asserts that 'Thainess' connects to the triad of nation, religion, and kingship in her essay "The Construction of Mainstream Thought on 'Thainess' and the 'Truth' Constructed by 'Thainess'". The word *suay* (beauty) refers to a general sense of beauty, such as the beauty of women, flowers, and locations. Those objects generally indicate the qualities that constitute high standards. Slightly different, *ngam* (gracefulness), which is a Buddhist idea, indicates idealistic beauty or inner beauty. For example, a semi-smiling face with the merciful gaze of Buddha is seen as representative of the Lord Buddha. The beautiful mind of a decent woman is generally referred to by *ngam* (Rutnin: 1983:3-4).

Thai people believe that the beauty of existence, particularly that of human beings, is associated with karma, an idea from Buddhism and Hinduism that holds that an individual's actions determine his/her fate in each successive existence. Good-looking people may have been granted a great number of graces in their former existences or previous lives, as a result of the law of universal causation. This implicit belief is persistently expressed in Thai dramatic works, and Eoseewong (1995:89) suggests that a hero or heroine is basically beautiful both outside (being good-looking) and inside (having a beautiful mind). A few are, nonetheless, born with imperfect bodies or hideous faces but may become beautiful later due to their former merit. The miracles of escaping death or maintaining beauty even when ill or nearly dead are significant ideals for Thai heroes and heroines; Sita (Rama's wife in *Ramakien*), for example, is portrayed as having healthy red lips at the moment of her death. This represents the power she has accumulated through merit. Thai classical or court theatre has the same qualities as many aspects of classical Indian theatre, such as aesthetic principle, creativity, and the passing of tradition to subsequent generations. A high degree of refinement in performance and well-articulated aesthetic principles are the most significant characteristics of Indian theatre, as Richmond, Swann, and Zarrilli (1990) explain. Moreover, classical texts of ancient dramaturgy are usually utilised and dance styles

refined through the application of court aesthetic conventions, so that audiences must be aware of this heritage. Appreciation depends on the dedication of performers and the sophistication of performances, rather than on how amusing or funny a scene or story is. Although many of the theatrical techniques used in court theatre are borrowed from popular arts outside the court, they have been adapted and co-mingled, until it has become difficult to identify which motifs were original and which were borrowed.

On the other hand, popular artistic practices, which are considered, to a certain degree, inferior to those of the noble class, have adopted the aesthetic elements of court theatre, though they remain less refined, since popular arts have their own aesthetic styles: quick action, understandable language, abundance of humour, vulgarity, and semi-refined short dance sequences. Different aesthetic perceptions have led to aesthetic discrimination between popular theatre forms, since their aesthetic qualities, to some extent, have excluded Thai official aesthetic standards. Satayanurak's practical article mentioned above provides a great number of explanations of constructed definitions. Satayanurak states that the concept of Thainess, defined by Thai elite intellectuals and rulers, was designed to maintain the political hegemony and social construction of each regime. (n.d.: 1-2). Correspondingly, Bullock and Trombley (1999: 387-388) point out that the worldview of the ruling class is seen as the societal norm, which is perceived as a universally valid ideology and imposed on other social classes. Barber (2007: 190, 169) suggests that the quality of Thainess has been principally reflected in classical forms of performance that were established by the traditional court, since court arts were acknowledged as central to aesthetic identification. Adopting the term *sunthariyasat*, which emphasises a standard of taste, has led to 'aesthetic judgement', a prejudicial belief that court aesthetics are superior to popular aesthetics, through Thai cultural values. The comparative bias of dramatic arts is a consequence of idealism.

Since the royal court was considered the centre of refined culture, and since the king was believed to be supreme, the aesthetic judgement of theatre forms by means of court centralisation was established. The royal court was one of the centres of culture that related to aesthetic conception, seeming superior even to the temple, the other aesthetic centre of Thai culture, according to Rutnin (1983: 9-10). For example, people from the royal palace were recognised as *chaowang* (courtiers), which means that they were refined, graceful, and fashionable people whose ways of life and arts were considered the highest standards and were also imitated by commoners. By contrast, temple arts or

common entertainment, which, in some cases, required more skill and longer periods of training and practise to produce, were identified as popular entertainment that was inferior to the royal standard. Although caste divisions in Thailand were not as strong as they were in India, the arts of the privileged classes were obviously distinguished from those of the lower classes. Barber (2007: 172) points out that a trend toward court centralisation was much in evidence in the history of Thai theatre; for example, Prince Dhamrong claimed that *lakon chattri* originated in Ayutthaya, the former capital ruled by the king, rather than, as other scholars assert, in the southern part of Thailand, which was governed by city lords. Dhamrong's assertion indicated the national, court-centredness of Thai culture under the Siamese/Thai monarchy.

In spite of the fracturing of Thai socio-politics throughout the ages, the notion that Thainess contains the Thai nation, religion, and kingship has remained deep-seated in the minds of the Thai people. Therefore, Thai theatre is inextricably associated with those three pillars in a positive way. With the solemnity and formality of art forms that maintain the sacred status of divine kingship, court art has been considered superior to popular art forms. Moreover, court arts have been recorded in the form of inscriptions, chronicles, laws, decrees, or literature and referred to as the national arts. On the other hand, popular theatre, which has been regarded as entertainment at public festivals, full of coarse and vulgar elements, has been considered a trivial part of Thai art forms (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 24-26). Therefore, little official recorded evidence of popular performances has, historically, been made. Even when commoners were capable of challenging the court's prerogative of writing, elite ideas written in official court history were authorised in Thai historiography until the end of absolute monarchy, according to Reynolds (1987: 11). Reynolds also observes that after absolute monarchy ended in Thailand, with the assistance of foreign gentlemen-scholars resident in Bangkok, the search that began for Thai history was not reconsideration, but a nostalgic resuscitation of the magnificent Sukothai and Ayutthaya kingdoms (Reynolds, *ibid*).

Accordingly, the historical books written by former court and elite scholars have been highly influential and highly respected by teachers and students. The ideal standards of Thai aesthetics, as expressed through a form of Thai theatre that was established by members of the royal family and noblemen, led to ignorance of commoners' arts, due to the lack of formal records of such arts. According to studies of Thai theatre, *Tamnan*

*Lakon Inao* (The Legend of Inao Play), written by Prince Dhamrong<sup>22</sup> in 1964, is one of the most referenced sources of ancient Thai theatre. Prince Dhani Nivat, whose collections<sup>23</sup> are related to classical theatre, rather than to popular forms, is also a respected scholar whose books are frequently quoted. Records of popular theatre, by contrast, are deficient. *Pakkai Lae Bai Ruea* (Pen and Sail: Studies of Literature and History in the Early Bangkok Period), written by Eoseewong (2000), however, is one Thai book that focuses on popular literature. Although there is little direct information on popular theatre, this book provides much essential knowledge on popular arts and ways of life that relate to popular theatre.

Although the strong distinction that was made between court and popular theatre forms from the Ayutthaya period to the Ratanakosin era declined after the political revolution, another class division in Thai theatre emerged. Even though court performances were less important after the political revolution of 1932, they were still performed in many states or at royal ceremonies. Moreover, court performances were also considered valuable enough to be preserved, and the Department of Fine Arts took responsibility for them. Today, they are commonly seen as symbols of the grandness of Thai culture. Popular theatre, on the other hand, is a native tradition, entertaining for the working class. More to the point, academic and lifestyle factors play crucial roles in distinguishing classes of theatre. The so-called binaries of status between poor and rich, rural and urban, and uneducated and well-educated persons help explain this situation. Distinctions between elite and popular theatre, upper and lower class performance, and educated and uneducated artistic work have gradually taken shape in the minds of Thais. In particular, noblemen who, in the past, graduated from universities in Europe seemed to discriminate against people by distinguishing them and also their arts from the arts of the urban, especially those of Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. It can be said that the more distant people were from the court or the centre of power, the less likely their arts were to be considered artistic (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 24). Although the social status of *prai* ('a labourer') and *tat* ('a slave') disappeared from the Thai ruling system, the concept of the patron-and-client system, which can be used to distinguish between *nai*

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<sup>22</sup> The prince of blood, who graduated from Europe, wrote Thai theatre from his own experience at court, written sources, and interviewed with old court dancers.

<sup>23</sup> Examples of documents written by Prince Dhani Nivat which relate to court performances: Traditional Dress in Classic Dance of Siam; Hide Figure of the *Ramakien*; *Dalang*; King Rama VI's Last Work: *Madanabadha* or the Romance of a Rose (All printed in The Siamese Theatre: A Collection of Reprints from The Journals of the Siam Society, edited by Mattani Rutnin, 1975)

(boss, hi-class) and *bow* (servant, low-class), still implicitly remains (Poolthubya, 1981: 206).

Furthermore, many kinds of classical theatre have historically been considered superior to popular theatre and kept from common artists and practitioners. According to King Rama VI (1911 reprinted in 1967: 3-5), dignified, delicate, and high arts belonged to royal performances. Rama VI pointed out that *likay* (folk opera), having developed from Muslim chanting into humorous solos with music, was nothing more than a sort of parody of *lakon*. He considered the latter to be more honourable and refined. Similarly, the manipulation of *hun* (*hun luang* - a type of royal puppet), which is hard and skilled work, is only conducted by people from royal troupes, while *hun krabok* (a form of popular puppet), whose manipulation is less complicated, is handled by popular artists. More to the point, *nang yai* is performed on more important occasions than *nang talung*, a mode of entertainment for commoners. This became more so the case when the late M.R. Kukrit Pramoch, a Thai philosopher and artist, laid blame on some of the masters in the Department of Fine Arts for destroying the high standards of classical theatre when they tried to make Thai classical performances more enjoyable by adopting some of the theatrical elements of popular theatre (Burutratanaphan, 2009). Additionally, many classical dance and drama masters criticised the first invitation to the *likay* Somsak Phakdee Troupe to perform at The National Theatre in 1975, since *likay* was regarded as being in poor taste. As a result, *likay* performers encouraged their children to train and practice Thai dance at the dance school Natasin College, so that they could teach other performers in their troupes *likay* and show the equivalence of their standards to those of the court.

According to the above, some popular theatre forms were disdained by the court because they presented discourteous language and manners and lowered the standards of refined performances. This discrimination between court and popular theatre, which was firmly established from the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) to the Ratanakosin period, and during the reign of King Rama VII (1925-1935), was less strong after the revolution of 1932. Popular theatre, however, encountered aesthetic discrimination again during the ‘culture control phase’, which was introduced by the Department of Fine Arts during the early years of Phibun’s regime (1938-1944), a period in which a new aesthetic standard was established. Siriyuvasak (2000: 3) describes such discrimination as ‘controlling the popular imagination’. In this period, Western

theatrical standards were considered superior to Thai artistic elements by the government, which introduced Western drama to Thai society and promoted it as the 'official standard of aesthetic values', which stood for global or universal culture (Siriyuvasak, 2000: 5). Some popular forms were forbidden, because their words were considered rude or their acting insolent, demonstrating an uncivilised or uncultured manner. A Western orientation took over the central power of aesthetic appraisal. Siriyuvasak (ibid.) points out that the government appointed Luang Wichit as the chairman of the committee of new aesthetic formulation. This committee had the power to revise and improve Thai performances, to see that they met new standards and suited the ideas of the modern era. Apart from the domestic differentiation of the two binaries of the theatre construct, furthermore, Western theatrical principles also predominated over popular forms because they were considered the global standard during the Phibun regime (1938-1944 and 1948-1957). Therefore, popular theatre and other folk forms were seen as inferior both to court and to Western performances by the Thai cultural elite.

## Conclusion

The duality of Thai theatre can be seen as an intersection of continuous lines, as Richard Schechner (1997:3) suggests via a graphical representation of the three axes of theatre distribution: one axis, signifying genres, extends from ritual through folk and popular genres and on to commercial theatre; another axis, indicating time, extends from traditional to modern (from then to now); while the last axis represents desire for as wide a geographical-cultural distribution of cultures as possible. Going beyond the geographical-cultural perspective, other socio-cultural backgrounds play vital roles in the development of Thai theatre, in terms of theatrical elements' encounters, exchanges, and differentiation in form.

If *lakon* (*nai*, *panthang*, and *dukdamban*) is referred to as the definition of Thai classical theatre, it can be said that *likay*, a living popular theatre, describes actual Thai popular theatre, since *likay*, a vigorous popular form, has been modified to suit its audiences' tastes and the Thai entertainment climate, drawing on both traditional and non-traditional styles. It stays alive by way of commercial theatre; troupes receive no

government subsidies and are exclusively reliant on ticket sales. The next chapter will focus on a comprehensive review of traditional *likay*, from its origins to its more contemporary versions. This will provide some background to the new style of *likay* called ‘contemporary *likay*’, the focus of this thesis.



## Chapter 2

### Thailand's *Likay*: Review of *Likay* through the Popular History

#### *Likay*: a Definitive Popular Thai Theatre

As a non-court performance, *likay* is a 'living popular theatre' in a hybrid form presented as Thai folk musical theatre or Thai folk opera. Originating in a ritual element in chanting, *likay* has developed itself and eventually become an entertainment form of commercial popular theatre. Type-characters generally improvise dialogues, *ranikloeng* verse libre<sup>24</sup> and song lyrics during the performance following a scenario provided by a story teller expanded from storylines and stock rhymes. Most of the stories are melodramatic and comic presentations, sticking to the familiar and recognisable to Thai audiences. The modern stories and contemporary social annotations are integrated with older material. In other words, a combination between the residual and dominant motifs, this can be said to be an emergent form, according to Raymond<sup>25</sup> (1977). *Likay* performance is accompanied by *piphat* traditional music and interspersed with Thai classical dance and modern songs. Elaborate ornate costumes, glittering headdresses including crystal crowns and ornaments, and buoyant staging techniques in an energetic all-night performance are *likay*'s symbols.

Through reinterpreting the knowledge of *likay*, I outline the origin and development of *likay*, its artistic configurations, social aspects, and its position of popularity and how it links to Thai society. These are valuable topics in terms of sketching a skeleton of a form. However, newer aspects such as class, gender, power, globalisation, transnationalism, media studies, cultural studies and a critical analysis of *likay* in its socio-political context are also included as they are relevant to the study of a popular theatre form which is highly diverse and constantly changing over time. According to those considerably new aspects, I bring the 're' concept to the discussion as the basis for

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<sup>24</sup> *Ranikloeng* verse lib is a trademark of *likay* song. Characters use this song to introduce themselves and to express their feeling, or narrate a story line and situation. The ending verse of each rhyme contains a punch line to make the rhyme sounds eloquence and wittiness.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond, Williams. (1977). "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent", in Raymond William (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 121-127.

a cultural invention to provide the comprehensive features of *likay* evolution from the ancient period to the twentieth first century. The discussion will allow for the further discussion, reflecting the analysis of the ‘discourse’ and ‘practice’ of *likay*, and considering the questions why it is still popular at the present time, and why it is also chosen to be reinvented in way of contemporary theatre in the sense of contemporary work, a core of this thesis.

Even if *likay* history and evolution are offered as a background to this chapter, the interest rests in popular cultural significance, including *likay*’s quality and its appeal that can be appropriated to ensure commercial, ritual and political gain (Mitchell, 2008). The new repertoires of *likay* in the twenty-first century are essentially required in this new project. With the purpose of reconsidering the development of *likay*, I pursue the reorganising theme, accompanied by some extra contributions, going beyond those pieces of research cited in Introduction.

The discussion is focused on these following major concepts:

- Re-discovery of the history of *likay* development
- Re-visiting of the aesthetic and theatrical elements of *likay* in the contemporary era
- Re-consideration of *likay* form as popular theatre within Thailand’s cultural socio-political milieu

## **1. Re-Discovery of the History of *Likay* Development**

If the question ‘what kind of nation-wide popular Thai performance in traditional style is the most popular and well known amongst Thais’ is raised, *likay* would be the first kind which comes to the Thai mind. This is because *likay* has experienced successful development, starting from the late 1880s, going on to a period of its greatest popularity, followed by a period of relative decline during Thailand’s modernisation era, and then becoming fashionable again. Furthermore, the form of *likay* itself could be described “as the archetypal popular theatre form” (Barber, 2007: 246) because it is a hybrid theatre, borrowing theatrical elements from the court, *khon* (classical masked dance-drama), the *lakon nai* (female dance-drama of the inner court) and a form of

*chaobaan* (commoner or village resident) popular theatre form, namely *lakon nok* (male dance-drama of the outer court), all of which are still familiar to Thai people, according to Carkin (1984: 93-94). Despite the fact that the specific origins are debated, there is general agreement among theatre scholars and historians that *likay* ultimately derives from ceremonial Muslim chanting and incantation, known as *dikir* or *dikay*, transforming to secular entertainment called *likay* in the modern period (Smithies, 1971; Virulrak, 1980 and Carkin, 1984). This consensus agrees with the view of Sujit Wongthes (2006)<sup>26</sup>, a Thai revisionist historian who has researched and reinterpreted Siamese history. Therefore, the records of Smithies, Virulrak, Carkin and Wongthes are still considered as the main source for a study of the emergence of *likay*.

### 1.1 The Seminal Years: the Introduction of *Likay* in Thailand

Scholars and artists have discussed *likay*'s ancestry with connections to 18<sup>th</sup> century Indian, Malay, Egyptian and even Persian traditions such as Islamic ritual incantations. However, the two main sources of *likay* were Shiite Muslim trade emissaries from Persia and migrants from the Malayan peninsula (Barber, 2007: 246). Both groups came to Thailand periodically beginning in the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) as traders, priests and court officers (Virulrak, 1980: 29), and became established since then. While Virulrak (ibid) indicates that the Muslim religious performance called *dikir* or *dikay* was probably introduced into Thailand by these merchants and immigrants, Koolsirisawat (2002) explains in a book titled *Khwam Sampan Khong Muslim Thang Prawatisart Lae Wannakadi Thai* [The Relationship of Muslims in Thai history and Literature] that *likay* is derived from a Muslim chanting of the Sufi clergy who were widespread in Persia and India, in Mogul dynasty, in the twelfth century. Their chief recitation was *zīkr* or *dhikr*, (of which pronunciation is changed to *dikir* and, later, *dikay*).

This Muslim religious chanting –*dikay*– which involved a group of men seated in a circle playing a *ramana*, a one-face drum instrument, combined with the Buddhist recitation – *suat phramalai*<sup>27</sup>– which was part of a funeral ceremony within the Siamese

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<sup>26</sup> Sujit Wongthes has accumulated historical information of *likay* on the series of 'Likay Ma Chak Nai' (Where is *likay* from?) in Matichon Soodsapda weekly magazine, from 29 September to 28 December 2006.

<sup>27</sup> *Suat phramalai* or a *phramalai* chant is Buddhist chanting for funerals by the *phra song* (monks). This recited narrative is about a monk, named *phramalai* who visits both heaven and hell and brings back news of them to tell people.

context. Its original name changed from a ritual form *zīkr* to *dikir* to *dikay* and to entertainment form called *yikay* and finally to *likay*. To extend this explanation, the Muslim chant which is used for a religious purpose is called *dikay*, a kind of vocal incantation by Islamic chanters in Malaysia (Smithies, 1971: 77). Subsequently, *yikay* is a secular mixture of Muslim chant and Thai *sipsongphasa* (twelve languages) chant<sup>28</sup>, and is the parent of *likay* which refers to an entertainment mode. This basis of secular entertainment emerged when the Siamese imitated the jokes in the solos of the Malays' innovation by adding the comical side in *yikay* repertoire. The Muslim incantation was originally performed for eulogising God while its function was later shifted to praise the important person or a member of the royal family. In Thailand, Smithies supposes that the first recitation by Muslims should be an offer of service to the court on the occasion of merit-making by the royal family in 1880 (1971: 77). This record is certified by Prince Dhamrong (1962:126) who witnesses that a *dikay*, Muslim chanting was performed in a ritual of the mourning ceremony for King Rama V's Queen Sunanthakummarirat in the Grand Palace in 1880. Next, in the same year 1880, in the course of its transformation into a secular entertainment, as Virulrak (1980: 31) points out, two groups of Muslim chanters performed *yikay* at the British Embassy on Queen Victoria's Birthday.

In order to create some more enjoyment, the performers used a lantern shining light on a drum, as a screen, and manipulated small leather puppets. It can be said that a secular entertainment of Thai Muslims called *yikay*, somewhat adjusted its form from Malaysian *dikay*, a Muslim chant for a religious concern, and is performed today in the southern provinces of Thailand called *likay hulu*. Additionally, Khlumchareoun (2009) indicates that Thai Muslim chanting performed for a religious purpose in the same way as *dikay* was in the past is also still presented in Ayutthaya province, a centre of the former Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350-1767), and is called *likay rieab* (plain *likay*).

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<sup>28</sup> *Suat sipsongphasa* or *ok phasa*, literally means a twelve-language chant or sing, is a performance of twelve foreign musical combination which derived from assimilation and synthesis of other neighbouring cultures to Thai culture (Polachan, 2002: 103). This term of *sipsongphasa* is used 'figuratively rather than literary' (see Virulrak, 1980: 42). The number 'twelve' has its own significance, and is worthy of reverence, according to ancient Thai belief. It became a principle of privilege, utilized by the royal court. However, the exact number 'twelve' may in fact be more or less and this is acceptable because the number 'twelve' is applied for fortune and prestige, as it is related to the king's twelve treasuries, twelve colonies, and twelve nationalities of traders (Wongthes 2006a: 78).

Taking into consideration another source of *likay* origin, there is evident about *likay* in Thailand's neighbouring country. Cambodian *yikay*, the theatre form which is similar to Thai *likay* also has origins from Muslim culture. Diamond (2003: 155) summarised from an interview of Cambodian scholars that *yikay* was unknown in Cambodia until 1876; the Muslim presence in Java was likely the source. Concurrently, a drum of *yikay* may have come from interaction with the Cham people, a Muslim group in Cambodia. In view of the fact that Cambodian *yikay* is supposed to derive from Muslim religious practice, it shares some characteristics with Malay *dikay* as well as Thai *likay*. Due to the fact that the origin of *likay* in Thailand is continually debated, these kinds of evidences provide crucial evidence in terms of tracing where *likay* derives from.

## **1.2 Journey of *Likay* Development: the Marriage of a Ritual Performance and a Secular Entertainment**

*Likay* is an unorthodox type of performance as well as a competitive form. Originating from the strictly sacred ceremonial Muslim chanting, it transformed into a definitely secular entertainment. Its customs and rules of performance are flexible in that they can be adapted and modified into a better and more fashionable form for the modern audience, based on its unique conventional theatrical semiotics. It can be said that this dynamic genre survives by means of adoption, adaptation and incorporation and it also negotiates the impacts of mass media culture in the contemporary era. It adapts by selecting some suitable elements for its repertoire which contain numerous motifs which suit 'Thai taste'.

Both *dikay* and *suat phramalai* in the ancient time had become popular before the beginning of 1900, losing their religious purports as they were transformed into secular entertainment forms, known as *yikay* and *suat kharuhat* (Virulrak, 1995: 229) respectively. While *yikay*, which transformed from *dikay*, was performed by male chanters in Malay outfits seated in a circle with a dramatic sketch, *suat kharuhat*<sup>29</sup> transformed from *suat phramalai* in the reign of King Rama III (1842-1851). Since there were songs, repartees and some physical actions in the *suat phramalai* repertoire, the king, who was a strict Buddhist, concluded that those comical styles and risqué

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<sup>29</sup> *Suat kharuhat* means a layman chanting, combined the form with *yikay* and became later an alternative in the form of *yikay sipsongphasa*, presented with more uncouth banter, more body movement and added comical sketches.

jokes performed by monks were depraved. In performing *suat kharuhat* one of the male groups of four takes a male leading role, one performs a female impersonator, and two are chorus members, sitting on a bench and singing a sequence of comic sketches in twelve languages in a sequence of comic sketches caricaturing foreigners and their pronounced mannerisms (Virulrak, 1995: 229). These are based upon the foreign characteristics and intonations of different nationalities (Virulrak, 1980: 43).

In the process of transformation, there is evidence of an avoidance of breaking a truly sacred rule of Muslim religious practice: it is prohibited to employ Muslim ritual in a comical manner (Wongthes, 2006a: 78). To exemplify this, a performance in an opening scene of *yikay sipsongphasa* is presented by a pseudo Hindu instead of the Muslim celebrant. This permissible character is called a *khaek rodnammon*, a male character who sprinkles holy water as a blessing to audiences in a comical manner. Such character substitution is acceptable, according to Wongthes (ibid), because Thai people have the same mythical concept of a so-called ‘*khaek*’ representing a non – Thai man, either Muslim or Hindu having a high nose, black hair, beard and moustache. This concept of ‘*khaek*’ is the result of the large numbers of immigrants to Thailand since the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767). As a result, *likay* artists today believe without hesitation that *likay* is derived from India, not Persia or Malaya because of this Indian/Hindu pseudo role. Moreover, the hand gestures they use are similar to those used in Indian dancing (Smithies, 1971: 79). They also use the term ‘*ok khaek*’ to refer to the prelude to an Indian impersonator singing and dancing in Indian style which developed from *khaek rodnammon* performance.

The secularised *yikay sipsongphasa* had two branches. The first one, which is called *likay*, is based on the comical sketches and storylines, transposed to the dramatic play form, which has been constantly developed to become the *likay* of today. The second one is called *lamtad*, a form which has changed slightly from the original *yikay*. Its repertoire manifests a non-dramatic style, having ludicrous songs as a basis (Tramot, 1955: 88-95). This kind of performance contains a sequence of songs, illustrating flirting repartee and everyday teasing sung by two opposing groups of men and women, accompanied by a band of *ramana*, a one-face drum, the same instrument as used in *yikay sipsongphasa*. Its styles were borrowed from the Thai traditional folksongs common in Thailand in the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767), according to Wongthes (2006b: 78). The form is ancient but relevant to the modern world. The performer sings

his / her repertoire of witty rhymes together with improvised the eclectic contemporary commentaries. In spite of differences of presentation with *likay*, *lamtad* serves the same function as *likay* as a popular entertainment for the common people.

In later years, the *yikay sip song phasa* was so popular and became the main entertainment in casino theatres. Since *lakon ram*, a classical dance drama was regularly performed in casinos as well, *yikay sip song phasa* was influenced and absorbed the former form's dramatic elements and gradually develop into an actual dramatic performance seen as *likay*. The form became a commercial theatre competitor when the Prince Theatre, a public theatre administered by the courtiers who came back from Europe influenced by Western style theatre, was established in 1890. Around the mid 1890s the first public *likay* theatre was introduced and called 'wik' (a Thai pronunciation of the English word 'week'), owned by Phraya Petchpani, a former courtier. This theatre offered a kind of modernised *likay*, called *likay songkhruang* (elaborated *likay*) in which the royal costumes were adapted.<sup>30</sup> The court in the reign of King Rama V was predominant and marked as the centre of Siam / Thailand's modernisation, which included socio-economics, politics, culture, and westernisation, so the nobility and courtier's taste became worth following. When the public theatre was introduced and its performance intrigued a bourgeois audience, this style of performance in a theatre was very soon to gain popularity among common theatre goers (Samutkoopt, et al. 1998: 39). However, the elite form of Prince Theatre performance, which specifically targeted only aristocrats, was unsuitable for popular audiences. Wongthes (2006c: 78) indicates that the common audiences were not only unable to afford the high ticket-prices, but the performance of Prince Theatre itself was too sophisticated to appreciate and comprehend, and it was also too slow in movement and action. *Likay*, therefore, was preferable and the genre became the most popular theatre form.

Nevertheless, the theatrical elements of court forms were adopted and adapted. *Likay songkhruang* saw a solidification of dramaturgical manifestation from the court-based theatre forms and merged them into its repertoire. The dramatic form, costume, and

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<sup>30</sup> *Likay songkhruang* performers adopted and adapted the royal family outfits by wearing a cloth of gold, decorated by insignia, shoulder strap, jewellery chest, and a face shield to the top of the crown. A long-sleeved cylinder with sparkling embroidery was worn by a female character.

other artistic elements were borrowed from *lakon nai* and *lakon ram*, increasing more outstanding dramatic forms than its prototypes. Continually innovating and with the intention of increasing its audience attraction, the *piphat* orchestra was introduced as an elaboration of the musical instrument form that had used only *ramana*, a one-face drum. Concurrently, the first *likay* actress, a real woman, was introduced around 1914 in the period of Thailand's modernisation, which focused on realism imported on Western principles. Accordingly, a male character had to be performed by a man and a female character vice versa. The fantasising character such as a half of human and animal was strictly prohibited in the Cultural Revolution in 1942<sup>31</sup> (Koanantakool, 1998: 146) since a realistic style influenced from a Western theatrical perspective was to some degree exploited in Thai theatre.

However, this imitation of the court and its adjustment followed the government's policy of Cultural Revolution, and the modification to suit commoners' tastes brought a dilemma to the *likay* genre. The new hybrid style, while admired by commoners was inevitably insulted by the elite due to its far-from-standard theatrical motifs. After viewing *likay* of Phraya Petchpani in his first *likay* theatre house in Thailand in 1897, Prince Dhamrong (1962: 79) indicated a great number of weak points of the repertoire, such as the incomplete music and unrefined dance. Phraya Petchpani manifestly explained to the Prince that his audiences' interests were focused on beautiful costumes, comedy, and fast-moving action instead of those refined elements of court theatre. Furthermore, the creativity of his elegant costumes had regard to women's appreciation. The more attractions he offered, the more often they came and paid for tickets (Virulrak, 1980: 73). It can be said that *likay* is a truly commercial theatre. This may cause a stigma, as it shows why *likay* is labelled as a low-grade form: that is because it is compared to a classical genre which is contributed to by nobility and courtiers. Although there was reciprocal interaction between court and popular theatre, court exhibited its superiority to popular forms when borrowing their motifs by adjusting them to be appropriate and suit a noble's taste. In contrast, when *likay* borrows court or classical motifs, adapting, rather than employing a whole refined format, it has still been judged as a non-artistic form. In terms of art for art's sake, it can be said that *likay* itself

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<sup>31</sup> According to the theatre classification in the Cultural Revolution, the *nataadontri* was the new name and form of the *likay* from 1942 to 1944. This new name referred to many strict rules to perform *likay*, for example, scripts must be censored by the government officials; realistic styles of performance were enforced; and vulgar styles and language were strictly banned.



has its own unique style as a great popular form. An appreciative connoisseur might understand why a performer dances in a non-refined style or uses a few Thai traditional songs in his repertoire. This is because a *likay* performer has to have multiple-competent skills: to sing, dance and talk on their own; to improvise a storyline; and to tell a real-life story in an everyday idiom to audiences. These are the true aesthetics and characteristics of *likay*.

### 1.3 *Likay* in Modernisation

The period after the end of WWII around 1947 is seen as the next phase of transposition of *likay* development. Barber (2007: 247) marks *likay lukbot*, a new dominant mode of *likay* as a “strong reference to the ribald, comic skits of the *suat kharuhat* being identified as the form of subaltern.” Its music instrument is the *piphat* orchestra, presenting the *lukbot song*. *Likay lukbot* was originally performed in everyday life costumes but more colourful and exaggerated with headbands. Then the late *likay* master named *pho kru* Homhuan (1899-1978) tried a waistcoat and forehead-band with a bird feather with the *likay lukbot* costume, and made it more decorative.

When the provincial *likay* artists had to come to Bangkok in order to be tested and gain an artistic certificate according to the government policy around 1942, Homhuan with the troupe’s members turned this crisis into an opportunity by renting the *wik talad turian* (the Durian Market Theatre House) to perform *likay*. Homhuan created a hybridity between rural and urban artistic motifs which became very popular with urban spectators. With solid training from the *likay* master, Homhuan, skilful disciples invented their own troupes. Boonlert Najphinit (b.1942), one of Homhuan’s excellent trainees, after performing and teaching *likay* for more than forty years, was honoured to be the *likay* national artist in 1996. Another is Homhuan’s grandchild, Wiroj Veerawattananon (b.1943). He is now a famous *lukthung* song composer and the *likay* master in Thailand. Next are the legendary *likay* artists, Banhan Sithomhuan (b.1948), Somsak Phakdee (b.1956) and Pongsak Suansri (b.1957) whose reputations have been widely-recognised by audiences for a long time. It can be said that among the middle-aged *likay* audience, most of them know those legendary *likay* performers. Alas, these five actors have changed their roles to be producers, masters or occasional guest actors. Their charisma as the potential artists as well as the audiences’ heart captivators have

hardly declined, but their ages and their figures which are not as attractive as those of younger casts, limit their casting opportunities.

Around the second half of the twentieth century, the prime time of those celebrated *likay* artists; they participated in a contest with other troupes, called *prachan*. Banthun So Tewarach (Interview, 2010) said that the three well-known *likay* troupes at that time, including Banhan Sithomhuan, his brother, Somsak Phakdee and Vicharnnoi Lukthonburi, were regularly invited to compete with one another in a temple fair. After 3 hours the judges started counting the numbers of seated audience members for each troupe, and stopped counting at midnight. The winner was the troupe with the largest number of audience members, and it was Banhan's troupe who frequently won.

Before the epoch of mass media, *likay* troupes looked after their own publicity by making a network of relationships with the community. Since mass media such as television, radio, and newspaper became influential in society, *likay* troupes depended on advertising in order to make themselves better known. For example, in 1975, Somsak Phakdee, a *likay* actor known as *Likay ngoen lan* –a 'million bath'<sup>32</sup> *likay* star', an alias coined by a famous Thai newspaper critic, Yingyong Sadedyard– became famous through Yingyong's promotion, such as the release of Somsak's performance programme in a national newspaper. *Likay* still has continually relied on various types of mass media to promote actors individually or *likay* troupes. For example, they needed to have their own song album, be interviewed in many variety or talk-show programs, and record their live performances. Besides the reliance on media promotion, *likay* troupes have enchanted *likay* goers by placing more attractive decorative embellishments on their costumes and in their stage design. Vicharnnoi Lukthonburi received the alias 'the twelve-colour star actor' since he changed his costume in every single scene of his appearance to gratify the host who paid 24,000 baths (in 1991)<sup>33</sup> for his troupe (Moungsanit, 1991: 93). Swarovski crystals, one of the most beautiful ornaments which easily reflect stage light, replaced plastic crystals or false diamonds sown onto costumes, and these more elegant adornments are used by the front-role performers. Likewise, Pongsak Suansri (Interview, 2010), the innovative artist asserts that he is the first *likay* performer who created and performed on the *wethi loifah*,

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<sup>32</sup> 1 Pound Sterling = 45.279 Thai Bath in 1975

<sup>33</sup> 1 Pound Sterling = 45.146 Thai Baht in 1991

literary, the sky-high stage<sup>34</sup> with the biggest *piphat* orchestra ensemble. The heyday of Somsak Phakdee and other renowned artists lasted approximately 20 years (1970-1990); their popularity gradually declined thereafter. *Likay* came to the low point again in the early 1990s, but its popularity came back around 1995. Chaiya Mitchai, who started his career as *likay* actor, has become the most famous Thai country-song (*lukthung*) singer, after he was promoted by many kinds of mass media, especially television. His song album in 1997 named 'Mai Thammada' (Extraordinary), sold in the million.

At present, *lukthung* song is well liked among *likay* audiences, and it is tempting for *likay* actors to rise to be a *lukthung* singer so that they can gain more money and fame by releasing their own song albums. The famous *likay-lukthung* singers in 2000s include Sutirat Wongthewan, Wattana Anan, Krataikhao Daorung and Nopparat Maihom. Their troupes can set a double-price fee for a nightly performance. Accordingly, *lukthung* songs, which are very popular among *likay* audiences, are always sung by actors during their performances in two ways: firstly, *lukthung* is sung in a special show, in the intermission, or as a last show each night to make extra. Secondly, it is performed as part of an actual play; in the latter case, a *lukthung* song is carefully selected for its tune and lyrics to suit a particular scenario. Moreover, if such shows are successful, performers may be approached by record companies for an album release. Mass media companies play a very important role in promoting such *likay lukthung* (a *likay* actor who becomes a professional *lukthung* singer) in a highly competitive market with many new releases of mass media entertainments, such as televised drama, movies, and pop songs.

Having struggled in the difficult situation of modernisation, *likay* troupes have developed their performances to compete with other mass media forms of entertainment and to be more attractive to audiences. In response to this challenge, Wattana Anan (interview, 2010) has created a cabaret-like show or a live music video featuring a *rai karn piset*, a special programme in which the musical play and stage props are used in contemporary stage performances with backgrounds or stage accessories. Their

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<sup>34</sup> Typically, *likay* stage has a standard tri-part space in the same level. There are: an actual-play area, a back stage, and a *piphat* or music part. The *piphat* musical ensemble is placed on the left of the stage. In *wethi loifah*, the *piphat* part is lifted to perform on a designated platform placed behind the stage. A performing space is also expanded, from 6 metres to 12 metres. The word *loifah* (sky-high) refers to a stage without a roof in the open air or outdoor space.

creativity is very warmly welcomed among *likay* spectators. The continual development of *likay* performance serves the demands of audiences who are accustomed to watching television is considered a necessary function of the form.

#### 1.4 Typical *Likay* Performance

A typical *likay* performance makes an introduction with the *piphat* musical prelude to *ok khaek* which in turn greets the audiences as well as giving a synopsis. After that, there is a dramatic story of heroes, heroines, clowns, villains and villainesses. Normally, a *likay* story is not performed in its entirety. The actor or the announcer asks the audience to see the very exciting scene the next night, but the next night typically the story is started a new one. At the end, the *likay* troupe usually performs a mini concert, singing popular *lukthung* songs to the audience. Performers will receive garlands with cash from their fan clubs based on the popularity of the song and the admiration for the performers.

*Likay* performance can be divided into three main parts, namely (a) *homrong* (prelude), (b) *longrong* (the actual play), and (c) *larong* (ending). The traditional *homrong* part embraces prelude songs and two dances called *ram tawaimue*, and *ok khaek*, while a modern *homrong* pattern usually includes a *lukthung* song in concert style, particularly in the *ngan plik* performance (a sponsored work). The *longrong* presents an introductory scene of each main character together with backstage narration. It accommodates a plot scenario in which characters dance, mime, sing songs and deliver dialogues through a given storyline. The *larong* contains various means of bringing the story to a conclusion and provides other farewell statements or after-show activities for the audiences. Details of this tri-part repertoire of a *likay* performance are as follows:

##### (a) *Homrong*

A troupe leader or troupe announcer begins by saying that a troupe will perform shortly and invites the audience to take a seat in front of the stage. Next, a *homrong*, or stage-warming, or a *homrong-piphat* introduction, begins with a *sathukan* melody, one of

thirteen melodies<sup>35</sup> borrowed from the *lakon ram* prelude and employed as a *likay* musical prelude. The *sathukan* melody is employed as a sacred instrument, to invite the divine spirits of the theatre and performing arts to protect the troupe and guarantee its success. The last melody in this prelude series is *wa*, which reminds both performers and the audience that a performance will shortly begin. As *likay* is highly adaptable, *lukthung* songs, or any kinds of pop songs, can be sung in this part of a *likay* repertoire, after the *homrong-piphat* introductory opening has finished, to extend the duration of the introduction if the performers are still preparing and are not yet ready to perform *ram tawaimue* and *ok khaek*.



**Photograph 1:** Performers of Sornram-Nampetch Troupe perform a worship dance or *ram tawaimue* in order to please the gods. (Takian Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)



**Photograph 2:** Actresses of Wattana Anan Troupe perform *ram tawaimue* prior to the introduction. (Chula Mani Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

<p>Please see DVD 1 clip 1 (duration: 7.38 minutes) An example of <i>ram tawaimue</i>, a warship dance</p>
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<sup>35</sup> The thirteen melodies of *lakon ram* are *sathukan*, *tranimitra*, *ruasamla*, *tonchub*, *khaoman*, *pathom*, *la*, *samoe*, *choet-ching*, *choet-klong*, *chamnan*, *kraonai* and *wa*. If time is limited, these series of *homrong* melodies would be cut and only four melodies are played: *sathukan*, *tranimitra*, *kraonai* and *wa*.

*Ram tawaimue*, a type of worship dance that is typically used in *wai kru*<sup>36</sup> ceremonies, is performed prior to the introduction, to please the gods. It is also performed for *kae bon*.<sup>37</sup> *Phleng naphat*, which is used to respectfully invite the dance drama spiritual masters to join the performance, refers to both *phleng cha* (a slow-tempo melody) and *phleng reo* (a quick-tempo melody); these are played by *piphat* musicians and serve as background music for *ram tawaimue*. Subsequently, *ok khaek*, a remnant of *dikay*, which is connected to the *sipsongphasa* convention, indicating the foreign origins of the form, is presented - also as part of the introduction. *Ok khaek* is a manifestation of *khaek*, a pseudo-Indian character. Normally, other members, particularly a leader, are seated at the back of the stage and sing two traditional *ok khaek* melodies, *sam-se* and *buranyawa* (Virulrak, 1980: 223). The lyrics of these melodies are sung in pseudo-Malay and pseudo-Indian languages, respectively. The opening line is typically the mock-Indian phrase ‘*hey hatcha, hey hey hey hey hey, hey salamana la la la la la la la*’, and the customary ending phrase is ‘*ha ha hey hey ma chom likay hai chun jai*’ (“please come to enjoy *likay*”), or ‘*hanle wanga chern tasana likay*’ (“it is time to see *likay*”).

In performing an *ok khaek* dance review on stage, there are two methods of presenting *khaek*: with the first, an actor dons a pseudo-Indian costume and uses hand gestures and movements similar to those used in Indian dance. A *khaek* may sing the *sam-se* and *buranyawa* songs himself. If an actor is alone on stage, he always takes the role of narrator, greeting the audience and briefly recounting an incident that will happen in the actual play. Alternatively, a girl or female teenager (usually the daughter of a *likay* performer) appears, wearing a *sari*, an Indian female costume, and dances in a mock-Indian dance style. A backstage narrator relates a brief story to the audience. However, *ok khaek* dance reviews are usually omitted in the *ngan wik* style of *likay*, since *ngan wik* troupes perform almost every night in the same place, and a performer singing at the back of the stage is sufficient as *ok khaek* in short.

Please see DVD 1 clip 2 (duration: 3.44 minutes)  
An example of *ok khaek*, the prelude singing and Indian  
style dancing

<sup>36</sup> *Wai kru* is a ceremony set for paying tribute to both living theatre arts masters and the divine spirits.

<sup>37</sup> *Kae bon* is a ritual to redeem a vow after individual's request has been obtained from the deities.

The *sam-se* and *buranyawa* songs that form part of the *ok khaek* prelude, particularly in modern *likay* performances, can be replaced by troupe songs, including the popular *lukthung* melodies whose lyrics are specially composed to advertise troupes' reputations and such details as troupe leaders' names and cell phone numbers. This song also indicates gratitude to sponsors and audiences through the inclusion of sponsor names and the mention of communities. Normally, in *ngan plik*, a type of sponsored-work performance, troupes bless and greet their sponsors and audiences by presenting the full cast on the front stage when an *ok khaek* song starts, without a review dance. This style is called *ok khaek ok tua*. All troupe members, wearing the same colours and patterns of *likay* costume or their own individual styles of *likay* costume, sing on stage.



**Photograph 3:** A child *likay* troupe performs *ok khaek ok tua* (full cast members wear *likay* costumes presenting on the front stage and singing along when an *ok khaek* song starts). (Phrapiren Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Please see DVD 1 clip 3 (duration: 3.11 minutes)  
An example of *ok khaek ok tua*, a troupe blesses and greets their sponsors and audiences by presenting the full cast on the front stage

For approximately the last two decades, many *likay* troupes have performed their preludes in a *lukthung*-concert style. After finishing the *wa*, a prelude end-signalling song, and *ram tawaimue* (if needed), such troupes perform *lukthung* songs, with their dancers in full *lukthung*-concert-style costume. The singers and dancers are usually *likay* performers and include the troupe leader, who typically sings around three to six

songs at the end of the show. This is a time for fan-club audience members or *mae yok* (matrons) to give the cast flower garlands and cash.

When *likay* musicians are performing *sathukan*, the first melody played in the *homrong*, the troupe leader or one of his parents places his offerings, which are flowers, fruits, incense sticks, candles, and money, in front of the *rishi* image at the back of the stage. All the actors raise their hands up to *wai* (putting their palms together in worship) and repeat their mantras, to contribute moral support to one another and ensure the success of the troupe. The musical prelude continues while the actors put on make-up and clothes. At this point, as a major part of the improvisation, the troupe leader or the storyteller begins *jaekbot* (story-giving) and specifies the sequence in which the performers will perform. Only a brief storyline and the characters' names are presented; the performers need to think about the characters, songs, dances, and dialogues they will perform in their first *naphat* (scenes).

#### (b) *Longrong*

The musical prelude continues as background music during the transition from *homrong* to *longrong*. When a performer is ready to perform, the announcer announces the names of famous performers and the play's title. Next, the announcer asks the audience to welcome the first performer in the first scene with loud applause. Often, younger performers are cast in roles of higher status, while older or more senior performers play servants and other lower-status characters. Before a performance begins, a younger performer usually apologises to a more senior performer for this reversal of the conventional hierarchy. This tradition, called *wai*, is a mode of paying respect. The first performer, who is usually a kingly or noble character, either a protagonist or antagonist, normally enters the front stage and pays respect to the audience by offering *wai* (putting her palms together) or *khong* (a bow). Stepping from behind the right wing of a backdrop, the first performer often enters with a graceful walk and dances to a *samoe* melody, after paying respect to the audience. Meanwhile, the performer's name, reputation, role, and character are announced off-stage. After dancing and walking to the middle of the stage, the performer turns his back on a bench placed in the middle of the stage, adjacent to a scenic backdrop, and then turns to face the audience. The performer signals to the musicians by raising his right hand in a Thai dance gesture



called *pong*<sup>38</sup>, to stop the *samoe* melody, and then prompts the musicians to begin a *ranikloeng*.

After the *ranikloeng* has ended, the performer also makes a speech, repeating the song lyrics that explain his character's background and objectives. The character archetypally finishes his first *naphat* (first scene) by singing a *songmai* tune, briefly notifying the audience of what he will do next. Some classical Thai tunes can also occasionally replace *songmai*, depending on a performer's individual talents. This is typically the case in at least one *naphat*, but there is no strict rule for how often it should occur. Apart from the *samoe*, there are alternative melodies that can accompany the first appearance of a character. A *choet*, for example, is used instead of a *samoe* melody if the first scene starts with a battle or a journey. Fighting action is usually accompanied with multiple offstage yells of *ao hey*, which can provoke the audience, as well as enliven a performer's acting. A *phra ek*, or troupe leader, is never the first performer on stage. He often makes his first appearance in the middle of a story, after supporting characters have played several scenes; the more he delays his appearance, the more intense is the audience's desire to see him and give him large monetary rewards. *Phra ek* characters often perform high-status characters. There are two musical options for a *phra ek*'s entrance. The first is a *samoe*, which requires a fixed dance style. The second is a *krataiten*, which is more improvisational and allows the *phra ek* to flirt with the audience. Some performers perform *lukthung* songs during their scenes, to please the audience or to depict their characters' lives.

Ensemble or encounter scenes provide an opportunity for a group of characters to gather onstage and talk about the story being performed in detail, thus leading into another scene. At the end of such scenes, as discussion concludes, the main character of the scene sings a *songmai* tune as he/she exits the stage and as other characters follow them at a normal pace. Sometimes none of them sing or dance after briefly informing the audience of what will happen next; they only walk to the back of the stage. A *likay* repertoire gives each scene (*naphat*) to the audience and uses backstage narration to link all scenes together or depicts situations sequentially. Normally, the *longrong* repertoire embraces a mixture of archetypal scenes and actions. The introduction is followed by a range of activities, such as fighting and flirting, and genres. The master plots of *likay*

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<sup>38</sup> To put an index finger on a thumb on the right hand and raise that gesture covering up the right eye-brown.

performances combine romance and comedy, with truth being revealed only later, as a general melodramatic formula. A family, or two princes, is separated and reunited; one husband deals with two or more jealous wives; a son sentences his father to death, based on incorrect information. The precise details of the master plots of *likay* are subsequently presented as ‘conventions of character and story’.

Please see DVD 1 clip 4 (duration: 7.06 minutes)  
An example of a love scene between a hero and a heroine

Five stock character types form the core of each *likay* performance are *phra ek* (hero), *nang ek* (heroine), *kong* (villain), *itcha* (villainess), and *chok* (male or female clown). Other, supplementary characters, performing in less important roles, such as *pho* (father) and *mae* (mother), may be seen as old kings and queens or as patricians and their wives. Additionally, minor characters and extras who take the roles of chambermaids and soldiers are typically *likay* novices or inexperienced *likay* performers. Protagonists are always accompanied by clowns. Since heroes and heroines have gracious manners and good behaviour, a following clown is often seen as a confidant, servant, brother or sister who helps the hero or heroine solve a problem in a chaotic situation or with a ribald opponent.

Virulrak (1980: 190) further explains the function of the clown:

[He/she] seems to be the smartest person when it comes to solving problems, though the clown acts foolishly. While other characters in the play worry about love, war, and sometimes philosophy, he/she talks about sex, food, death, and other necessary things.

Correspondingly, Eoseewong (1995: 118) suggests that a clown can be removed from a story’s situation, as he is ‘omniscient’, making comments about the story to the audience. When a hero is mournful, a clown can soothe him with his comedic perspective and tell the audience that the clown himself knows what is happening and will help the hero. Moreover, a clown can be a ‘spokesperson’ for a hero, requesting monetary rewards from the audience; for example, after a hero finishes introducing himself as a wealthy prince, a clown may directly address the audience, telling it that the actor portraying the prince is, in reality, struggling financially that his car will soon be confiscated, and that the audience can help the actor by giving him cash.

Since only stereotypical characters are presented in *likay* performances, it is unnecessary to interpret characters' roles or discover their objectives. *Likay* performers are able to perform their characters in ways that fit well with stock plots. Improvisation is also important. Sometimes storytellers ask performers to name their characters themselves. Regarding my first *likay* performing experience, with the Nopparat Maihom Troupe in 2000, playing the chambermaid of a princess, I had to name my character and select a suitable song for my scene. Fortunately, one of the *likay* masters in the troupe gave me a verse that could be sung in any situation. The lyrics were about greeting and blessing the audience. Named Angkarb (a kind of Thai flower), I came on stage, listening to and observing the performance of the princess character whom I accompanied and then interacted with. I was also asked to perform in another scene as a female-clown of the same name, playing with a male clown, since a director had seen my talent for improvisation in my first scene. I had only a couple of minutes to prepare a witty dialogue with a male clown before performing front-stage, but this comedic scene was, to a certain degree, successful, since the audience applauded and laughed loudly. Scenes that are too long or bore the audience may be promptly cut or skipped. It can be said that the way in which details are added to or cut from scenes is typical of the 'impromptness' of all *likay* performances. Because these performances are, at least somewhat, improvisational in nature, utilising improvisation until *larong* (the end of a performance), their storylines are not told beforehand each evening.

<p>Please see DVD 1 clip 5 (duration: 9.12 minutes) An example of a comedic scene</p>
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(c) *Larong*

The *longrong* in *ngan wik* lasts, on average, two hours, while, in *ngan plik*, it runs for approximately three to four hours, before *larong* arrives. *Likay* has no strict rule on when or how a story should end; the end can occur in various ways. For example, all the characters in the last scene may freeze at an exciting moment or climax; or a leading actor may sing before the climax, to indicate to the audience that the story is over, and say that the performance has to close because of time limitations; or a clown may tell the audience directly that the performance is going to end. In *ngan plik*, all performers gather at the front of the stage and sing a farewell song to the audience, waving good-bye. Somewhat differently in *ngan wik*, troupes typically present mini-*lukthung* concerts

to the audience, to solicit money or gifts. Actors are allowed to showcase their ability to sing *lukthung* songs and also to request monetary rewards from the audience. Two to three staff members walk around, selling plastic flower garlands to the audience and encouraging spectators to buy them for their favourite performers. Each garland costs 20 baht (40 pence), and the performers have to share half of their total rewards with the head of the troupe. There is no need to share any cash pinned on a garland with the troupe leader, as this belongs to the individual performer.



**Photograph 4:** An audience member gives a cash garland to an actor. (Phrapiren Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)



**Photograph 5:** An audience member greets and gives a cash garland to an actress. (Chula Mani Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Additionally, a *raikarn piset* (a special programme) is normally held once or twice a month on either Friday or Saturday and even during the birthday celebration of an eminent performer, which usually takes place in a *likay* theatre house or on stage. This special programme is designed to make more money by offering greater entertainment; ticket prices are five to ten times more expensive than the cost of a normal ticket, which is 20-40 baht (40-80 pence). By contrast, a ticket for *raikarn piset* is approximately 100-200 baht (2-4 pounds).

*Likay* troupes also offer other special shows, including, for instance, cabaret-style and comedic performances, the latter from invited professional comedy groups. Additionally, troupes may invite well-known *likay* artists to act as guest performers, particularly star male actors who have released their own *lukthung* song albums. Audiences also expect to see male superstars from other troupes in colourful *likay* costumes with ornate decorations or in *lukthung*-style costumes. It is worth paying five to ten times more to attend such special programmes. During *larong* events, which typically end between 11 pm and 2 am, some audience members begin to leave, while others wait to personally talk to and take photos with their favourite performers, and still others, who have special relationships with the performers, wait for the performers to finish changing their clothes and removing their make-up. These audience members then have late dinners with the performers, or the performers drive them home.





**Photographs 6-7:** Wattana Anan, the troupe leader, sings *lukthung* songs, accompanied by dancers. This is recognised as a *lukthung* concert in *raikarn piset* (a special programme). (Chula Mani Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Please see DVD 1 clip 6 (duration: 3.34 minutes)  
An example of a *lukthung* concert in *likay* repertoire

## 1.5 The Life of *Likay* and *Likay*'s Walk of Life

### 1.5.1 *Likay* Performer: an Artist by Blood

*Likay* is an inherited performance genre. Most *likay* artists are born into *likay* families; their grandparents and parents are typically *likay* artists. Because they are born into *likay* families, *likay* performers master the skills of their parents, as well as absorb theatrical techniques from *likay* veterans; they normally place themselves, semi-hidden, in the wings, gazing alertly at those skilful actors. Their childhoods are entrenched in a learning system, namely '*likay* home school'.<sup>39</sup> Such home schooling, so to speak, can be seen as a means of knowledge transmission, in either a formal or informal manner, by which young children attempt to imitate the dancing and singing of their families over many years, as skills are absorbed, practiced, and sharpened (Schechner and Appel, 1996: 5-6).

Comments from other performers or the audience during and after a performance are also significant in individual *likay* skill development (ibid). Having continually

<sup>39</sup> Personal communication with Pongsak Sounsri , 28<sup>th</sup> September 2010; Duangkaeo Luktharuea, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2010; Banthun So Tewaracha, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2010; Niran Anchalee, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2010; and Wattana Anan, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

practised on their own, *likay* performers have gained experience while touring with their troupes. Normally, troupe members are families, as depicted in *likay lhongrong* (a *likay* performer with no troupe), a type of *lukthung* song sung by the famous singer Sodsai Rungphothong. The lyrics describe *likay* members in the same troupe as a family: a king performed by a father, a villainess performed by an elder sister, and a hero performed by a son whose real-life role is as troupe leader. People who do not grow up in *likay* families have to attach themselves to troupes and practise steadily. Apart from family succession, another factor that encourages children to be *likay* performers is family financial difficulty. A child born to poor parents with too many siblings may be forced to leave school after completing compulsory education<sup>40</sup>, to make his/her living as a *likay* actor.

Unlike such forms of classical theatre as *khon* and *lakon*, *likay* has no formal training programme that affects its performers' social status. *Likay* artists, therefore, are usually humble and submissive. When participating in interviews with me, they usually start with a self-introduction in which they claim to be *khon me karn sueksa noi* (poorly educated people) raised in (very) poor *likay* families. Due to the fact that university degrees and diplomas are significant in Thai society, skilled people with no official certificates are, to some extent, excluded from the intelligentsia. *Likay* performers maintain this stigma in their minds and try to upgrade their positions by means of encouraging their children to study further. Therefore, troupes with money often send their children to obtain formal dance training at the College of Dramatic Arts<sup>41</sup> or Thai university dance departments. Since a great number of Thai classical dances are taught in Thailand's formal dance education system, Thai performers with formal training are in a position to share their superior skills with classical dance troupes (Amranand, 2007a: 3) and, perhaps most important, to proudly call themselves educated artists. Some *likay* troupes advertise their members' undergraduate degrees, as is the case, for example, with *phra ek parinya-Thiwa Thewin* (Thiwa Thewin, a leading actor with a bachelor's degree). Likewise, troupes with masters' degrees proudly use them as a

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<sup>40</sup> In 1921, in a reign of King Rama VI, the Compulsory Primary Education Act was proclaimed and the National Education Scheme was later introduced to encourage further development and expansion by the government after the 1932 political revolution from the absolute monarchy to the constitute democracy. The compulsory primary school years were changed from 4 years to 6 years in 1977.

<sup>41</sup> The College of Dramatic Arts was founded by Luang Wichitwatakarn in 1934 under the name Rongrian Nata-Duriyangkasart (School of Drama and Musicology). The name was changed to Wittayalai Natasin (College of Dramatic Arts) in 1972 which covered Thai and Western dramatic arts and music. This college was changed again in 1998 under the name Sathaban Bandhitphatanasilpa (National Institute of Artistic Development). This institute is under the Ministry of Culture.

selling point. An academic degree is considered a means of upward social mobility, even when such a degree is unrelated to the *likay* profession.

*Likay*, today, is performed almost continually as full-time work. This is different from the past, when many performers were farmers, performing *likay* as a part-time job when they were not in the fields. However, a few of today's *likay* performers - less-popular performers, in particular - have part-time jobs (Khunteeya, 1995: B4-B5). This includes, for instance, repairmen, taxi-drivers, and dressmakers, who find it hard to earn sufficient income by performing alone. Noticeably, part-time jobs as labourers at construction sites are hardly ever taken by *likay* performers. This type of manual work does not fit a slim-figured actor and may cause damage to the fingers and hands (Sukphisit, 1997: 74). Saving face is another reason for avoiding such low-class jobs.

### **1.5.2 *Likay* Practice within Its Praxis**

It can take many years of patient practice before a novice is confident enough to perform a leading role. Performing the Indian, axe, and horse dances in the introduction or the interlude may be the beginning step for a child artist who, when slightly older, may perform a supporting role, such as that of a page, servant, or trooper. The role of a soldier who walks across the stage without engaging in any dialogue, or of a messenger, is normally taken by a beginning male cast member. Similarly, a trainee actress may begin as a princess's attendant. After having accumulated experience for approximately one or two years, novices are upgraded to small parts with some singing and speaking (Tha Hla and Pornpitagpan, 1995:33). Their training finally earns them places as major characters. Wattana Anan told me that he started his career as a stagehand and a prop man, moved on to being a musician, and finally became an actor. He recalled that he had observed and committed to memory every single detail of *likay* performances in these unofficial roles, with the ambition of becoming an archetypal *likay* artist (interview, 2010). This process of imitating without formal permission is also normally seen in *likay* performance methods and is called *khru phak lak jam* (to steal and remember a teacher's technique when she/he is demonstrating it and without asking her/his permission). Audiences are obviously able to see the performers who are waiting for their cues while standing or sitting behind the two sides of the stage wings, stealing glances at on-stage actors while performing. Artists adapt the best of what they see and



learn and then try to improve their own performances, rather than simply copying others’.

In terms of professional practice, *likay* performers never stop observing, memorising, and practising as part of their non-formal training. Many *likay* performers, such as those in Sornram-Nampetch, the famous children’s troupe, have to train after school each day or on weekends from a young age<sup>42</sup>, as Duangkhaew Luktharuea (Interview, 2010) noted. It is also worth mentioning that the performing sphere and daily life are rarely separate. While waiting for their next scenes, apprentices sit in the wings, eating and watching the performances on the front stage. The *likay* stage is utilised as a kitchen, a study room, and even a bedroom. Young *likay* performers are taught to have good manners and be respectful, since well-bred behaviour is always admired by audiences, particularly by a *mae yok*.<sup>43</sup> The more courteous performers are, the more they are rewarded by their fans.

### 1.5.3 Employment: Stage Varieties of *Likay*

*Likay* performances are year-round entertainment. Two main performance styles predominate in this art form. Live performances occur outdoors, on a *likay* stage; still other performances are mediated by a type of media and take place either on an outdoor stage or in an indoor studio.

#### Live Performance

##### (a) *Ngan Wik*<sup>44</sup>

*Ngan wik* is a semi-permanent *likay* theatre, usually built outdoors, covered with a roof, enclosed by a long cloth, and situated in an empty space near a market or a rented lot in

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<sup>42</sup> Duangkhaew Luktharuea is a former well-known *likay* artist. She and her professional *likay* husband, Monrak founded a children *likay* troupe named ‘Sornram-Nampetch’ ten years ago. They train their daughter and son (Nampetch and Sornram) and other children to become professional *likay* artists. The young artists have been trained after school and on weekends. They are now becoming a ‘teenager troupe’.

<sup>43</sup> *Likay*’s matron is a female fan who gives financial aid and other supports to *likay* performers.

<sup>44</sup> *Ngan wik* is a nightly performance; performers earn by a ticket sale and monetary rewards from the audience.

a city's outskirts. *Ngan wik* performances should be convenient to access, but they should not be at the centres of communities, where their noisiness could bother residents. Outside *ngan wik*, stands are typically set up in the audience area where garlands can be bought for performers. Members of the sales staff may represent people in the audience who do not dare to present garlands to their favourite performers on their own - for example, because they are bashful, need to keep secrets, or find it inconvenient to walk from their seats to the stage because of age or infirmity.

On average, *ngan wik* loses money, as the income from ticket and garlands sales is not enough to cover monthly expenses. Normally, *likay* troupes perform five to six nights a week. Some troupes perform only three to four nights a week, so as to ensure that audiences come to see them every night. Rental fees for performance space cost around 15,000-30,000 baht<sup>45</sup> a month, but a troupe might collect ticket fees (20-40 baht per head) from an average of 20-30 audience members per night, amounting to approximately 400-1,200 baht a night. This income does not cover expenses, such as rental fees and performers' and musicians' wages. Thus, *raikarn piset*, a special program with more expensive ticket fees, is given once or twice a month, to bring in additional money that helps pay fees for rent, electricity, and water. At *raikarn piset*, all-star male casts from various famous troupes are invited to sing or be featured. *Likay* troupes use this strategy as the backbone of their crowd-pulling efforts. *Rai karn piset* can seduce audiences into buying 100-200 baht tickets. At these performances, the fan clubs and *mae yok* of each star may present the star with garlands containing more cash than usual, as a way of showing their appreciation of the star's superior quality. The large amount of money placed around an actor's neck makes him, as well as his sponsors, proud. *Likay* in *ngan wik* normally start at around 8:30 pm and end at midnight, with *raikarn piset* extending until 2 am.

The standard male cast member's wage in *ngan wik* is 150-200 baht per person per night, while female cast members, who receive smaller tips from audiences, are guaranteed a minimum wage of 200-300 baht. A *ranad* (wooden xylophone) player, as a lead musician, usually gets 500 baht a night, while other musicians receive 200-300 baht. Aside from these fixed rates, *likay* players expect garlands from audiences. After shows, troupe leaders give them half the value of each 20-baht garland they are wearing.

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<sup>45</sup> 50 bath equals to approximately one pound sterling at this time (2010)

To earn much more money, a *phra ek*, or troupe leader, sells garlands directly to audiences himself. This strategy is usually successful, because audiences want to be recognised as special and appreciate the considerateness of the *phra ek*. Having repeatedly performed ‘stock stories’ over the five to seven days for which *ngan wik* are open, troupes experience shortages of new material. Moving to a different location is an opportunity to reuse the same stories with new audiences. Another reason for moving is a decline in audience size.

(b) *Ngan Plik*<sup>46</sup>

*Ngan plik*, or ‘hired-job’ *likay*, is normally produced for temple fairs, religious events, and individual celebrations. Beurdeley and Hinz (1980: XI) claim that “no fair, no pagoda festival, no village celebration ever takes place without a performance of the *likay*.” Typical festive activities are: the *ngan fang luk nimit* (placing of a sacred heavy black orb stone in the ground of a new Buddhist monastery or church), *ngan kae bon* (honouring of the gods when a wish comes true), *ngan tham boon khuen baan mai* (house-warming), *ngan sop* (cremation), *ngan buat* (ordination), *ngan pra cham pee* (annual temple celebrations), and *ngan wai khru* (honouring of the spirits of theatrical masters and newly-opened markets). These events are free of charge, but audiences have to reserve their seats. Performance duration is around six hours, starting at 8 pm and ending at approximately 2 am. More to the point, the greatest *likay ngan wai khru* (an homage ceremony) are held twice a year in Wat Phrapiren (Phrapiren Temple) and Wat Soengwai (Soengwai Temple).<sup>47</sup> These events are the same style of *ngan plik* but are volunteers; performers receive no payment. Many *likay* troupes, however, wish to attend these ceremonies, since most of the performances given there are by well-known troupes and are by invitation only.

When viewing *likay* performances in *ngan plik*, audiences sit on the ground, on straw or aluminium foil mats, or even on used newspapers, in front of the stage; on occasion,

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<sup>46</sup> *ngan plik* or *ngan ha* is hired by a host or patron for religious purposes at a temple fair or a secular celebration.

<sup>47</sup> These two temples are the places that *likay* troupes perform for paying tribute to their masters, late masters, and master spirits. Wat Phrapiren is also used as a place for Thai classical musical homage ceremony. The event is organised by the ‘Welfare Association for Companions in Arts’ (see more in Suthon Sukphisit. 2000. ‘Reverence of the ‘Wai Khru’ Ceremony’. *Bangkok Post*. 16 September 2000). Wat Soengwai is a place that the late *likay* master Homhuan stayed in his monkhood.

rows of chairs are specially provided. *Ngan plik* pays approximately 50,000-65,000 baht for a troupe of average size and mediocre reputation. Correspondingly, a famous troupe with a *lukthung* concert normally earns 80,000-100,000 baht per performance. The most famous troupes offer a variety of shows with a great number of members and can set a price of 150,000-200,000 baht for each night's employment. VIP casts, with guest artists from other troupes or superstars of their own, receive around 2,000 baht nightly. Other, less important characters are given 800-1,000 baht, while concert dancers typically receive 100-200 extra baht. Gasoline fees are paid separately for the performers, and depend on each individual's distance from the performance site.

The number of troupe members depends on how famous the performers are. The minimum number of members is roughly ten to fifteen, two thirds of whom are performers; the rest are musicians. This-size cast normally performs in *ngan wik*. Medium-size troupes, which regularly perform in *ngan plik* or *ngan ha* (hired jobs), have around twenty to thirty members: performers, dancers for *lukthung* concerts, musicians, and labourers. Up to fifty members can be seen in very popular troupes who put on many variety shows, beyond the *likay* repertoire. However, small troupes' numbers increase when they are employed in *ngan plik*, in which case groups of five to ten performers from other troupes are hired. This can be called *likay pasom rong*, or troupe combination. *Ngan plik* decreases during Buddhist Lent, when there are few religious celebrations, and also in the rainy season.

### ***Rong Likay***

The standard size of *rong likay* (a *likay* stage house) in *ngan wik* is approximately six meters wide and six to eight meters deep. The stage is divided into three areas: the *na rong*, or the front stage, is divided by a painted canvas backdrop from the *lang rong*, or back stage. *Wethi piphat* (the stage for the orchestra) is situated stage right. The *piphat khrueangha*<sup>48</sup> (the *piphat* with five kinds of instruments, plus *ching*) is the smallest orchestra employed in *ngan wik*. The wing sides or wing drops used as entrance and exit points are separated cloths that are usually painted with printed photos of the

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<sup>48</sup> Instruments include *ranad ek* (an alto wooden xylophone), *kong wong yai* (the circle of large bass gong) *pi nai* (*nai* oboe), *taphon* (two faced, horizontal barrel drum), and *klong* (two faced, vertical barrel drum).

troupe's leader. Every section is covered by a galvanised iron roof that is topped with a huge sailcloth, as protection from the rain or sun.

The *likay* stage house for *ngan plik* is bigger and more flamboyant than the *ngan wik* stage. It is approximately twelve meters wide and ten meters deep. The *wethi piphat* area can contain a medium-sized orchestra with ten kinds of instruments, named *piphat khruengkhu*.<sup>49</sup> The biggest and most elegant stage used in outdoor performances of *ngan plik* is the *wethi loifah* (sky-high stage), which was created by Pongsak Suansri (Interview, 2010) in around 1982. This stage style (see previous section) is a two-metre platform, raised from a stage floor, that divides the front and back areas, with a painted wooden backdrop behind. The *piphat khruengyai*<sup>50</sup>, which can accommodate orchestras that have more than ten instruments, is normally placed in this lifted area. Besides this, the bench in the throne hall contains three-level stands, arranged by tiers to present the hierarchy of characters: noble characters sit in the top level, and subordinate characters follow, in descending order.

### **Divine Beliefs on *Likay* Stage**

Since the Thai world-view is influenced by the main three beliefs of Buddhism, Animism, and Hinduism, these doctrines are combined together and widely used in many aspects of living. Carkin suggests that Thai Buddhism practised by the villagers or the commoners is not the pure doctrine which aims at spiritual ends, but a combination of the concept of 'divine' of Hinduism and a *phi* (a free-range spirit) and superstition through animism (1984: 32-38). This combination of divineness, therefore, manifests itself mostly in sacredness and the sense of protection from evil spirits and bad luck. The rites and worship presented to those spirits, therefore, are offered, so that the 'sacred spirits' can protect the villagers from uncontrollable and unpredictable powers that besiege them. In this connection, a king character in *likay* performance is considered superior, as a living god, according to Hindu or Brahmanism.

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<sup>49</sup> Instruments include *ranad ek* (an alto wooden xylophone), *ranad tum* (a bass wooden xylophone), *kong wong yai* (the circle of large bass gong), *kong wong lek* (the circle of small bass gong), *pi nai* (*nai* oboe), *taphon* (two faced, horizontal barrel drum), and *klong* (two faced, vertical barrel drum).

<sup>50</sup> The *piphat khruengyai* includes *ranad ek* (an alto wooden xylophone), *ranad ek lhek* (an alto metal xylophone), *ranad tum* (a bass wooden xylophone), *ranad tum lhek* (a bass metal xylophone), *kong wong yai* (the circle of large bass gong), *kong wong lek* (the circle of small bass gong), *pi nai* (*nai* oboe), *taphon* (two faced, horizontal barrel drum), and *klong* (two faced, vertical barrel drum). All piphat bands are controlled in a slow or fast rhythm by *ching* (small up-shaped cymbals).

*Likay* today combines together the polarity of ritual and commercial genres. Even with its commercial purposes in modern times, *likay*, a popular theatre, still embraces the elements of sacredness in its repertoire; paying homage with incense to *pho kae*, the mythical master-teacher in a mask-model or a bust of Muni Bharata before starting a performance; paying homage to the spirits of the late masters when the *sathukan*, a blessed melody is begun, and silent chanting an individual *mantra* before a presence in each first scene. The *pho kae* is placed on an altar table or a shelf at the middle of the backstage area. Incense, flowers and fruits are paced in front of him. Before the performance begins, the leader lights joss sticks and candles, and then pleads to the *pho kae* for success in the ritual. The props are regularly placed under him so that all bad luck will be expelled.

Also a *ram tawai mue*, a homage-paying group-dance is normally offered on the front stage before the performance begins or at a shrine in order to give pleasure to the gods who protect that place or the local spirit lord who controls and cares for the area. The combination of these beliefs leads to the two significant practices of *likay*: the sacred rituals offered for the purpose of blessedness; the content and form of the god-king from Hinduism and karma in Buddhism. Virtue in a previous life and being a good person in the present life will help ill-fated characters to have better lives, and perhaps find a perfect spouse. These themes are in the same manner as a romantic European fairy-tale such as Cinderella. Sometimes the story provides assistance from angels or an invisible power.

### **Conventional *Likay* Stories**

*Likay* stories are abridged monarchical legends and fairy tales that can be similar, in some respects, to stories found in modern novels. Their themes include love, possessiveness, envy, and light romantic comedy. Act division is not necessary in the *likay* repertoire. A performance contains short dynamic scenes, presented in a rapid sequence. Most audiences know the plot lines of performances before they even begin, because different *likay* troupes often perform the same stories. Typical storylines involve a hero in search of knowledge, the meeting of a spouse, departure, the banishment of a hero, and the falling of a hero and heroine under an evil spell that prevents each from remembering the other. Some audience members maintain that they can be storytellers, as they have seen some stories more than ten times. When they have

seen a story before, they may discuss it with other audiences, comparing it to other iterations, to determine which troupe performed it best. Although *likay* stories lack plausibility, audiences do not mind, because they focus only on how well actors act, sing, or dance or on how beautiful their costumes are.

The performance usually starts with an action of a villain (either a rogue king or a commoner character) who brings about a conflict throughout a whole story. It is typical that an appearance of *phra ek* (a leader who takes a hero role) occurs halfway through the action. *Likay* plot types generally follow Greimas's *Quest Model* (Pavis and Shantz, 1998: 5). It's about the prince or hero who embarks on a long search to retrieve the person that he loves (mother, father, sister, brother, wife) or to repossess his treasure (palace, position, city) or to revenge his enemies.

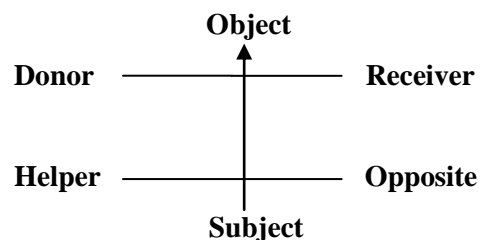


Figure 2: Greimas's Quest Model

Generally, *likay*'s plot types are seen as the following account:

1. There is a king who has two wives (or more). The major wife is always jealous of the other wives, so her reputation is blackened and banished from the palace. However, she usually gives birth to a son before that difficult time and when her son grows up; he will finally find her and help her as well.
2. A prince of the royal family goes to study with a sage in the forest or temple. When he finishes his studies, he leaves. On the way to the palace, he meets a poor beautiful woman. He falls in love with her and courts her. Then, when he takes her to his place, he finds out that he already has a fiancé. The battle between two wives then begins.

3. After a former king is killed by his brother or a bureaucrat, his son is sent to the forest and will be raised by a soldier (clown). When he grows up, he will go back to the palace then make his foe pay his blood debt.
4. The offspring of a royal family are separated from one another or from their parents when they are infants. When they grow to adolescence, they search for each other or for their parents.
5. Student friends, usually of the same temple-school, fight each other over the woman they want to marry. Unfortunately, that woman loves only one of them. It typically ends in a love tragedy.

### **Mass-Mediated Performance**

#### *(a) Likay on Television*

Apart from 'being performed live', *likay* has been broadcast by the mass media since the 1950s. Radio broadcasting was first, spurred by a *likay* anti-Communism contest that was organised by the government in 1952. Radio *likay* has declined and is rare today. Television became an alternative method of broadcasting *likay* in 1954. In 1975, Winyu Chanchao produced a once-weekly televised version of *likay* (Lersakvanitchakul, 1995: C1-C2). Many famous *likay* artists, including Pongsak Suansri, Somsak Phakdee, Dhepbancha Sithomhuan, and Sakuna Rungrueang, were invited to perform on Winyu Chanchao's show. Popular for around thirty years, weekly *likay* TV ended recently. Beginning in 2009, *likay* was showcased in weekly cultural programs, such as *Raikarn Pen Thai (The Being Thai Program)*, on which troupes were invited to perform in indoor studios. *Likay* troupes use such programs to promote themselves.

#### *(b) Likay on VCD*

Although *likay* troupes benefit from mass media promotion, the mass media could, ultimately, lessen *likay*'s popularity. Audiences now have many entertainment choices - TV dramas, radio song-programmes, movies, and DVDs - that can be consumed at home. *Likay* troupes have responded by recording and selling videos and DVDs of their



performances, which are more prepared<sup>51</sup> than live shows. Sometimes, when performing *ngan plik*, *likay* troupes record their performances for broadcast on cable TV or for sale as VCDs or DVDs. Taped performances garner double profits, both from the income of patrons and from the copyright that troupes maintain over their material. Another kind of *likay* that is now on VCD relates new stories that are composed and filmed with more commercial approaches. A grand theatre or large studio is normally rented. A troupe will command approximately 200,000-250,000 baht per completed storyline, but distribution rights are controlled by its employer. I watched a *likay* VCD called *Malai Siang Rak* (The Prince Casts Lots for Love) by the Sutirat Wongthewan Troupe. The story was adapted from *Sang Thong* (The Golden Prince of the Conch Shell), a classic of Thai literature, but in this story a heroin masks her good appearance with an ugly look. Her counterpart hates her at first, because she is ugly, but later falls in love with her, after seeing the face she wears inside. The most interesting element of this VCD is the elements it borrows from television and cinemas, such as composite pictures, vanishes, fade-ins, fade-outs, and dissolve effects. These techniques are believed to be more amusing to viewers. However, the performers seem to have found it somewhat difficult to be filmed; they appear to be self-conscious performing in front of a camera. The discontinuity of their emotions is likely due to the fact that the scenes were shot out of order; for example, the tenth scene was filmed directly after the fifth scene, because the two used the same backdrop and stage decorations. The crying scene, without context, is the most difficult scene to perform (Luktharuea, Interview 2010).

Some recorded performances were seen as special shows at gala charities or special occasions at the National Theatre and the Thailand Cultural Center. To entice audiences to buy high-priced tickets, famous performers were invited to perform together. To an extent, the theatrical standards of classical performances - such as refined dancing and singing, in addition to well-arranged lyrics - are often utilised at special events. Panadda Yuuyangyuen, the well-known *likay* actress, organised a *likay* charity event that was based on the Thai legend *Pantai Norasingha* in June 2010. Stage props were used more than they would be in ordinary *likay* performances, particularly in the royal barge scene and the cremation parade. The aim was to prove that *likay* has high theatrical standards and can be performed at the same level as other classical Thai stage plays. *Likay* artists more carefully use their words when their performances are being recorded and aired.

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<sup>51</sup> *Likay* performed for recording usually provides an opportunity for performers to rehearse their roles in written script. Moreover, they can repeat acting and singing in each scene when mistakes occur.

Ribald or rude words are also avoided, so as to make shows appropriate for mass audiences. However, occasional slips cannot be avoided, as vulgar and insolent words are the essential motifs of *likay*; audience participation is also limited in this context. Additionally, the internet and such websites as ‘<http://www.com/fanlikay>’ and YouTube provide places for *likay* spectators to post clips or photos of their favourite performers as promotions or advertisements. Spectators may also form fan clubs and chat on the Internet. Those who do are called ‘hi-tech fans’ or ‘hi-tech *mae yok*’.

### 1.6 *Mae Yok*: a *Likay* Matron

The *mae yok* (literally ‘the raising mother’), often seen as a female *likay* matron, is usually a middle-aged female audience member who supports her favourite performers, particularly young male *likay* stars, by showering them with cash-bound flower leis during performances. *Mae yok* usually follow their favourite players to almost every performance. During *likay* performances, the *mae yok* usually criticise or praise the beauty of the costumes and talk about the lives of the performers. *Mae yok* typically fall into one of two groups: *mae yok saneha*<sup>52</sup> or *mae yok phitsawat*<sup>53</sup> (Virulrak, 1980: 256). The first is composed of elder women who see performers as family members and support their favourites by giving them money, food, and advice on personal issues. The second type of *mae yok* seeks sexual relations with their favourite actors - but only those that are willing (ibid). The latter group is usually younger than the former group. They treat their favourite actors as boyfriends or secret lovers. I use the word ‘secret’ because most of these women are married.<sup>54</sup> Becoming matrons of male *likay* actors, they achieve the same status as their husbands, who patronise female café singers.

The success of *likay* fluctuated throughout the 1900s. World War II and the Great Depression significantly impacted the genre, as did the outbreak of the Thai Cultural Revolution in 1942 and the decline of (folk/traditional) popular theatre in Thailand, which directly and indirectly affected *likay*. Likewise, the 1970s marked another downturn for *likay*. Smithies (1971: 100-101) claims that *likay* began to die during this

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<sup>52</sup> *Saneha* literary means love, affection. In this case the word is implied to use as a mother loves a child or love from sister to brother in terms of kinship.

<sup>53</sup> *Phitsawat* literary means seduction. This kind of *mae yok* usually desire for sexual relation with their favourite actors.

<sup>54</sup> See more in Pattarawan Yongchai. 1997. *Mae Yok: the Study of Relationship between Likay Performers and Audiences*. MA thesis, Naresaun University.

time because no regular performances were offered and because the genre lacked support from the government. However, this is not the case. Virulrak (1980: 3) asserts that *likay* continually developed as a form of popular commercial theatre, primarily serving audience's variable tastes. Consequently, the effects of socio-political circumstances on *likay* must be taken into account. It is worth noting that people who say *likay* is dying do not watch this genre. It has followed the ebb and flow of social change. *Likay* struggled to survive as new media forms emerged, such as radio drama, television, and cinema. These major competitors have continued to affect *likay*, even in the twenty-first century. However, *likay* has principally survived due to its ability to use its principal elements to transform into various styles.

While many *likay* troupes have found it hard to gain employment, the Sornram-Nampetch troupe is booked to perform until 2013<sup>55</sup>, principally because it maintains high performance standards and because its troupe comprises only children and teenage performers. Luktharuea (Interview, 2010), mother of Sornram and Nampetch, asserted that being a great artist requires both talent and practice: to continue practising with *likay* masters, one must be grateful and not insult other performers. Despite the fact that *likay* is a stigmatised theatre form, in the view of elite and conservative theatre goers, in the 2000s, the period of Thai classical/traditional theatre revitalisation, approval for *likay* as a national cultural genre increased, resulting in a resurgence of support for the form from both traditional and non-traditional troupes, as manifested by their inventive approaches.

## **2. Re-Visiting the Aesthetic and Theatrical Elements of *Likay* in the Contemporary Era**

This chapter concentrates on the aesthetic elements of *likay* performance, which reflect Thai popular tastes and Thai popular artistic formations. Indian theatre has influenced Thai performance, which draws on the Indian concept of *rasa* (sentiment) - part of Bharatamuni's *Natya Sastra*, the Indian set of aesthetic elements - and on the Sanskrit Literary Theory of Sentiments, which is present in Indian arts, drama, and dance (Fernando, 2003: 53). These are generally used in classical Thai dramatic works. The

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<sup>55</sup> This interview was conducted in 2010.

nine principal<sup>56</sup> *rasas* are “(1) The First or the Erotic; (2) the Heroic; (3) the Pathetic or Tragic; (4) The Terrific; (5) the Comic or Farcical; (6) The Horrible; (7) the Odious; (8) the Wonderful; and (9) the Quiescent” (Yajnik, 1970: 31). Thai classical literature, as well as theatre, usually holds to these principles. The word *rasa*, in Thai, has the same sense as ‘flavour’ in English. Hence, Thais call it *rot thang wannakadi*, or ‘the flavour of literature’. Another Thai *rasa*, although it interconnects with Indian theory, has its own entity; it can be divided into four characters: beauty, courtship, fury, and sadness. All are indispensable features of Thai theatre, serving as appealing and emotional motifs. The principle aim of stage representations is to appeal to and rouse latent emotions in the audience (Yajnik, 1970: 30). The proper combination of *rasa* in each theatre repertoire brings *sanuk*, a feeling of emotional fulfilment.

## 2.1 *Likay* Aesthetic: The Essence of Popular Theatre

With respect to popular aesthetics, *likay* is comprised of various characteristics of traditional Eastern styles of theatre, such as participation (between performers and audiences), stylisation of the performance approach (Pronko, 1967), and emphasis on the beauty of image and sound (Sompiboon, 2002). Audiences are easily pleased, on an emotional level, by these features. In this section, I examine the unique characteristics of *likay* aesthetics. They are: participation, the ‘heart’ of *likay* performance; improvisation: the source of *likay*’s uniqueness; stylisation: a form of exaggeration in everyday practice; the aesthetic of interruption: the pleasure of discontinuity; and fictitious supposition: imaginative exercising, which reflects upon performance forms and conventions. I shall now discuss these terms.

### 2.1.1 Participation: the ‘Heart’ of *Likay* Performance

On the subject of the popular form which is ‘of the people’, ‘for the people’ and ‘belonging to the people’, one of *likay*’s most significant attributes is its ability to tell a dramatic story that relates to audiences’ imaginative worlds. Often, without a script, actors directly address the audience, asking for their opinions and thanking them for their attendance and support. As regards participation in the performance, the audience can interrupt by shouting suggestions for what the actors should do in a scene. They are

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<sup>56</sup> These nine *rasa* principles in Thai use are known as love, heroism, compassion, disgust, mirth, horror, fury, wonder and tranquillity.

freely allowed to order a vendor to bring them food or drink during the performance. Colourful soft drinks, fresh and pickled local fruits, and grilled dried squid are the most well-liked refreshments.



**Photograph 8:** The audience members chat to each other and eat foods while viewing a *likay* performance. (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Nagavajara (1996:108) asserts that there is no sharp dividing line between actors and audiences, particularly in traditional performance, where audience participation is always encouraged. In the context of Thai popular theatre, audience participation is highly important, since applause, yelling, and loud laughing during a performance can invigorate viewing mood. The need for audience participation during *likay* performances is underscored by my own experience performing *likay*. My first two nights with the Makhampom troupe's members in Yokohama, Japan, in 2008, were a somewhat disappointing experience, since the Japanese audience kept silent and did not react at all. They neither laughed nor responded when asked. I was informed later that the audience knew little of *likay* prior to our performance and thought that making noise would interrupt the performers' concentration and destroy the whole performance. The mood of the performance very much changed in the last two rounds, when some Thai audience members who resided in Yokohama came to see us and took a chance on participating by presenting us with garlands and flowers and cheerfully yelling and clapping their hands throughout the performance, which encouraged Japanese audience members to follow suit. The reactions of the audience boosted the energy of the performers.

Improvisation, a core characteristic of Thai traditional theatre, very much relates to audience participation, a common practice in popular theatre. Improvisational techniques transgress the dividing line between performers and audiences, encouraging them to ‘perform’ together during shows. The aesthetic of interruption alternates between song, dance, and spoken dialogue. Even ‘text’ and musical notation leave plenty of room for directors and performers to put in elements of their own, including improvisation. Members of an audience can shout out suggestions to actors when they forget their lines, since most audiences know the *likay* prosody. Their assistance may either be accepted or rejected (Nagavajara, 2004: 229, 76). More to the point, some actors sing songs asking for support from audiences for their decision-making; asking for clapping and yelling, to encourage them to fight and curse their enemies; or asking for advice on a dilemma.

### **2.1.2 Improvisation: the Source of *Likay*’s Uniqueness**

In general, a storyteller or director relates a story or plot outline and defines a set of typical characters for all the actors in a *likay* performance while the actors are applying their make-up and doing their hair, a short time before starting. A story may change at any time during a performance, depending on the number of actors who appear on a given night or on the time left in an evening. Experienced actors have advantages, in that, for example, they may be acquainted with a plot or story better than apprentices or nonprofessional actors. However, most actors have a stock of lyrics they can employ with a variety of characters. Additionally, *likay* performers often incorporate current or ‘hot’ issues and political commentary into their dialogues and lyrics, in order to present up-to- date performances.

*Likay* performers do not completely improvise entire pieces, but, rather, adapt stock verses to each scene and to other performers. When two or more performers sing *ranikloeng* together, they have to prepare the same ending sound of the last word of the rhyme in a punch line. This ability is a key skill in their praxis. Before performing or while dressing, performers usually prepare the songs, particularly Thai classical songs from *lakon ram*, that they will sing with the musicians in their troupes. When performers start singing, the musicians know which tunes they have to play follow along.

### 2.1.3 Stylisation: Exaggeration in Everyday Practice

*Likay* often toys with meaning through exaggerated speech, dress and even the expression of impossible daydreams. Enjoyment of exaggerations of reality is depicted, for example, through lights and sounds, costumes, expressions, and graceful movements, the symbols of *likay*. In addition, all performers engage in conventional *likay* dance movements and hand gestures that display crying, going, coming, happiness, anger, and so forth.

Another point worth noting is that performing methods must be defined for different ‘types’ of presentation. For example, a *nang ek* (heroine) must move slowly and neatly and speak or sing with a soft voice, to show her virtuous ladylikeness. By contrast, whoever takes the role of a villainess must walk quickly and make high and loud noises, to exhibit her mean character. It is unnecessary to interpret *likay* characters in the context of their ‘realisticness’ as humans. Correspondingly, audiences do not expect performers to focus on characterising the roles they play. *Likay*’s stock characters and stereotypical performing styles give performers the choice to not focus solely on characterisation. They are licensed to qualify their roles by singing and dancing, rather than utilising acting methods associated with realism. This style that allows performers to act exaggeratedly is called ‘faked naturally’, a term coined by Pantoomkomol (1999:1).<sup>57</sup>

### 2.1.4 The Aesthetic of Interruption: The Pleasure of Discontinuity

Nagavajara’s studies of ‘the aesthetics of interruption’ and the ‘aesthetics of discontinuity’ provide a rich source of comparative approaches to Thai traditional theatre - and especially to *likay* and Brechtian theatrical principles. From Nagavajara’s point of view, performers have to be versatile, able to shift their real personae on stage, and the spoken word, music, song, and dance can be used, in combination, to make a

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<sup>57</sup> Sodsai Pantoomkomol (b. 1933) is a Thai dramatic scholar and was the national artist of the Performing Arts (stage play and television drama) in 2011. Her education includes Master of Arts in Theater, University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Her dramatic principle is basically based on Stanislavsky’s system of believable emotions in a performance, which she presents in her book, Pantoomkomol, S. (1999). *Modern Acting Method*, the second edition. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.

highly pleasurable impression on audiences. This underlying artistic principle is called the 'aesthetics of interruption' (1996: 237-246 and 2004: 242, 329).

Nagavajara also addresses the notion that Brechtian dramaturgy is not at all remote from traditional Thai theatre and is very familiar to Thai traditional audiences; for example, actors can speak directly to audiences, narrate and comment on their actions onstage and their situations offstage and even change their costumes before audiences' eyes. The stylistic manner that most collapses the 'fourth wall' and shatters the strict line between our imaginative and real worlds is the direct contact made by performers with audiences and even with other actors on stage, without or beyond a script. This point recalls Brecht's statement that "the performer not only develops a characterisation, but also expresses awareness of being watched" (1964: 91). This allows a 'character' to be a 'performer' who can be 'in' and 'out' of the performing role throughout a performance. This in-and-out technique is distinctive of popular theatre, in which audience participation makes shows more interactive and dynamic. Moreover, characters in popular theatre can articulate social criticism by directly addressing their audiences. Additionally, *likay* performers commonly use asides when their characters need to express their inner thoughts or feelings. Such asides are a means of directly communicating with audiences, whether a character is alone or accompanied. Performers usually stand near the edge of the front of the stage and place one hand on their cheeks, near the mouths, and talk to the audience. Sometimes, performers simply turn their bodies and faces to the audience and thus direct their speech. Asides are inaudible to other characters and help the audience to understand the characters speaking them and their situations better.

As with Brecht's alienation method, asides aim to convince audiences that they are watching plays, not real-life situations. Empathy between audiences and characters may break down. Tatlow (1982) states that dismantling the fourth wall attempts to strip away the mysteriousness of stage art and to establish a natural relationship with the audience. Only after the fourth wall is broken down can the principles of acting before an audience be clearly established and the techniques employed by Brecht, such as singing, reading sub-titles, introducing one's character, and commentating, achieve the alienation effect. However, traditional and folk Thai theatre, which share characteristics with Brechtian theatre, are by no means exactly the same as Brechtian theatre. The discontinuity of presentation is a native essence of Thai traditional theatre, with no



intent to achieve alienation or *Verfremdung*, which encourages intellectual awareness of theatrical illusion; instead, it aims at *sanuk* or pleasure-seeking.

*Likay* performances, basically, allow their repertoires to be interrupted in two ways: by performers and by audiences. Actors can put themselves in and out of their characters while performing, typically by talking about real-life situations unrelated to the narrative at hand, speaking directly to audiences, or commenting on other characters and situations occurring on and off stage. I witnessed this myself at a performance of the Wattana Anan *likay* troupe in October 2010. The clown in the performance asked the audience members how much they regretted missing the ending of a popular soap opera because they had come to see *likay* instead. After talking about this for a short while, the clown paid respect to the princely character, who joined the clown in teasing the audience. They discussed a problem in the play, and then the characters suddenly paused to shout at a group of children from the audience to stop climbing onto the stage. Correspondingly, Somsak Phakdee, a former, well-known *likay* actor, stated in a magazine interview that during a performance, if he sang or spoke mistakenly or unsatisfactorily, his father would interrupt his performance immediately. Audiences were asked to wait while Somsak's father came onstage and punished him (Nang-nuan, 1991).

More to the point, a clown can change his costumes to serve many roles. On the flip side, when more than one VIP actor is performing at the same time, all have to share the main *phra ek* or hero role. The first actor may make an appearance in the first and second scenes, while the other actor(s) may turn up in the following scenes. A backstage narrator announces to the audience that the *phra ek* role will be performed by a new actor. This offers the audience the advantage of seeing many 'superstar' male actors performing the same role.

Interruptions are made by the woman matron *mae yok*, who may yell, walk past a scene on stage, chat with a gang, or present cash garlands to the performers. These activities occur even in serious and climactic scenes; for example, whenever a garland is carried out by the *mae yok*, performers can set aside the characters and walk to the front of the stage to take this reward.

### 2.1.5 Fictitious Supposition: Imaginative Exercising

After singing a *ranikloeng*, *likay* performers always start their first dialogues with announcements of their fictitious names (e.g., Mr or Miss So-and-so). This convention is agreeable to both audiences and performers. As a stylised form, the fictitious method is commonly used in *likay* performances. Props are close-at-hand materials that are easily accessible. A new-born baby is created by folding a towel into a doll model; a loincloth covering a body can be a sign of disgust or concealment; and a broomstick can be a house, particularly for a joker. Audiences very much enjoy these representations.

Pantomime, which depicts the needed settings within the limitations of stage space, scenery, and props, is another necessary component of *likay* performances. A high throne or bench, for example, may be used as a high cliff, and an actor may jump down from such a seat to the stage floor in a suicide scene. An actor might also mime opening a palace gate or smelling a flower picked from the royal garden. Koanantakool (1998: 151-152) watched a very interesting use of the fictitious method in a piece of *lakon chattri*, which is similar to *likay*. A performer enacted the *lom beng* (an effort exerted by a mother at the moment of delivery) of a pregnant character in a birth-giving scene. After making its appearance with a short jeering remark, a doll that was supposed to a baby was placed in the mother's lap by a performer who embodied the *lom beng* character. The birth-giving scene ended full of laughter.

## 2.2 *Likay* Performance Elements and Conventions as Symbolic Indicators

The semiotic elements of *likay* that act as symbolic indicators are spoken text, lyrics, music, dance, costume, make-up, staging, scenery, light and sound, and plot. The following are some elements of *likay* semiotics and performance conventions.

### 2.2.1 Conventions of the Theatre House and Stage Properties

#### (a) Stage and Performing Space

A performer's entrance and exit are each called a *naphat* (scene). *Naphat* performances begin with performers entering from stage right by dancing or *krai* (refined walking). They start singing *ranikloeng* that introduce them and their characters' objectives and

then sing songs that tell what they will do or what will happen in the next scene, before exiting stage left. When two or more characters approach each other in the same scene, one party is allowed to enter from stage left. The sitting position indicates hierarchical order. According to *likay* convention, characters with higher social statuses always stay stage left (to the right side of the audience), particularly when sitting on a bench. The king sits to the left of the queen. Furthermore, a chair used in a temple or a sponsor's venue can be used on stage to extend the throne-hall, when placed next to both sides of a bench, for persons of status lower than that of regal characters. Characters of very low status, such as clowns and commoners, usually sit on the stage floor. The modern *wethi loi fah*, with bench-like steps, is clearly designed in a hierarchical fashion. The king and queen sit on top of the steps, from which they can see the royal family members, nobles, soldiers, and commoners from a top-down position.



**Photographs 9-10:** The throne hall contains three-level stands, arranged by tiers to present the hierarchy of characters: noble characters sit at the top level, and subordinate characters follow, in descending order. (Wattana Anan Troupe, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

## (b) Scenery/Backdrop

*Likay* scenery is basically standard wing-and-drop. It is usually a picture of a throne hall, in keeping with the *likay* theme of kingship. One set, however, can be used throughout a performance, regardless of what the setting of the story may be, for the performers themselves tell the audience of the settings for particular scenes. Therefore, *likay* scenery usually serves as a background for the actors and as curtains, to hide the backstage from the audience's view.

More modern *likay* may feature a large painted canvas screen with Ganesh (the Hindu god of wisdom or prophecy, a symbol of the divine theatre master) at its middle. Photographs of troupe leaders, placed in both entry and exit doorways, are also popular. Other modern troupes, such as the Chaiya Mitchai, use only a plain, opaque canvas backdrop, displaying pictures or texts with a laser projector. Occasionally, troupes may attempt to impress their audiences with changeable or special scenery. Chatsamai Wilaisilpa is a famous troupe that has ten changeable backdrops, depicting a forest, royal garden, hill, beach, living room, bedroom, and throne hall, for instance. This has earned Chatsamai Wilaisilpa the title *likay roi chak* (the *likay* of a hundred scenes).



**Photograph 11:** A photograph of a troupe leader is placed on a stage as a part of a backdrop. Such use of photographs is popular among *likay* troupes. (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

The throne hall is the most popular backdrop. It can illustrate any place specified by narrators or performers. Miming is used to depict needed scene contrivances. Many different places within a palace may be illustrated within the square-shaped space of a normal *likay* stage and using the bench that often appears on the centre front of the stage. Signals of interior and exterior are also used. When the king, royal family, courtiers, and pages take their seats on the upstage and downstage thrones, respectively, the visitors who enter via the doorway have to stand close to the edge of the stage, waiting for a royal page, a role normally taken by a *chok*, to approach them and ask for an introduction. The actor mimes opening the door or windows, making five to ten steps to depict his journey from interior to exterior space.

### (c) *Likay* Stage Props

Theatrical properties, commonly referred to as stage props, can be both large and small. A trademark *likay* prop is the *tang*, or *tiang*, a big bench placed at the centre of the stage and used as a throne hall bench. In crowded scenes with the royal family and attendants, additional chairs may be placed next to the *tang* to accommodate characters of lower hierarchical status.

Hand props are also used in *likay*. Virulrak (1995: 251) divides hand props into four types: traditional, suggestive, comic, and creative. Traditional props include those used in *lakon ram*, such as the *dab*, a sword with a wooden handle and without a sharp edge; the *maitakhab* (slapstick); and the *maphaeng* (flat-metal-carved horse). Suggestive or identical props, such as suitcases, trolleys, and ruck sacks, indicate that a character has travelled. Such props can be freely and unrealistically used in *likay* repertoires. Additionally, sarongs indicate lower status. Joss sticks and numerous flowers in a character's hair are used as symbols of insanity. The third kind of hand prop is comical. This prop is usually used by a clown; it may be, for example, an exaggerated chopping knife or a laser sword adapted from the Star Wars movies. The last type of hand prop involves the transformation of one object into another. The most popular transformative props are baby dolls made from folding towels and *phakhaoma*, or loincloths, that are used as horses when placed between jesters' legs.

## 2.2.2 Conventions of Sound and Dance

### (a) Songs and Melodies

A variety of songs typify *likay*, including *lakon ram*; *ranikloeng*, a master song used extensively and exclusively by *likay*; and *songmai*, as well as other traditional Thai melodies and *lukthung*. Musicians and actors also cover the latest Thai and foreign popular songs.

- The *Lakon Ram* Song

*Lakon ram* melodies can be used for various purposes but are principally employed as preludes and background music and to accompany characters' movements, dancing, and singing. The *samoe* melody is played for the first appearance of an actor - in particular, a royal character. *Choet* accompanies fast action, such as running or fighting, or a journey. *Rou* indicates an exciting, rushed moment or a sudden change. It can be used when a character fights with someone or even runs away from something or somebody in his/her scene and crosses over in a scene with the previous or new character; it can also be used with supernatural incidents, such as when a character disappears or is transfigured. *Od* is used when a character cries or is in a mournful situation.

*Lakon ram* songs are performed at three speeds that may be ordered from slowest to quickest, by numeral quantity: *samchan* (triple-layer), or slow-speed; *songchan* (double-layer), or medium-speed; and *chandeo* (single-layer), or fast-speed. The *samchan* speed is almost always omitted in *likay*, because it is too slow and unfitting for *likay* repertoires, which feature little slow movement and action. The *songchan* speed is used with general actions and movements, while the *chandeo* speed is used to emphasise fast action. Furthermore, *likay* musicians may play at *khruengchan* (half-layer), a very fast speed that highlights a comic situation and is played right after a performer finishes singing a *ranikloeng* (Virulrak, 1980: 171). *Khruengchan* can be used as a sound effect, to underscore actors' rapidly-improvised banter and witty dialogue, as in a comedy show at a café or night club.

- *Ranikloeng* and *Songmai* Songs

*Ranikloeng*, a trademark *likay* song, is frequently used by all actors. Its verse-based song lyrics describe characters' lives and how situations influence characters' behaviours, manners, and decisions. Actors sing *ranikloeng* more often than they sing any other type of song. *Ranikloeng* is unaccompanied by music, except *taphon* (a two-faced drum) and *ching* (a pair of small cymbals). The full *piphat* accompaniment is played before a performer starts singing the first verse and after she finishes the whole rhyme.

- Other Thai Traditional Melodies

Other Thai traditional melodies heard in *likay* include songs and melodies from traditional folk performances, such as the *sungkhara*, from *hun krabok* (a small puppet); *phleng choi* and *phleng e-saew*, from *lamtad*; and other kinds of *phleng phuenbaan* (traditional folk music), like *phleng ruea* (a boat song) and *phleng kaiw khaw* (a harvest song). Furthermore, performers can use other kinds of classical Thai songs with foreign melodies from such countries as Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Java, depending on what fits best with a story or is popular and familiar to an audience.

- *Lukthung* and Thai Pop Songs

*Lukthung* songs are popular among *likay* performers and may be sung before, during, or after a play. The tunes and original lyrics of *lukthung* songs can be adjusted to suit the scenes in which they appear. Some solo songs are divided between actors and actresses who sing their parts together, as duets. Before the 1980s, performers sang *lukthung* songs with *piphat* ensemble bands; only after this were Western-style musical instruments, such as the drums, bass, keyboard, and guitar, introduced. Around the 1990s, backing-track melodies were used, instead of whole musical bands, but these have since been replaced by computer-karaoke within the last decade. Dancers and review shows are included in mini-concert-style performances. Thai pop songs are occasionally sung by young performers, to gain favour with their contemporaries.



## (b) Music Orchestra

*Likay* music orchestras are called *piphat* ensembles. A small, commonly-used ensemble is *piphat khruangha* (the *piphat* with five kinds of instruments); this ensemble is also accompanied by the *khon* (masked play) and some styles of *lakon ram* (classical dance drama). The *piphat khruangha* instruments embrace (1) *ranad ek* (an alto wooden xylophone), (2) *kong wong yai* (a circle of large bass gongs), (3) *pi nai* (an alto oboe), (4) *taphon* (a two-faced, horizontal barrel drum), (5) and *klong* (a two-faced, vertical barrel drum). Apart from these five instruments, the *piphat khruangha*, as well as other types of *piphat* ensembles, are always accompanied by a smaller instrument, the *ching* (a set of small, up-shaped cymbals), and *chab lek* (a small set of hand cymbals) that command the tempo of the music, though these are not counted in the exact number of *piphat khruangha*.



**Photograph 12:** A *piphat* ensemble (Wattana Anan Troupe) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

## (c) Voice Technique

Emphasis is placed on vocal quality, which is especially influenced by folksong convention and often uses vibrato. Heroes and heroines always speak in high, lightly nasal voices. Clear and captivating singing voices are also their signatures; by contrast, villains, villainesses and clowns usually speak loudly, as if shouting.



#### (d) Dance and Movement

*Likay* performers adapt various types of *lakon ram* dances. One style of *likay* dance features hand gestures with meanings, while another features dance suit. The gesturing dance mode is used to express characters' feelings and physical emotions and also includes singing and speaking, while the type of dance that features dance suit is more wide-ranging in style.

- Meaningful Hand Gesture Dance

*Likay* performers usually accompany meaningful hand and foot gestures with singing and, sometimes, spoken dialogue. Such body gesturing suggests the emotions of love, hate, anger, and sadness; it also indicates physical action - for instance, going, coming, smiling, thinking, or dying. While the *lakon ram* performer executes gestures completely, using both hands and feet, from beginning to ending positions, the *likay* actor performs partial gestures in only some positions. This is simply because the *likay* performer concentrates on improvising song lyrics, rather than on perfecting gestures. Pointing (with an index finger) can be symbolic: pointing down, at the torso below the waist, symbolises time-today or at this place; pointing up, at the torso above the head, indicates time-tomorrow or a place-there. Placing *jeeb* ('finger-crimping', with the index finger and thumb touching each other and the other three fingers of the hand outstretched) or pointing to one's chest with one's left hand signifies 'I' and serves as a form of self-designation.

- *Lakon Ram* Dance Suit

Performers dance fully and purely when they are not singing. This type of dancing can be seen in the axe dance, horse dance, and *ok soom lao*, a duet that takes place between the *phra ek* and *nang ek* after they finish singing and carry on dancing with a *piphat* musical background in a love scene. The dance suit can be divided into two types: One is a complementary dance that is employed to fully depict a performer's additional actions; for example, the horse dance illustrates a performer's travels to another country via horse, while the sword or axe dance portrays a character's ability in a battle scene. These kinds of dances make a scene complete. The other is a supplementary (or optional) dance is adopted from classical *lakon ram* and folk dance. This kind of dance

is usually seen as a group dance or *rabam* by female characters in a ceremonial event for a noble character. These supplementary dances include *rabam srichaisingha*, *rabam Sukothai*, *sad chatri*, and *manhora buchayant*.



**Photograph 13:** *Rabam*, or a dance suit, is performed to the audience as a special show in *raikarn piset* (a special programme). (Chula Mani Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Apart from these classical dance styles, adapted from *lakon ram*, *likay* performers, accompanied by *lukthung* songs, can dance in popular and contemporary styles - e.g., disco, bump, cha cha, and even breakdance - if such styles are suited to their particular repertoires.

### 2.2.3 Costume and Make-Up Conventions

#### (a) Costumes

*Likay lukbot* was originally performed in costumes of everyday colours. Then, Pho Kru Homhuan (the legendary *likay* master) added a waistcoat and forehead band with a bird feather to the traditional *likay lukbot* costume, making it more decorative. From 1975 onwards, and because *likay* is a flexible, loosely-structured form with no stringent rules, *likay* performers were licensed to design their own costumes and decorations, based on *likay* styles. While male costumes became more decorative, female costumes also changed. Originally, women wore traditional Thai costumes, such as *pha yok* which is

puckered at the front and accompanied by a diamond-headed belt, a blouse, and a shawl embroidered with tinsel thread. Eventually, Victorian-style dresses, including ball gowns, replaced skirts. Various kinds of ornaments, such as diamond crowns, earrings, and necklaces, imitated those worn in beauty contests.



**Photograph 14:** An actress styles her hair. (Phrapiren Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)



**Photograph 15:** An actress in her full make-up and headdresses (Phrapiren Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Afterward, the use of sequins and gold made *likay* costumes more ornate. Until around 1984, the late Mister Vera Leablee (1938-2001), the most famous *likay* costume designer and former *likay* actor, used fake diamonds and crystals and changed traditional *likay* trousers (*panung*) into ready-made skirts by covering trousers for male

actors, which are still popular now, with crystals and other ornaments. Performers today wear diamond ornaments and diamond crowns with feathers and stockings but no shoes.<sup>58</sup> Once a *likay* performer has successfully created a new style of costume or ornament, his fashionable outfit can be widely and freely adopted by other actors (Virulrak, 1980: 84). Performers apply ornate make-up and costumes at will, no matter their characters; noble or poor, all can wear dress decorated with crystals and fake diamonds. However, no one wears jeans, T-shirts, or everyday clothes to perform *likay*. Only a clown is licensed to wear whichever costumes and decorations make his appearance more hilarious.

The average price of a male costume today, including all decorations, is approximately 40,000-60,000 baht (800-1,200 pounds). A female costume is cheaper, at around 20,000-40,000 baht (400-800 pounds). A very special or ornate costume, with more ornaments, will cost up to 100,000 baht (2,000 pounds). Each crystal costs an average of 80-150 baht, while other ornaments, such as glass and fake diamond, are approximately 5-30 baht per piece and are used as alternatives to their more expensive counterparts, principally by poorer performers. The more extreme the glittering vividness of their costumes, the more superior performers feel to other artists who have less elegant costumes. Apart from skill and talent in performing, a performer who is unable to afford an elegant costume usually feels humiliated. The wearing of Western-style suits and cocktail dresses while singing *lukthung* songs is a new trend among *likay* performers. When *likay* actors are invited to perform as guest stars in other *likay* troupes, they normally wear *likay* costumes while singing. Additionally, leading actors often wear suits while performing *lukthung* songs in which they are accompanied by dancers. This has turned out to be popular among *likay* actors.

#### (b) Make-up

In terms of aesthetic distance, audience members sit quite far from *likay* performance spaces; the closest are around one metre from the stage. Therefore, *likay* performers wear very thick make-up - both male and female characters - in order to look beautiful to audiences. They always wear false eyelashes, use eyeliner, draw thick eyebrows with

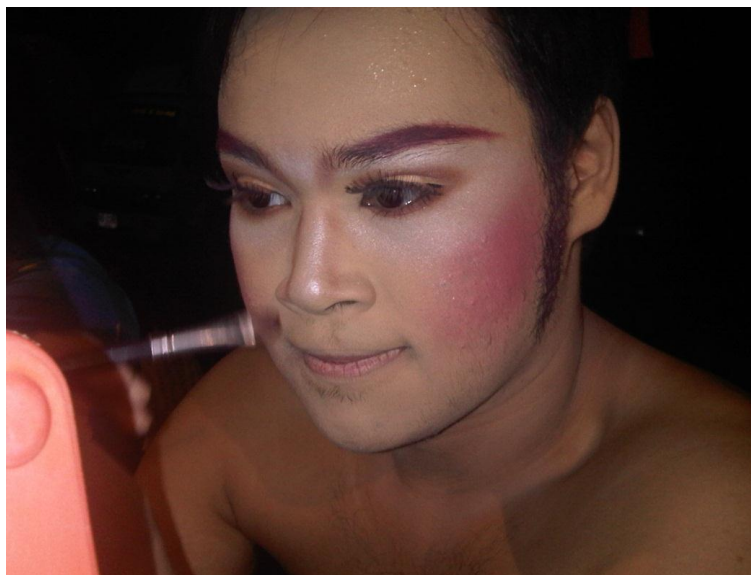
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<sup>58</sup> Female performers regularly perform on stage barefoot while male actors wear white socks as part of their costumes. Wearing shoes are prohibited on *likay* and other classical Thai theatre since.

dark pencil, highlight nose bridges with pencil or dark eye-shadow, and wear red or shocking pink lipstick. As stated earlier, performers need not be concerned about their roles. They can dress in whatever costumes they like, without knowing the plotlines of their performances or their characters.



**Photograph 16:** Colourful eye-shadow is typically used in *likay* make-up. (Wattana Anan Troupe, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

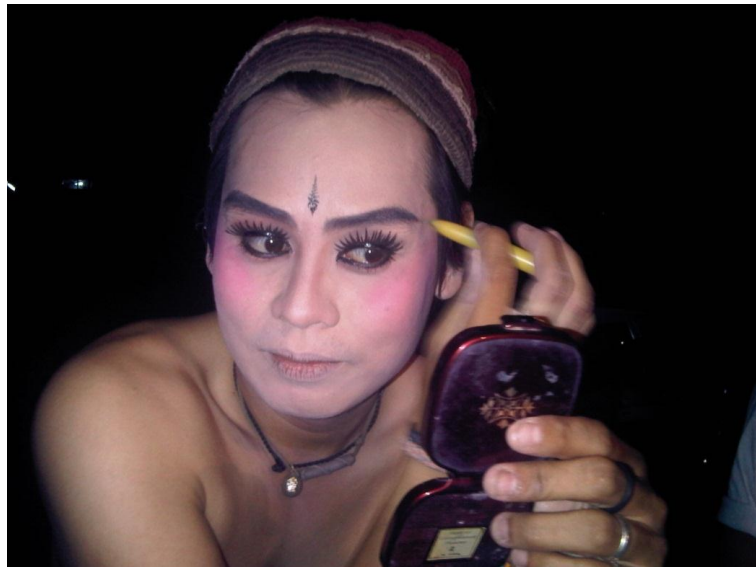


**Photograph 17:** An actor highlights his nose with brown colour to make nose bridges and glues false-eyelashes on his eyelids to make them more beautiful. (Wattana Anan Troupe, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)





**Photograph 18:** Dark red lipstick is used to highlight the lip edges. (Wattana Anan Troupe, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)



**Photograph 19:** Thick and dark eyebrows are usually drawn for all characters in order to make their faces look more dimensional. (Wattana Anan Troupe, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Comedic characters usually dress in *likay* styles that have fewer decorations or in modern or funny costumes, such as police uniforms, suits, and shorts or skirts with neckties, in an allusion to boy or girl scout uniforms.



**Photograph 20:** a *chok ying* (female clown) wears a Korean style costume, colourful wig and ribbons to make her character more humorous. (Phrapiren Temple, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)



**Photograph 21:** Two *chok chai* (male clowns) wear fewer decorated costumes compared to *phra ek* (the hero). (Wattana Anan Troupe, 2010) (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

#### 2.2.4 Conventions of Character

*Likay* characters are stereotypical. Each actor and actress specializes in playing a particular type of character, namely *phra ek* (hero), *nang ek* (heroine), *kong* (villain), *itcha* (villainess), or *chok* (male or female clown). The *phra ek* and *nang ek*, containing a sense of handsomeness, beauty, or youth within, represent flawlessness in beauty and

manner, while the *kong* and *itcha* stand for opposing qualities. The character whose appearance is unsightly or old is not considered a *phra ek* or *nang ek*, even if she plays an important role in a story. This character is called *tua ek*, a main character, instead. The clown or *chok* is a multi-functional character whose appearance humours the audience.

The roles within *likay* performance are stock characters of a melodramatic genre:

### Major Roles

Role	Played by
<b>principal protagonists</b> <i>phra ek</i> (hero) <i>nang ek</i> (heroine)	male-star actors female-star actresses
<b>principal antagonist</b> <i>kong</i> (villain) <i>itcha</i> (villainess)	male actors female actresses
<b>co-principal</b> male <i>chok</i> (male clown) female <i>chok</i> (female clown)	good-humour male actors good-humour female actresses

Table 1: *Likay* typical major roles and performers

### Minor Roles

Role	Played by
<b>senior characters</b> <i>pho</i> (father) <i>mae</i> (mother) <i>khun nang</i> (noble man) <i>khun khaloung</i> (royal female attendant)	old male actors / ex-heroes old female actors / ex-heroines middle-age actors or ex-heroes middle-age actresses or ex-heroines
<b>Junior characters</b> <i>phra rong</i> (minor hero) <i>nang rong</i> (minor heroin)	novice male actors novice female actresses
<b>child character</b> <i>orot dek</i> (young prince) <i>thida dek</i> (young princess)	boy kids / male teenage girl kids / female teenager
<b>Extra</b> <i>nang tam</i> (chambermaid, servant) <i>tahan</i> (soldier, trooper)	inexperienced female actresses inexperienced male actors

Table 2: *Likay* typical minor roles and performers



From an artistic point of view, *likay* performers develop their own ways of performing multiple actions, singing, dancing, and speaking in ornate and individual costumes. They are trained to be sensitive to audience reactions and responses. According to their wisdom of experience, they develop a type of ‘charisma’ that makes them very much beloved. On the other hand, *likay* performers superstitiously believe that they have talismans with which to tempt audiences to love them. I was taught to look at a *likay* actor in the proper way, from toe to head instead of from head to toe, lest I be seduced by his holy power. However, *likay* audiences prefer young players to mature ones, so, as performers get older, their popularity, to some degree, declines. Good-looking and younger actors always have an advantage over older performers. Moreover, heroes and heroines must be neat all the time, no matter how much they meet with misfortune, as such characters have to conform to Buddhist ideals.<sup>59</sup>

### **3. Re-Consideration of the *Likay* Form as Popular Theatre within Thailand’s Cultural Socio-Political Milieu**

*Likay* emerged from the diversity of Thai culture but has developed into a cultural contest with an aesthetic hegemony. In the history of Thai theatre, there is much evidence that court theatre has been, almost continuously, the dominant mode of theatre in Thailand, overwhelming more popular genres since the end of the Ayutthaya period (1767). The belief that court theatre represents Thai aesthetic standards was constructed to disseminate the supremacy of the court. Such a nationalistic perspective has inevitably constructed in Thai minds the mythical, subaltern status of folk and popular theatre. *Likay* is a case in point.

Although Thai society is culturally diverse, melding foreign and local artistic forms into the court and popular modes, the standards and qualities of superior aesthetics in Thailand are laid out by the Thai nobility. As a result, any performance that is different or far from a fixed standard is considered substandard. The discriminatory idea of popular performance as substandard dominates the cultural sphere. This is because a (high) standard is specifically classified as belonging to the classical genres that derive from court perspectives and from theatrical influences imported from the West. *Likay*,

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<sup>59</sup> According to Buddhist or Thai belief of karma, goodness always conquers the evil, no matter birth, family, status and situation.

which is unsophisticated in manner and is suitable for common people who may be poor, backward, uneducated, and uncivilised, is inferior to those of elitism. To be a *likay* fan is somewhat embarrassing, since this kind of popular entertainment is mainly received negatively or looked down on by a majority of the upper class and intellectuals. *Likay* is continually scorned for its vulgarity and charged with showcasing seduction and destruction. By contrast, classical theatre is praised for promoting the high values of Thai culture (Mitchell, 2008: 223). Additionally, performances of *chakchak wongwong*, melodramatic folk fairy-tales, and local folk legends - all features of *likay* - are considered to be for the working class, which is expected to ignore established classical stories from the national literature. In the same vein, city residents with high levels of education are expected to appreciate classical performances both from Thailand and from Western countries, as well as modern, in-vogue genres, instead of folk or popular forms. Those who favour *likay* or any popular forms of theatre might consider these ‘guilty pleasures’.

A cultural contest - particularly when a traditional performance is, in some ways, unsatisfactory - may relate to either the form of a piece or the way(s) in which people think of it. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between theatre ‘discourse’ and ‘practice’. *Likay* may reflect a discursive concept of substandard art, which is unworthy of preservation, but its practice has had a long journey of development and is representative of Thai popular theatre. The discordance between the discourse and the practice of *likay* leads to dialogue. *Likay* needs to rediscover and reconsider both the historical development of the form within Thai socio-culture and its artistic motifs. This will offer a glimpse into the underlying circumstances that influence Thai cultural values and encourage Thai people to look at Thai culture, popular culture in particular.

### **3.1 The Embodiment of the Artistic Establishment in Thailand’s Cultural Revolution**

June 1932 marked a drastic change in Thailand’s political history, when the country transitioned from the absolute monarchy of King Rama VII to a constitutional form of government dominated by a group of civilian and military bureaucrats (Barne, 1993: 1; Wittayasakpan, 1992: 80). Not long after the revolution led to the establishment of constitutional monarchy in 1932, Prime Minister Plaek Phibun Songkhram instituted a form of artistic and cultural imperialism, in 1942, called ‘The Cultural Revolution

Policy'. Thai performing arts underwent radical evolution under Phibun, during an era referred to as the 'Phibun Period'. Under the rule of Phibun's commoner government, Thai performing arts faced the rigid control of genre categorisation. The Prime Minister and his government made an attempt to frame the notion of performance reforming, renaming, and grouping as an attempt to define appropriate standards for Thai aesthetics. Besides, patriots and noblemen contributed to a great number of patriotic theatres, such as Luang Wichitwatakarn (1898-1962). His histrionic plays, which employed the antecedent stories of Thai heroes and great men, were very popular.<sup>60</sup>

During the Phibun period (1938-1944 and 1948-1957), the nationalist ideology of the Thai government had a great impact on theatrical forms (Wittayasakpan, 1992 and Siriyuvasak, 2000). On the one hand, politics and government influenced Thai performance - in particular, its content and style. On the other, theatre and performance adjusted themselves to Phibun's regulations. There was an effort, during the 'Cultural Revolution', to decentralise elite cultural forms, moving power from the court to the commoner government. The royal court was no longer the centre of Thailand's performing arts, but it still played an important role in classical performing arts patronage. The government intervened in the performing arts, in order to enforce its 'new' definition of Thainess, since it believed that theatre could be used to cultivate nationalism, promote the standards of civilised countries, and distribute official versions of culture (Wittayasakpan, 1997: 262). Yet, despite the efforts made to decentralise the royal court, popular theatre has never been appraised as a national art form, because the government has tried to enhance Thailand's artistic value in ways that make Thai arts appear to be equal to those of other civilised and modern countries (Wittayasakpan, 1997: 237-238). Another motive for the government's intervention in the performing arts was its belief that once Thailand had changed from a 'backward' to a 'modern' country, it would be better defended from colonisation. The edict of cultural control, 'The Royal Decree of the Cultural Determination for the Theatre Arts A.D. 1942', was promulgated to re-cultivate the superiority of cultural forms that had been imported from Western countries and were considered civilised or modern. Thai artistic forms were inevitably re-organised to fit the new models. Two significant principles were proclaimed. First and foremost, Thai art forms were re-classified, to fit categorisations

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<sup>60</sup> Examples and approaches of his patriotic performances are presented in chapter 3.

that were based on Western attributions; second, popular art forms, seen as representing ‘backward’ aesthetics,<sup>61</sup> were abolished.

Virulrak (1980: 91) summarises the new three categories of Thai theatre written by intellectuals with a Western background according to The Royal Decree of the Cultural Determination for the Theatre Arts 1942 as follows:

1. The *uparakon* (opera), the performance in which music and singing were more important than acting and speaking
2. The *natakam* (spoken drama), the performance depended solely upon speech and action with no music or dance
3. The *nataadontri* (dance-music), the performance of equal in importance among music, song dialogue, dance, and action

According to ‘The Royal Decree of the Cultural Determination for the Theatre Arts A.D. 1942’, the term *likay* was to be replaced by the term *nataadontri*. *Likay* stories were also censored by government officers; scripts were required to show respect for the nation, religion, and kingship. Some *likay* conventions had to change, to become more equivalent to those of civilised countries. Musicians were not allowed to sit on the ground during shows and were required to sit on chairs, instead. Ribald and vulgar actions, such as foot-trampling and spitting, were absolutely prohibited. The strict prohibition of these behaviours became the basis of later Thai censorship. Pongsak Suansri (2010), a renowned former *likay* actor, told me that he was asked to avoid the word *mha* (a dog) when performing *likay* on TV, since this epithetic word can be construed as vulgar. Furthermore, rigid control of traditional and classical Thai theatre forms, which used *lakon ram* theatrical elements, was established by requiring that all professional artists obtain artistic identification, or *bud prachamtua silapin*, by passing an examination solely organised by the National Theatre’s officers. This absolute power of art control was highly harmful to artistic diversity in Thailand.

After his decline from 1945 to 1947, Phibun returned to the office of prime minister again in 1948 and remained there until 1957. In 1952, Phibun organised and sponsored

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<sup>61</sup> Three performances were considered uncivilised namely *lakon chatri* (a form of dance-drama), *hun krabok* (puppet play) and *lakon ling* (monkey play) and were demolished since they had no way to adjust themselves through the specific and strict law (Siriuyasak, 2000).

a national *likay* competition whose purpose was to propagate his nationalistic and anti-Communist policies and also to encourage people to vote (Chantavanich, 1984:5 and Rutnin, 1996: 185). *Likay* radio broadcasts were chosen as the medium by which to disseminate such policies. As a popular form that functions as social commentary, the repertoire of *likay* performance does not simply serve any political function. The government chose to use *likay* as a tool in its anti-communist campaign because of *likay*'s loose structure and subversiveness, which can be used to impart political messages, and because *likay* was commoners' favourite form of entertainment. Barber (Interview, 2010) suggested that *likay* might have been employed as a pro-Communist medium, if only the Communist party had had a chance to use it. However, the improvisation that is the heart of *likay* performance was strictly prohibited during the contest; radio officers had to look through and censor full written scripts before they aired. After television was introduced in Thailand, television dramas became popular. The content and style of *likay* was widely adopted by television dramas, and this exchange can be seen as the present-day transformation of Thai popular theatre.

### **3.2 The Reciprocal Relationship between *Likay* and Thai Television Drama**

Thai television was established in 1955. Channel 4 was the first to broadcast a variety of types of programs. In the beginning, the on-air drama produced by this channel related to love, revenge, and adventure. On the one hand, *lakon ram* (dance drama) and *lakon rong* (sung drama) were broadcast as a means of presenting national culture. On the other hand, comedy and vaudeville were shown, because they appealed to popular audiences who loved viewing popular theatre such as *likay*. Consequently, *likay* broadcasts were very popular between 1958 and 1963 (Siriyuvasak, 2000: 16-17). *Likay*, however, lost ground to the movies in the 1960s-70s and declined further during the 1980s, with the rise of new television dramas. Although Barber (2007: 184) points out that cinema and television have become forms of popular mass media, moving audiences away from the traditional popular stage, the residual content and style of *likay* are still presented in mass-mediated cultural performances. *Likay* motifs have been deliberately employed in television dramas to entertain popular audiences, because *likay*'s aesthetic quality is appealing. For example, the excessive and ornate costumes and make-up, as well as the over-acted expressions, of stock characters have been adopted. Correspondingly, Eoseewong (1995 in Siriyuvasak, 2000: 27) claims that *likay* can deal with any new genre, such as televised drama, as long as the old content of

everyday experience that *likay* is known for is worked in. Thai movies and television dramas were new artistic forms that contained old folk-popular messages. Therefore, it can be said that the mutual relationship between *lakon* TV and *likay* performance is visible both in the contents of TV shows and in the viewing patterns of audiences who usually know plots beforehand and react to and comment on characters and situations while watching them. The modern technology of television is a new form of popular entertainment, but the content and plot structure of TV dramas in Thailand more or less confine themselves to the Thai ideas of melodramatic and romantic content found in *likay* narratives.

Most television drama or *lakon* TV,<sup>62</sup> which is broadcast nightly and called *lakon lhang khao* (soap drama after the nightly news), in addition to some Thai movies, especially in their earlier stages, have presented *likay* and *chakchak wongwong* stories and styles. Miettinen (1992: 65) explains that these stories have portrayed princes' and princesses' adventures with demons and in dangerous places. The melodramatic plots come in major types, alongside one-dimensional characters, such as *nang ek*, *phra ek*, *nang itcha*, and *tua kong*. Hence, this *lakon* TV can be described as the modernisation of dramatised versions of Thai folk and fairy tales (Miettinen, *ibid*). Good characters principally manifest their values in their appearances. Audiences are supposed to ignore stylised, thick make-up, used even in sleeping scenes: the heroine is always beautiful, no matter what she is doing, because she is righteous as a result of her good deeds, in conformity with Thai aesthetic, philosophical, and religious teachings. Although a realistic or representational style of televised drama has become gradually more evident, a presentational style is still evident in styles of acting and make-up (Ratanachaiwong, 2004). It can be said that the characters in Thai television dramas are similar to *likay* characters but lack their head-dresses, glittering ornaments, and ornate costumes.

### **3.3 Escapism and Romanticism in *Likay* and *Lakon* TV: a Formula for Thai Popular Entertainment**

*Likay* has managed to sustain its popular appeal to mass audiences, since television soap operas have steadily adopted *likay*'s dramaturgical formulas. The romantic notion that

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<sup>62</sup> *Lakon* TV is a kind of Thai soap opera broadcast on television. Its prime time of being broadcast is at 8.30-10.30 pm after the nightly news finishes. Melodramatic and romantic content adopted from *likay* and Thai popular novels are usually scripted.

the hero and heroine will remain together forever, and the Buddhist didactic doctrine that holds that goodness always conquers evil, form the mainstream of Thai popular performances, even today. Such performances are characterised by one-dimensional characters conforming to traditional moral roles. Storylines are based on quotidian scenarios, such as love triangles between husbands, major wives, and minor wives; depressed love; revenge between two families; and misunderstandings between couples. Such plots have been serially re-made. According to Cornwel-Smith, political issues are complementary to, rather than the focus of, *likay* plays, so as to avoid the taking of sides, which might lead to social controversy and also the grip of censorship and accusations of malicious defamation. Such avoidance to politics often amounts to self-censorship by producers (2005: 238). Cornwel-Smith also offer examples of the emotional release afforded by viewing a television soap that shares with *likay* such features as vulgar language, face-slaps, hair-pulling, and screaming outbursts, which release the feelings of audiences who are restrained by politeness and hierarchy in real life (2005: 239).

The happy-ending, romantic formulas often seen in *likay* reveal the internal truths of heroes and heroines who are able to conquer all life obstacles, which inspire audiences. It can further be said that innate virtue is an important symbol of heroism. Even when a *nang ek*, or a heroine, named Dao-phrasook<sup>63</sup> (literally, the Venus) is beaten by a stepmother and abused with malnutrition in the soap drama in the same name, *Dao-phrasook*, her beauty remains flawless, and she still commits good deeds. After being sold to a brothel, she, incredibly, remains a beautiful virgin, waiting for a *phra ek*, or a hero, to find and marry her. This manifests the concept that, by the end of a story, a protagonist should have received well-deserved rewards and become accomplished in ways that audiences can recognise and accept without question.

Imagination control is another reason for the censorship of scripts in Thai popular entertainment. After the Phibun Period, as well as the fall of three military dictators<sup>64</sup>,

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<sup>63</sup> Dao-Phrasook is a name of a heroin of a story of the same name; the story is a popular soap style, in which a heroin has a suffer life in the beginning, but turns to be happy ending. Dao-Phrasook is left at a hospital after her mother gave her birth. She is then adopted by a family with a cruel stepmother. Finally she can escape from that family and is adopted again by a hero who will be her husband at the story end. She meets her real mother and forgives her mother's wrong doing. She marries to the hero and stay happily ever after.

<sup>64</sup> Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, Field Marshall Tanom Kittikachon and Field Marshal Prapat Charusatien

Thailand's elected government, in 1973, began to regulate television and radio by setting up a broadcasting board that was independent of broadcasting stations (Siriyuvasak, 2000: 20-21). The objective of this board, which is focused on fourteen topics,<sup>65</sup> is to control the content of radio and television. Avoiding negative or unsuitable representations of the nation, culture, religion, monarchy, and the government, the board forbids the telling of stories that demonstrate or promote cruelty, vengeance, sexual desire, and uncivilised or culturally debased behaviour. As a result of this strict control by the government, the content of mainstream television dramas inevitably involves love stories, romance, mystery, adventure, and the eulogising of heroes, presented in either the past or present.

Like *likay* performances, television dramas reproduce familiar stories. Audiences know many of the plots and stories well; different versions and performers are the main attractions. In the same manner, most of *likay*'s fans care little about stories but come to *likay* performances to appreciate, for example, the dance and movement that they love; their favourite songs; and scenes of combat, jealousy, and envy. Therefore, watching a *likay* performance, as well as watching television with the same companions, can create

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1. Stories that stir up conflict between classes such as peasants and landlord.
  2. Stories those are not suitable for current political/social situation or causing negative impact such as the story that conflicts with state policy or crime and illegal action.
  3. Stories that create a negative impact on politics or international relations such as comments on politicians, government policy or international policy, stir up social/political unrest or disseminating the doctrine of Communism.
  4. Stories that create a negative impact on the nation, the government or state officials such as comical, satire or critical comments on the government or the police.
  5. Stories that create a negative impact on the monarchy such as creating bad feeling, disrespect or stirring or commenting on the monarchy or leaders of other nations.
  6. Stories that create a negative impact on the religion such as creating bad image or disrespect for the religion, the temple or the Buddha image or creating misunderstanding on the religious script.
  7. Stories that demoralise or are in conflict with Thai culture and tradition such as presentations that could create misunderstanding or destroy the Thai culture, disrespecting parents, quarrels between students and teachers, homosexuality, sexual abuse, etc.
  8. Pornography or stories that create sexual desire such as sexy language, love scene or extra – marital relations.
  9. Stories that show violence, cruelty, hate, vengeance, un-civilised or cultural-debased presentation
  10. Stories that promote crime or gambling or drug addiction.
  11. Stories that are negative to the Thai language such as slang, improper pronunciation, vulgar language or wrong usage of royal vocabularies.
  12. Stories those are unhealthy to viewers such as unclear plot, non-sense or misleading to children and youth on sex and violence or magic.
  13. Low quality production which might disturb the viewing of audience.
  14. Stories with inappropriate name such as sexual desire which might stir up the desire to have sex.



an atmosphere of fun. Spectators who partake in the same experiences may share the same feelings, talking about casts and stories, laughing, looking one another in the face, and shedding empathic, random tears, all while contributing to the building of collective memory.

## Conclusion

*Likay* is continually developing, modifying, and adapting. The commentaries and critiques of performers are highlighted via improvisation. Allusions to television, current events, and social issues are regularly used to illustrate *likay*'s modernisation. To be a fan of a *likay* performance is somewhat embarrassing, since this kind of popular entertainment is mainly received negatively or looked down on by a majority of the upper class and intellectuals. The term 'guilty pleasure', therefore, is normally used to refer to the pleasurable feeling experienced by fans of *likay*. However, as long as romanticism, exaggeration, and superfluous beauty, together with a belief in karma, are still the mainstays of popular Thai entertainment, *likay* performances will be far from the threat of extinction. Serious social commentary, such as on politics, economics, sanitation and safe driving, can be made through the semi-improvised, humorous actions in *likay* performances. The new style of *likay* created by contemporary artists has also been much in evidence. This may be a sign that *likay* is a form of popular theatre that is able to grow in all types of Thai aesthetic soil. This notion will form the majority of the discussion in Chapters 4-6, which focus, in particular, on contemporary *likay*.

In Chapter 3, I will provide the socio-political context for Thailand's 'modernisation period' and effects of this context on Thai theatre's development. While Chapter 1 presented the duality and aesthetic dichotomies of court and popular performance, Chapter 3 will distinguish between modern-based contemporary performance and tradition-based contemporary performance, both of which are principal attributes of Thai performance today. The latter has developed into contemporary *likay*, a style of performance that combines traditional forms of *likay* with contemporary theatrical elements and content.

## Chapter 3

### **The Development of Modernised and Contemporary Thai Theatre: An Intercultural Approach to Theatrical Hybridity**

The development of contemporary Thai theatre is the main topic of this chapter, which focuses on the creative and resurgent approaches of ‘tradition-based contemporary’ performances - namely, revitalisation, reinvention, and experimentation. Thai tradition-based contemporary theatre is a hybrid form, resulting from cultural fusion and syncretism and incorporating both national Thai aesthetics and intercultural motifs. It is seen as a combination of modern and traditional, foreign and indigenous, and urban and rural theatrical elements. This approach of Thai tradition-based contemporary theatre has developed into contemporary *likay*.

Since Western theatrical motifs began to influence Thai theatre since 1900s, Thai artists have demonstrated innovation by adapting artistic conventions to suit new and personal aims (Virulrak, 1999b: 78). Without copying every element of Western theatre, or “without having to resort to wholesale imports,” as Nagavajara (2004:232) puts it, theatre practitioners have found inspiration in foreign cultures and attuned their new sensibilities to Thai familiarities. In so doing, they have discovered new opportunities to borrow elements of foreign practices that fit Thai tastes. This kind of theatre hybridisation has characterised the postmodern Thai theatre<sup>66</sup> that has revived Thai cultural heritage; it has clearly attracted contemporary artists, audiences, critics, and scholars, according to Virulrak (2003: 3):

Theatre might be a permanent building or makeshift structures. New stories, new style and new techniques were needed for the enthusiastic audience which was of middle-class city dwellers. Old forms and contents are revised to serve the mode and mentality of modern audience (who have neglected their ancient background). This is a kind of rediscovery of the ancient civilisation; bringing it to life and being fully understood and appreciated by the new generation of audiences.

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<sup>66</sup> Postmodern Thai theatre can be seen as the coexistence of cultural hybridity between traditional and modern theatrical elements. These kinds of productions make efforts to communicate with a wider range of audiences by transposing traditional elements into modern (both Thai and foreign) motifs, mirroring the resurgence of theatre in keeping with the market capitalism (Kerdarunsuksri, 2002: 54-55).

This kind of (Thai) intercultural theatre, which has enabled practitioners to revitalise declining traditions, is similar in aim and approach to the “Asian theatrical interculturalism” (which bears Western theatrical elements) described by Wen-shan Shih (2000: ii):

...how to achieve the equilibrium between borrowing Western playwright and staging techniques, which gives social significance to modern audience, and preserving Asian forms and aesthetics, which provides cultural roots and a sense of continuity with the past.

It would be intriguing to seek the basic reasons for which theatre practitioners have reworked productions by presenting traditional content in new contexts and innovative styles. It would also be informative to explore the directions in which ‘tradition-based contemporary’<sup>67</sup> performances have developed. In this chapter, I consider the evolution of Thai theatre from a traditional to a contemporary context, where the influence of modernisation, westernisation, globalisation, and localisation play important roles in the shifting of Thai theatrical milieus. My discussion includes: (1) Thailand’s embrace of modernisation and westernisation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the impact of imperialism, Siamisation and nationalistic theatre, and the influence of the Cultural Revolution on Thai theatre. (2) Thai contemporary theatre, including explanations and examples of contemporary Thai theatre, modern-based contemporary performances, and tradition-based contemporary performances.

## **1. Thailand’s Modernisation and Westernisation during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries**

The phenomenon of ‘modernisation’, initially observed amongst non-Western countries, can be referred to as ‘westernisation’. Western modernisation was a tool in power negotiations that resulted in imperialism and the reshaping of socio-political conditions in non-Western countries. The Japanese government, for instance, proceeded with a policy of westernisation after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This policy focused on cultural affairs, in particular, without wholly importing imitations, writes Kennedy and Yong (2010:7). By crafting a Japanese adaptation of European high culture, Japan endeavoured to manifest its potential to be a great power. By contrast, the first and

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<sup>67</sup> Thai tradition-based contemporary theatre is a hybrid form incorporating both [intracultural] national Thai aesthetic and intercultural motifs, including contemporary staging elements, modified Thai forms, and reinterpretation of Thai literary works and folk tales.

foremost condition of the modernisation of Siam,<sup>68</sup> which we know today as Thailand, was Siam's escape from colonisation. Siam was later modernised under court guidance, with the intent of permanently establishing the supremacy of the monarchy and elites and securing Siam's political autonomy. The modernisation that took place under King Rama IV, as well as under his son and grandson, is described in the following sections.

### **1.1 The Introduction of Modernisation: The Impact of Imperialism**

Imperialism was a stimulus for modernisation that lasted one hundred and fifty years in Thailand. King Mongkut (King Rama IV, 1851-1868) was aware of the intense threat posed by Western imperialism to Southeast Asia in the middle of the nineteenth century. To save Siam from Western colonialism, the King imposed a policy that was intended to maintain Siam's independence by opening up the country and developing Siam's civilisation in such a way that it could be considered equal to that of the West. Such development was to occur by means of modernisation and westernisation. Despite Siam's lack of direct connection with states colonised by the West, it would be incorrect to say that the nation was not influenced by imperialism. Although no power was exerted to force the country into the modern world system, it was unavoidably shaped by the social systems and cultural affairs of Western powers. Although Siam is independent, it has suffered from socio-economic imperialism. For example, the signing of unequal trade treaties with the West in the nineteenth century led Siam to become "an indirectly colonised dynastic state" and an "indirectly ruled colonial state" (Thechapeera, 2001:5, and Esterik, 2000: 9 as cited in Jackson, 2010: 45). It can be said that, as a consequence of avoiding colonisation, Siam, or Thailand, turned out to be a 'semi-colonised state':

...a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attached, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the value and structures of dominating centre of the system.

(Shiller1976: 9 as cited in Jackson, 2010: 50)

These characteristics created a kind of internal (socio-cultural) colonisation, in which Siamese aristocrats authorised the modernised consolidation that they had adopted from

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<sup>68</sup> Siam was the former official name of Thailand. It was changed to Thailand on 24 June 1939 under the government of Prime Minister Plaek Phibun Songkhram.

the West, centralising power and making themselves superior to localities and indigenouness.

Correspondingly, Wright (1991: 33) notes that the Thai people, before the reign of King Rama IV (1804-1868), did not differentiate themselves from other people in the same region. By contrast, Western people were looked at as aliens. However, once westernisation was introduced and disseminated, Thailand's neighbours came to be seen as barbarians. This demonstrates the predominance of Western cultural values in the Thai way of thinking. King Mongkut and his successors, including the royal elite, enjoyed Western material culture and marked themselves as models or agents of civilised and cosmopolitan rulers by establishing cultural values that held that Western social norms and tastes were higher in value than those of indigenous peoples (Kitiarsa, 2010:66). This is an example of 'cultural imperialism'. In spite of the fact that the King himself had never been to Western countries, he proved to be a progressive learner who gained knowledge from Western missionaries in many disciplines, from linguistics to scientific subjects. His adoption of a Western way of life became vital to the creation and civilisation of the 'New Siam'<sup>69</sup> empire (Kitiarsa, 2010: 65-66). Western education was introduced to the royal children, making them aware of the significance of the West, with the intent that they be able to negotiate with Western supremacy and maintain Siam's sovereignty (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 28). Correspondingly, Jackson notes that upon his return from two visits (in 1871 and 1872) to Europe and to countries colonised by the British in Asia, King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V, 1868-1910), who succeeded King Mongkut, had a vision of making the Kingdom of Siam similar to a diminutive European colony (2010:45).

In the quest for civilisation or westernisation, and in order to consolidate Siam, make it equal to the West, and magnify the profile of Siam's elite dynasty, King Chulalongkorn and his courtiers intentionally went from being traditional rulers to being modern sovereignties. The country's administration was reformed in 1892<sup>70</sup>, when Siam

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<sup>69</sup> Old Siam begins from the pre-Sukothai period until New Siam was emerged in the reign of King Rama IV. The New Siam related to the influence of westernisation in Thailand. Western ways of life were adopted and western products were consumed to build Siam a civilised empire. (Eoseewong, 2000: 19-21 and Kitiarsa, 2010: 66).

<sup>70</sup> Pongphaichit and Baker (1995: 240 as cited in Barber, 2007: 30) describe his efforts towards constructing a new centralised, absolutist state as occurring through (i) increased peasant revenue collection, (ii) a centralised administration to bypass the old nobility (iii) the formation of a standing army and police force to police the capital, new rice economy, and territorial frontiers, (iv) central control over

adopted a European approach to governance that resulted in the expansion of its bureaucratic system. Moreover, the country reformed its technology, education, public utilities, and dramatic arts. As a result, the high levels of modern education seen in Europe were increasingly in demand in Thailand. Eoseewong (2000: 265) notes that possession of Western forms of knowledge, such as competency in English, was one of the most important factors in the ability of the Thai nobility to be great leaders. King Chulalongkorn sent his sons and a number of royal family's members and courtiers to study in Europe, believing that this would help them cope with cultural and political changes at home. Western theatrical and aesthetic works also exerted a long and continuous influence on Thai entertainment.

Modern or Western-style entertainment began to be disseminated to the bourgeoisie and aristocracy through novels, short stories, and dramatic plays after King Chulalongkorn and his followers returned home from visits to Europe (1897 and 1907). Amongst the King's courtiers were Chao Phraya Thewet (1851- 1922), who was fascinated with Western opera and ballet, and Prince Naris (1863-1947), an avant-garde artist, were the most important contributors to Thai theatre during the early twentieth century, creating a 'new style' of classical dance-drama - namely, *lakon dukdamban*. The Western theatrical elements that they principally employed were staging and performance style. Prince Naris introduced realistic performing techniques into his stage design: an early example is his utilisation of three-dimensional settings, props, and special effects. The realism of Naris' lighting, which distinguished between day-time and night-time, and his replication of the sounds of natural creatures were very appealing to audiences. Performing in Western-like styles, performers sang songs and spoke lines on their own but still danced in courtly, refined ways.

Western theatre's introduction in other colonised countries was different from its establishment in Siam. A great number of Western theatres were established in countries colonised by Europeans. For instance, grand proscenium-arch theatres were first established in India in 1753, and by 1831, five full-size public theatres had been built for British officers' entertainment (Mukherjee, 1982: viii and Yajnik, 1970: 86, as cited in Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996: 7-8). Western cultures, which were brought into

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the Buddhist religious establishment and consistent religious practice (v) imposed common language and culture through centralised education, and (vi) creating material foundations for continued pre-eminence of the royal family, primarily through the rice surplus.

Siam by the Siamese nobility, therefore, were not forcefully imposed on Thailand; rather, as Chaiyan Rachakul has suggested, unlike its Asian neighbours “whose doors were broken by (foreign) political-military forces, Siam’s door was opened from the inside” (1994: 82, as cited in Jackson, 2010: 46).

Despite the impulse felt by Thailand, in response to outside forces, toward modernisation and civilisation, domestic conservation of the monarchy and the supremacy of the aristocracy over other social classes consolidated King Rama V’s sovereignty. The Siamisation of the elite is evident in many aspects of Thai culture.

## **1.2 Siamisation and Nationalistic Theatre: The Internal Imperialism of Elitism**

Although Thai nobility and royalty accepted and promoted Western customs and administrative systems during the early twentieth century, they also maintained Siamese cultural values, particularly those derived from the court. Because King Chulalongkorn strongly believed in the prestige and dignity of Siam and Thai identity, he continued to perform the royal Brahmanical rituals of the Ayutthayan period, reflecting the monarch’s role as the virtuous centre of the nation (Keyes, 1989: 47). Brandon (1967: 14) makes a similar point in noting that, “The king was believed to represent the essence of the state; he personally symbolised the tribe; his palace was a model in microcosm of the macrocosm of the kingdom.” The Hinduism of *devaraja* (God-king) was adopted and applied, to maintain the hegemony of the ruling elite over other social classes. I call this practice ‘Siamisation’ and hold that it was instrumental in developing a sort of ‘Thainess’ by combining the Thai elite’s preferences with Western elements; the Marble Temple and the Chakri Hall in the Royal Palace are remarkable examples. The former was constructed in a Thai style but made mainly of Italian marble; the latter was decorated both inside and out in a Western style, but its roof is Thai. The roof of the Chakri Hall signifies the centre of the universe - namely, Heaven, Earth, and the underworld (Noobanjong, 2003: 176). This conceptualisation of the *devaraja* system can be seen as reinforcing the dominance of the absolute monarch.

During Siam’s renaissance era, under King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI, 1910-1925), *lakon phud* (spoken drama) was introduced. King Rama VI’s exposure to drama and theatre began when he was a Crown Prince studying in England (1894-1902) at Oxford and Sandhurst. The Crown Prince brought back with him from Europe many advanced

cultural elements, particularly those of the Western performing arts. As the first Thai king to have studied in a Western country, he began translating a number of English works of literature, such as Shakespeare's plays, as well as works by authors of other nationalities, upon his return to Thailand.<sup>71</sup> The modernisation of Thai theatres, clubs, and magazines was one consequence of the King's interest and reflected the King's remarkable talent in theatre and his westernised vision, which primarily provided a modernised ideology for subsequent generations. The King's preferred realistic style of spoken-drama, which was adapted for performance at the royal-court, included minor use of classical music and dance. The first *lakon-phud* was adapted from a Western play and was produced in 1904 in the 100-seat theatre of Crown Prince Vajiravudh.

Ironically, dissemination of the new styles of theatre that were influenced by the West, both the operatic style of *lakon dukdamban* and *lakon-phud*, was limited to the royal court and upper class. This new culture, in which theatre was the provenance of those with influence, demonstrated the superiority of royalty and elite aesthetic values and positioned the elite as the centre of power, as Brandon (1993: 2) observes. Moreover, these new kinds of theatre represented the 'good taste' standard of elitism, while local performances were, to some extent, discriminated against. Such discrimination resulted in a belief that the common people lacked good or sophisticated taste. The undervaluation of the *chaobaan* (commoner, villager) performance style, for instance, was evidenced by a declaration of the Prince in the journal of the Thawi Panya Samosorn (Club for Intellectual Development), which was founded in 1904. Crown Prince Vajiravudh's purpose for promoting dramatic activities at the club's theatre was to advance a new kind of comedy that conveyed the values of the upper class to audiences. These comedic plays were believed to be better forms of entertainment than *likay* (Rutnin 1996:158). Hence, the latter form was stigmatised as vulgar by the elite. Wright has observed in recounting that Western motifs were considered to be of higher value than native (*chaobaan*) Thai motifs and in noting that Thai social standards accommodated Western ways of life (2004, parentheses added).

When modern theatre became a favourite activity of King Vajiravudh and his courtiers, the King began raising the social statuses of his actors and dancers by giving them noble

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<sup>71</sup> The king translated and adapted many English and French plays, including those of Shakespeare (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It* and *Othello*), Sheridan (*The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*), Moliere, and Gilbert and Sullivan.



titles. Motivated by the promise of nobility, many courtiers joined the king's troupe. The King's behaviour, however, which was seen as an indulgence, caused strong prejudice amongst and provoked aggravated criticism from ordinary people. Moreover, the King punished military officers for fighting with his pages, which led to an attempted coup d'état in 1911. Afterwards, the threat of a military overthrow of the monarchy persisted. As a result, the King introduced didactic and nationalistic forms of theatre that were meant to replace fashionable works of romance and comedy. Since the King's absolute power was being challenged by young intellectuals who were inclined toward democracy, the new genres defined 'Thainess' as loyalty to the Thai triad of nation, religion (Buddhism), and kingship. The King further declared that the 'Thainess' that had existed under Thai royalty throughout the ages was civilised.

Prince Patriach Wachirayanwarorot (1860-1921), King Rama V's brother and a monk, had disseminated the idea of Thainess constructed by King Rama VI, which was Buddhist-based. King Rama V had emphasised the Buddhist virtue of *rajadhamma*, which refers to the responsible and conscientious wielding of power. Both Rama V and Wachirayanwarorot stressed that Buddhists should accept kings' *rajadhamma* and be proud of Thai culture, which was also created by Buddhism (Sattayanurak, n.d.: 4-6). Even after the political revolution and the introduction of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy in 1932 until the twenty-first century, the nation-religion-kingship triad has remained deep-rooted in Thai minds and continues to be seen as the centre of Thainess (Reynolds, 1987: 9). It has also significantly informed anti-Communist attitudes in Thailand (Darling, 1969:16 cited in Tandrup, 1977: 1). This is because Thai people believe that the cleverness and magnanimity of Thai kings and the nonaggressive manner of Buddhism help Thailand remain peaceful and protect it from being colonised.

The play *Chuai Amnat* (Coup d'état) was written in 1922 by King Vajiravudh to affirm the strength of Thailand's absolute monarchy in the face of an attempted Socialist revolution (Rutnin, 1996: 162). Other plays by King Vajiravudh focused on patriotism, sacrifice, and the righteousness and morality of preserving the nation, religion, and monarchy; examples are *Huachai Nak Rop* (Heart of a Warrior) and *Phra Ruang* (Phra Ruang, one of Sukothai's great kings). To convince audiences of the importance of his message, King Vajiravudh replaced the entirely realistic style of *lakon phud* with the variety-show styles of *lakon ram* and *lakon rong*, whose repertoires include verse, song,

and dance. However, since King Vajiravudh's didactic style of theatre was used to propagate nationalism and the pillars of Thai society (nation, religion, and monarchy) almost exclusively amongst the elite, such ideologies were circulated little to the masses. A more successful style of modern nationalistic and patriotic theatre, which disseminated nationalism and 'civilised' culture to everyone, was established under the next regime, of Premier Phibun Songkhram (1938-1944 and 1948-1957) and his cultural ally, Luang Wichit Wathakarn. Phibun oversaw the so-called epoch of 'Cultural Revolution', which augured in a new era of government and state-sponsored bureaucracy.

### 1.3 The Influence of the Cultural Revolution on Thai Theatre

The idea of the nation and Thainess underwent an official change in 1932, when absolute monarchy was replaced by the institutional democracy of the revolutionary government. The absolute power of the divine king was transformed into a new type of political authority. Premier Phibun, a member of the group that staged the *coup d'état*, maintained absolute power from 1938-1944 and 1948-1957. To gain popular accord during the Phibun periods, Phibun's governments defined Thainess as membership in the Thai nation (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 7). Many changes in Thai socio-cultural conventions and practices occurred in response to the westernisation promoted by Phibun's cultural-reform policy; however, local and indigenous Thai were still excluded from Thailand's reformation. Phibun's model aimed to win the respect of the West by modernising Thailand (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 103-104). Since Phibun had once been accused of being a barbarian while studying in France, he endeavoured to be equal or superior to Western countries throughout his regime. Changing 'Siam' to 'Thailand'<sup>72</sup> was one of the strategies Phibun used to imply that Thailand was a land both free from colonisation and equal to the West. For this reason, aspects of Western culture, such as Western dress and social codes, Western decorum, and Western aesthetics and performing arts, were imported into Thailand and assimilated by the Thai people. Phibun's policy was heavily criticised, but he explained that it would prevent the imposition of Japanese culture on Thailand; Western civilisation was preferable to

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<sup>72</sup> Siam was a term used in ancient times by other countries such as Champa, China, and Cambodia to designate the kingdom dominated by the Thai-speaking peoples of the Chaophraya River valley. The name Siam was changed to Thailand on 24 June 1939 by the government of Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram (Phibun) to respond to nationhood and monopolise the nation semantically for Thai speakers. The meaning of Thai as 'free' would imply to the nation emancipate in that era of high colonialism (Reynolds, 2002: 4).

Japanese civilisation, from his perspective.<sup>73</sup> Phibun hoped that Thailand, as a civilised country equal to other modern nations, would be able to avoid the predominance of the great power nations.

Apart from demonstrating Thailand's modernisation to the Axis powers during World War II, Phibun's westernisation aimed to decentralise court power and consolidate the authority of the new government. Dispersing the customs of the royal court, Phibun eliminated hierarchy in language and introduced a demotic language for all citizens. The variety of hierarchical pronouns that had theretofore existed was replaced by only two words, *chan* (I) and *thaan* (you).<sup>74</sup> The plethora of politeness markers that designated class difference and were used when answering questions in the affirmative or concluding statements politely were replaced by a single *cha* (yes, okay, right). In addition, the Thai alphabet was simplified by eliminating the Sanskrit and Pali characters in it. To foster social equality, Phibun limited the use of royal language and repealed all noble titles. Patronage of formerly-'royal' theatre forms was transferred out of the hands of royal court members, whose power was constrained, and to the new government. Therefore, many forms of theatre were preserved, but at more modest levels, rather than their magnificence being proclaimed. Royal and court theatre performances were henceforth presented only at state ceremonies or as demonstrations of Thai cultural heritage to governmental delegates.

Yet, despite official attempts to demolish or restrict royal conventions during this highly political epoch, which would seem to make way for more indigenous practices, the latter were also dismissed with little concern. Many local practices were strictly prohibited, in order to avoid the disgrace of Western judgment (Reynolds, 2002: 7). For example, the wearing of loincloths, sarongs, and round-necked, sleeveless collared shirts was considered impolite, and, hence, these items were banned, while such improper behaviour as betel chewing was also outlawed. Moreover, *chaobaan*, which was debased, was also discriminated against. The government worried that uncensored

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<sup>73</sup> Phibun exploited the Western cultural elements to civilise people because he would like to reject Japanese power after Thailand was forced to allow Japanese troops to use Thailand as a base and transit when Japan invaded Southeast Asia in World War II. (See Jiraporn Wittayasakpan, 1992: 101).

<sup>74</sup> There are many pronouns used in Thai language demonstrating hierarchy and intimacy as well as distinguishing gender. For example, the word 'I' can be used as: *khapachao* (formal word for man and woman), *dichan* (formal/woman), *kraphom* (formal/man), *kha* (for a common man and woman), *gu* (an informal use for close friend). Please see more details in Atkins, Gary L. (2012). *Imagining Gay Paradise: Bali, Bangkok, and Cyber-Singapore*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, pp. 144-145.

messages could be liberally articulated through improvisation. The uncontrollability of this content was evident during the last Ayutthaya reign of King Ekathat (1758-1767). Although female dance-drama performances were already given at court, folk drama troupes, including clowns, were now brought to perform by the King. Nai Thaen and Nai Mi improvised dialogues in protest against the tax on the vegetable *phak bung*,<sup>75</sup> discrediting and shaming the king (Bhumisak, 2009: 112).

The exploitation of theatre during the Phibun regime, therefore, relied on the use of Western motifs to promote a new form of Thai culture and the use of theatre as a tool for political propaganda; as Mao has declared, “theatre reflected society but also influenced it as a means of propaganda, whether it intended to or not” (Scott, 1993:41). Apart from pursuing nationalistic ends, the Phibun government aimed to systematise the variety of Thai theatre genres by founding the Department of Fine Arts in 1933, one year after the Cultural Revolution of 1932. The royal court and popular genres, which were considered national art forms, were supervised by this department, which fell under the supervision of Luang Wichit and other bureaucratic administrators. Luang Wichit (1898-1962), a chauvinist poet, novelist, and playwright, was appointed the first director of the Department of Fine Arts in 1934 and played a vital role in the modernisation of art forms that was meant to demonstrate Thailand’s civility to other nations and exploit the dramatic arts to propagate nationalism and culturalism.

To gain acceptance for Thailand’s status as a civilised nation and to avoid the disdain of other Western countries, the ‘Committee on Developing and Promoting Music and Theatre’ was appointed to develop national arts that met Western standards. Phibun’s strongly-enforced policy of westernisation helped revive modern theatre and move it beyond elite circles. The patriotic plays *Lueat Suphan* and *Ratchamanu*, which aimed to establish the ideology of the new government, were first introduced to the Thai people in 1936. *Lueat Suphan* presented the patriotic heroine named Duangchan, who left her lover to protect the country. *Ratchamanu* told the story of the bravery of Ratchamanu, an adjutant of King Naresuan the Great (1555-1605), of the Sukothai Dynasty (1590-1605). Patriotic Thai theatre emphasised the achievements of populist leaders. However, plays with socialistic and progressive themes neither employed the whole structural form of traditional Thai theatre nor Western realism. Luang Wichit’s theatre, for

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<sup>75</sup> Tax on a kind of water plant which was consumed by the poor and it had no market value since it grows easily in natural water resource. This tax, therefore, was against the common people.

example, adapted traditional music, songs, and gestures for patriotic purposes. I think these adaptations raise concerns about audiences' familiarity with what they were seeing. The sole use of elements imported from the West was liable to alienate spectators. The combination, therefore, of selected traditional motifs and new nationalistic imagery and the creation of a new dramaturgy and theatrical style that were influenced by the West was a politically astute means of appealing to audiences during the Phibun period of political transformation.

In concept and presentation, the patriotic plays of Luang Wichit can be considered modern reflections on the dignity of common people. Such dignity was demonstrated by emphasising the love of nation shown by characters in Thai legends and stories with sentimental and historical romantic plots. The *lakon panthang* style, which often refers to Thai mythology, incorporated fabricated historical references that strengthened its focus on specific political topics during the Phibun era. Augmentations of dramatic subplots were added to main plotlines, while the names of actual people and historical events were used on a regular basis to make stories more recognisable to audiences. Characters performed songs and dialogues with gestures and movements, but without the refined dances of court dance-dramas that were often seen in *lakon panthang*; group dances were performed as interludes during performances. Spoken dialogue, rather than song, was heavily used to move stories forward. Audiences were asked to sing patriotic songs with performers either during performances or during intermissions. Luang Wichit's special staging methods, to some degree, made his plays popular. His heroic roles could be male or female and were regularly commoners, not princes or princesses. This elevation of the common man to new heights was a manifestation of government policy geared toward demolishing hierarchy among Thai citizens. Mixture of Western elements and traditional Thai motifs became an emergent form of theatre. Luang Wichit realised that the sole use of traditional Thai or Western styles would estrange his audiences and not help him achieve his aims.

Generally speaking, in Thai culture, comedy is more popular than tragedy. Thai audiences prefer to view dramatic plays with happy endings. Nonetheless, Luang Wichit, who had been influenced by the European romanticism, melodrama, and realism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wittayasakpan, 1992: 202), bravely attempted to initiate the performance of tragic love stories that ended with the separation or death of a heroic character. Unlike romantic plays, which comprise

chance, problem-solving, compliance, and the love achievements of heroes and heroines, Luang Wichit's plays often presented the disappointed love of two protagonists. Love in the midst of battle was one of Luang Wichit's most common plots; for example, Duangchan, the heroine of *Lueat Suphan*, ultimately chooses her country over Mangrai, her enemy lover. In Luang Wichit's plays, heroic characters always sacrificed their personal happiness to protect their nations. Often, his emotional plots compelled sentimental tears. They also conveyed nationalistic themes. However, Luang Wichit's patriotic theatre, which intended to deliver ideological dialogues rather than provide entertainment, began to decline in popularity when Phibun lost power in 1958.

The 1960s is seen as the era in which contemporary theatre began in Thailand. Such theatre incorporated new, mainly Western, forms and was produced by students, academics, the intelligentsia, enterprising amateurs, and professional artists. The decade signalled an important new stage in the development of Thai theatre that lasted until the end of the twentieth century.

## **2. Thailand's Contemporary Theatre**

Though European colonialism ended in the late twentieth century, Thailand faced another form of Western influence during the Cold War; its political and economic systems were formulated by and reliant on those of the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, the impact of globalisation and international cultural exchange has been evident in the development of Thai contemporary theatre. The negative effects of globalisation, on the one hand, may be seen in the homogenisation of cultures. On the other hand, the cultural exchange and hybridity brought about by globalisation have had a positive impact on theatre-making (Rebellato, 2009: 5). Since theatrical hybridity, as a post-modern construct, has primarily occurred within the context of cultural negotiations of the global condition, it can prove a positive source of creativity and cultural intervention and renewal (Barber, 2007: 13). I certainly believe that Thai theatre practitioners can take advantage of this cultural interchange to create new modes of contemporary theatre.

The formation of contemporary Thai theatre, in the broadest sense, can be referred to as the emergence of a new performance style and a fusion of art forms that resulted from modernisation. Contemporary Thai theatre aims to create a modern style of theatre that entertains and develops society, rather than serving as a government propaganda tool. Typically, the genre ‘contemporary Thai theatre’ includes modern performances performed in Thailand or overseas by Thai theatre practitioners. Performances can employ imported forms of avant-garde theatre, physical theatre, and physical dance or theatre forms that employ Thai theatrical structures or content in various contemporary ways. Another definition of the term ‘contemporary’ that fits with the Thai aesthetic consciousness is *ruam samai* (*ruam* means ‘mutual’ and *samai* stands for ‘time and context’), which literally means ‘a new style of art’. *Ruam samai* is considered new irrespective of whether it embodies traditional elements, is performed in the present period, or relates to a contemporary context. In this regard, it may be clearly distinguished from the ‘purer’ remnants of classical or traditional Thai theatre whose main motifs are traditional Thai music, dance, and text and poem recitation. However, when such elements are adapted and performed by contemporary artists within present contexts, they may be said to constitute contemporary Thai art forms. In view of this, contemporary artists or theatre practitioners in contemporary performances are literally called *silapin samai mai* (modern artists) or *silapin ruam samai* (contemporary artists).<sup>76</sup> Classical artists are called *silapin kromsilpa*, ‘artists of the Fine Arts Department’, whereas folk or popular theatre artists are called *silapin phuenbaan*, or ‘traditional folk artists’.

When it comes to stage theatre, literally *lakon-wethi*, audiences usually associate a sense of the contemporary with spoken drama, unless another genre is employed within a modern context. Thai plays that devise contemporary Thai elements and forms by means of *ruam samai* (contemporary) approaches are generally considered to be unauthentic Thai performances. In other words, according to Pradit Prasatthong (Interview, 2010), a contemporary performance, or *lakon ruamsamai*, that is performed ‘in’ the present time and context and ‘for’ a contemporary audience, and that is created by Thai artists, using contemporary contexts, in Thailand, whether employing traditional Thai motifs or not, is regarded as contemporary Thai theatre. Collective

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<sup>76</sup> These two terms can be either used to illustrate artists or practitioners who contribute contemporary performance which is distinguished from classical and folk performances.

imagination of ‘authentic’ Thai theatre is, to a great degree, the provenance of classical or traditional folk artists. Classical performances are staged by well-trained artists from the Department of Fine Arts or universities, whereas traditional folk performances are given by real chaobaan artists who maintain rural traditions.<sup>77</sup> ‘Authentic’ Thai theatre, therefore, refers to either the form preserved by the Krom Silapakorn (Department of Fine Arts) or traditional folk forms. Contemporary Thai theatre, on the other hand, is performed by contemporary artists who embrace contemporary motifs and/or classical and traditional Thai elements.

Contemporary Thai theatre can be divided into two categories: (1) modern-based contemporary and (2) tradition-based contemporary. Both labels were invented by academics. The first suggests the influence of Western theatre on the formation of modern Thai theatre, which uses modern methods to treat Western and original contemporary Thai texts. Tradition-based contemporary theatre demonstrates an attempt to embrace folk and classical Thai theatrical elements in a contemporary style. Although this section focuses on the practice of tradition-based contemporary theatre, which has led to the praxis of contemporary *likay*, a brief discussion of modern-based contemporary theatre is also provided.

## **2.1 Modern-Based Contemporary Theatre: The Modification of Western Theatre Forms and Texts**

Modern-based contemporary theatre, in this context, refers to Thai stage theatre that employs or adapts Western elements in its repertoire and is mainly performed in the spoken-drama style. This kind of theatre supposedly began when dramatic arts and theatre were introduced as academic subjects in Thai universities in the 1960s. Modern-based contemporary theatre can be divided into three categories: (2.2.1) modern theatre in Thai university curricula; (2.2.2) performance arts theatre; and (2.2.3) contextual theatre, or theatre for social change.

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<sup>77</sup> The distinction between a contemporary stage play and traditional theatre is clear, in particular, in the way they are included in the university curriculum. The first form is usually housed in the Dramatic Arts department, while the second type is regularly designated in the Fine Arts department. Nonetheless, most traditional performances are within the classical genres; few types of popular theatre are studied (except in the provincial universities). Popular theatre and other folk forms have been revitalised by their communities and scholars who draw attention to traditional works. However, such a revival focuses on popular theatre as a community theatre and calls for research by means of new approaches to bring those folk forms to use again, rather than considering it in terms of art for art’s sake.



### 2.1.1 The Introduction of Modern Theatre in Thai University Curricula

Chulalongkorn University was the first Thai institution of higher education to introduce Western dramatic texts, particularly those of Shakespeare, as language-teaching tools,<sup>78</sup> in its Department of English in 1964. In 1975, it founded a Dramatic Arts Department. Thammasat University became the second institution to incorporate Western texts into its curriculum when it introduced Drama as a minor field of study in 1966; in 1971, Drama was upgraded to a major subject. These two universities were pioneers, providing models of drama curricula. Modern university curricula have exploited not only classical Shakespearean dramas, but a great number of modern realistic plays, for the purpose of dramaturgical study.<sup>79</sup> Other scripts suitable for the study of the modern social theories of Marx, Foucault, and Gramsci, such as the works of Harold Pinter, Samuel Becket, and Eugene Ionesco, have also begun to be interpreted and adapted within the Thai contextual framework. Furthermore, Stanislavski's method of actor training has come to be considered authoritative.

Rutnin and her disciples made great efforts to adapt and translate Western plays in ways that fit with contemporary internal Thai socio-political contexts. Rutnin's adaptation of *Antigone*, a version of Jean Anouilh's play, was performed in 1976 under its Thai title, *Antrakani*,<sup>80</sup> which literally means 'eternal frame' or 'the frame that perpetually burns'. In intentionally portraying the political milieu of the era of democratic enhancement, *Antrakani* provoked a variety of reactions to, debates on, and discussions of Thai socio-political problems. Another example of Rutnin's works is the play *My Fair Lady*, by George Bernard Shaw, which was adapted as *Busaba Rim Thang Isan* in 1995 and starred the actress Sa Sungdoi as a flower garland seller who spoke *Isan*,<sup>81</sup> a dialect from north-eastern Thailand that can be seen as comparable to the cockney accent called for in the original play. In *Busaba Rim Thang Isan*, Sa Sungdoi took speech lessons in

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<sup>78</sup> Shakespeare's play scripts were initially used as reading texts and performing practice in the beginning of modern drama studying phase in Thai universities.

<sup>79</sup> The Dramatic Arts Department of Chulalongkorn University by Sodsai Pantomkomol staged Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. For Thammasat's Dramatic Arts Department under Mattani Rutnin, Western dramatic plays were presented, such as Arthur Miller's *Death of Salesman*, Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

<sup>80</sup> The play was translated by Suchada Thantawanich and Mattani Rutnin which Thai title *Antrakani* is a homophone to the original version, *Antigone*.

<sup>81</sup> *Isan* dialect is often negatively associated with poor-rural people and labourers in the capital.

standard Thai from Dr. Songphoom, a phoneticist who helped her elevate her status from that of an uneducated poor girl to that of a well-born lady.

Two other types of modern-based contemporary theatre have also come from university--educated practitioners. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, Thailand's socio-political milieu was one of reform in both entertainment and social development. Such reform inaugurated a theatre climate in which soul-searching and individual liberty were the focus of Thai artists. As a result, two main types of modern theatre were performed on a regular basis - namely, (2.2.2) 'performance arts theatre' and (2.2.3) 'contextual theatre', or 'theatre for social change'.

### **2.1.2 Performance Arts Theatre**

Apart from plays that are performed at universities as extracurricular activities, many private modern drama clubs and theatre troupes, largely reliant on educated practitioners, have emerged in Thailand, particularly in Bangkok. The 1980s and '90s were known as the Golden Age of Thai spoken drama, a period when repertoires were influenced both by the translation and adaptation of the Western canon and when original Thai scripts, were performed in modern spoken-drama or musical styles. More experimental and inventive theatre styles were also characteristic of this period. Rassami Phao-Lueangthong founded 'Group 28' (Gloom Song Pad), a renowned private modern theatre troupe, after her graduation from the Yale School of Drama in the year 2528 (song-ha-song-pad) of the Buddhist calendar or 1984 of the Christian calendar. This theatre troupe aimed to provoke social debasement with its adaptation in Thai contexts of such Western plays as *Galileo*, *Hamlet*, and *Man of La Mancha*. Having been performed for a large number of educated audiences, the modern style of *lakon wethi* (stage theatre) became a symbol of social entertainment for Bangkokians and urban dwellers. Its popularity led to the introduction of modern commercial theatre, which was administered by professional artists and within a free market system. There were two important pioneers of commercial theatre styles: the Monthianthong Theatre, founded in 1984, and Dass Entertainment, established in 1986. Located in the cocktail lounge of the Monthian Hotel, Monthianthong Theatre offered live performances on weekend nights of such plays as *Dian*, which was adapted and translated from Charles Dyer's *Staircase*, and *Chan Phu Chai Na Ya* (Darling, I'm Really a Man), which was adapted from Mart Crowley's *Boys in the Band* and treated the subject of homosexuality

within a Thai context (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 74). Dass Entertainment put on five or six plays each year (Rubin, 1998: 544), all mainly focused on comedy, from both Western and original Thai texts. An example is Noël Coward's *Relative Values*, which Dass retitled *Rai Luea Khuea Yat* (Mean Relatives), and *Mon Phleng Kanom Krog* (Thai Sweetmeat Magical Music).

Due to financial problems, Dass Entertainment and Monthianthong Theatre closed down. Most of their actors and crews moved to the TV and film industries. Some of Dass Entertainment's members continue to produce modern stage plays under the name 'Dreambox', which was founded in 2001 and is led by Suwandee Jakravoravudh and Daraka Wongsiri. More recently, in 2007, the Broadway-like musical theatre troupe Rachadalai Theatre, whose works centre on Thai novels,<sup>82</sup> was introduced. Rachadali's lavish big-budget theatre is produced and directed by Thakolkiat Veerawan, a renowned Thai stage play director who trained in the US. Its leading actors and actresses are television superstars and pop singers.

Apart from commercial theatre groups, like Rachadalai, a number of non-profit theatre troupes and troupes that make low profits, run principally by younger artists, have emerged since the 1990s. These troupes have been founded by small, private groups of drama-educated artists and include B-Floor Theatre Troupe, The New Theatre Society, and 8x8 Theatre Troupe. Their adaptations of stories and performance styles often reflect their education in the dramatic arts and their experiences both domestically and internationally. Aside from putting on commercial productions, these modern-based contemporary theatre troupes gather every November at the Bangkok Theatre Festival (BTF), which first debuted in 2002. Around 100 stage plays are performed each year at the festival, which features a different theme each year, at Santichaiprakarn Park, near Phra Athit Road, and at other selected venues in Bangkok. The BTF results from the cooperation of Thai amateur and professional theatre practitioners, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, the Bangkok Theatre Network, the Banglamphu Community, and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and its partners. Some of the productions aim to entertain children and families, while others tend to serve intellectuals and highlight social-concerns.

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<sup>82</sup> The well-known Thai novels which were adapted to be performed in Rachadalai Theatre, such as *Banlangmek* (The Cloud Throne), *Khang Lang Phab* (Behind The Painting) and *Tawiphob* (The Two Worlds).

### 2.1.3 The Context Theatre: Theatre for Social Change

Theatre for social change emerged as the inevitable result of the bloody crackdown on democracy<sup>83</sup> that occurred in the 1970s. The 1980s ushered in a political climate of restraint and capitalism, but latent discontent provoked independent-minded theatre practitioners, most of whom had been involved in the ‘Student Uprising’ of 1973 and the ‘Student Massacre’ of 1976, to produce theatre-for-liberation pieces. Possessing a liberationist bent, the socialist and leftist literature, poetry, and music of the 1980s was emotional and provocative in ways that brought such socio-political issues as quality of life to public attention. *Chant Ti Jedh* (The Seventh Floor), written by Suchart Sawadsri; *Chan khae Yak Ok Pai khang nok* (I Wanted To Be Out); and *Ngan Liang* (The Party), by Witayakorn Chiangkul, for example, expressed discontent with the socio-political setbacks experienced by Thailand during the 1970s.

Phra Chan Siew (The Crescent Moon Theatre) and the Makhampom Theatre Troupe played important roles as pioneers of social-change theatre, which firmly exploited the Western concepts of community theatre, poor theatre, Brechtian techniques, the avant-garde, and physical theatre. In 1975, Kamron Kunadilok (b. 1946), founder and leader of Phra Chan Siew, was invited by the Goethe Institute of Bangkok to collaborate with Norbert Maier, a director who specialises in Brechtian techniques. Their production of *Chonnabot Number 4* (The Fourth Rural Play) presented problems in rural areas, such as poverty, migration to the big city, and prostitution and was remarkably successful.<sup>84</sup> *Chonnabot Number 4* exploited neither spectacles, settings, nor ornate costumes. Its actors work black trousers and t-shirts and performed in plain scenographies, alluding to the simplicity that features in poor theatre. Another of Phra Chan Siew’s successful performances, which employed Brechtian techniques, was *Khue Phu Apiwat* (The Revolutionist) performed in 1987, the autobiographical play of Pridi Banomyong, the father of Thailand’s democracy. The following section discusses the key subject of this

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<sup>83</sup> On 14 October 1973, student demonstrations were set up demanding a new constitutional democracy without three tyrants, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, Field Marshal Praphat Charusathian, and Col. Narong Kittikachorn, who led a military dominated government. This student uprising demanded those three dictators leave their leadership and flee the country. On 6 October 1976, there was an attack on students and protesters in Thammasat University after students from various universities demonstrated against the return of the former dictator, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. Around 50 protesters were killed in the attack and many of them were injured, so this incident is called Student Massacre.

<sup>84</sup> *Chonnabot Number 4* was the last performance of the *Chonnabot* series. The three other stories which are called *Chonnabot Numbers 1-3* were made in 1970 when Kunadilok moved to teach Drama in Chiang Mai University.

chapter, focusing on the revitalisation and reinvention of theatre-making in Thailand, which has resulted in ‘tradition-based contemporary’ performance.

## **2.2 Tradition-Based Contemporary Theatre: Performing Hybridity with Theatrical Syncretism and Fusion**

According to Lo and Gilbert’s cross-cultural schematic umbrella of theatre (2002: 32), an intercultural theatrical form is a sub-genre that includes the intracultural, extracultural, and transcultural. Intracultural theatre is regarded as ‘an internal diversity within the boundaries of a particular region or nation’, according to Bharucha (cited in Lo and Gilbert, 2002: 38), while extracultural theatre refers to the exchange of two cultural agencies - for example, the bi-cultural encounters of the West-East and North-South axes. The transcultural theatre can be seen as “the fusion of native and foreign cultural sources into a new synthesis” (Ah-Jeong, 1995: 5). The author explains further that transcultural theatre can be concluded as a final stage in an evolutionary cycle of interculturalism (ibid: 6):

an intercultural cycle comprises three development stages: first, when one society (thesis) acquires a foreign cultural material (antithesis), the latter causes a temporary state of displacement of native traditions; second, a transitive phase, which requires resisting foreign cultural dominance and simultaneous intracultural efforts to revive indigenous traditions; third, the stage of transculturation (synthesis), when a new performative mode is achieved that transcends both foreign and native strands.

The synthetic process of transculturation can be seen as the self-syncretism of dramatists who craft tradition-based contemporary performances because they have trained in both traditional Thai and Western theatre. This aspect of intercultural theatre is the core theoretical facet of the Thai tradition-based contemporary theatre discussed in this chapter and in the present study of contemporary *likay* (see Chapters 4-6).

The process of making tradition-based contemporary theatre, however, can be seen as ‘theatrical syncretism’ and ‘theatrical fusion’, according to Christopher Balme (1999: 17-20). Balme systematically categorises forms of indigenous intercultural theatre, claiming the existence of three, distinct types. Balme suggests that the first category, which emerged as a result of colonisation and decolonisation, is characteristic of

syncretic theatre<sup>85</sup>; in it, “(1) a new theatrico-cultural system is introduced which eclipses and overlies an existing one. Isolated elements of the older system remain present.” He explains further that

the new theatrico-cultural system was adopted locally and mixed to varying degrees with local cultural texts [...] the dramaturgical structure has a recognisably Western provenance, but many performance elements such as songs and dances stem from the indigenous culture.

Since Thailand’s tradition-based contemporary performances often reinterpret classical and folk Thai texts which are recognised as being of Thai origin, Balme’s definition could be well fit this concept. In Balme’s second category of indigenous intercultural theatre, “(2) the existing system remains dominant. The new theatrico-cultural system is visible only in the form of a few identifiable elements.” Traditional Asian performances, such as classical Japanese dance-theatre and Chinese Peking Opera, are clear examples. Although altered by Western influence, these systems remain dominant and structurally intact within their respective cultural spheres both in Japan and China. Modifications to them have occurred as the result of internal changes within the cultures themselves. This is also the case for Thailand’s conventional *likay*.

Since the Thai tradition-based contemporary style embraces the content and form of traditional Thai theatre and combines one or both of these with select ‘contemporary’ or ‘Western’ theatrical techniques, it could also rightly be described as fitting within Balme’s third category of indigenous intercultural theatre. Balme calls this ‘fusion’; (indigenous) traditional forms mix with Western theatrical aesthetics, and old and new elements seem to be in equilibrium, wherein: “(3) a new equilibrium is established between the old and the new systems with a balanced number of elements from both being utilised.” However, according to Lo and Gilbert (2002: 36), fusion can be seen as a syncretic process in which the incorporation of indigenous material into a Western dramaturgical framework is clear. Lo and Gilbert explain further that syncretic theatre integrates the performance elements of different cultures into forms that aim to retain the cultural integrity of the materials used while forging new texts and theatre practices (2002: 35-36). More to the point, according to Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983: 1-4 cited in Dowsey-Magog, 2002: 13-14), the reinvention of tradition, which is part of theatrical

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<sup>85</sup> Balme (1999: 2) notes that “syncretic theatre is one of the most effective means of decolonising the stage, because it utilises performance forms of both European and indigenous cultures in a creative recombination of their respective elements, without slavish adherence to one tradition or the other.”

hybridisation, can be seen as a repetitive process that implies continuity with the past or the re-designing of old traditions. Such reinvention involves the combination of traditional or classic content with new or contemporary forms, and vice versa.

Thai tradition-based contemporary theatre also takes an approach that differs from Pavis's 'Hourglass Theory' (1992:4). This model offers an explanation of East-West intercultural theatre: a foreign or source culture passes from the upper bulb of a theoretical hourglass through the narrow neck of the glass and into the lower bulb of the target culture in a 'vertical' aspect. I interpret this model as hierarchical distinction between predominant and diminutive culture where Lo and Gilbert (2002: 41-42) suggest that this model seems to somewhat a one-way cultural flow based on a hierarchy of privilege and it cannot demonstrate other collaborative forms of intercultural exchange. Thai hybrid theatre can be seen as a combination of modern Thai or (selected) Western form/content and old Thai form/content within the 'horizontal' perspective of the hourglass: the combination of the two sides 'flowing' and 'linking' into two bulbs by a narrow neck, in terms of interchangeableness.

Likewise, tradition-based contemporary theatre can be analogised to Thai fusion food, especially Thai curries that incorporate new ingredients and seasonings. The main ingredients of fusion food remain Thai and are recognisable to Thai people, but their flavours are adjusted towards certain target tastes. Such mixtures make the flavours more contemporary and diverse. By the same token, tradition-based contemporary performances can be seen as theatrical mixtures of classical or folk arts and contemporary elements (both intra- and extra-cultural). Thai literary works and some traditional Thai artistic forms are the main ingredients; modern approaches and reinterpretations are the complementary components or seasonings that make original Thai theatre more varied in flavour.

Since the 1990s, then, Thai tradition-based contemporary projects have combined Thai folk and classical literary works with contemporary approaches<sup>86</sup> and used reinterpretations of traditional methods to communicate messages about contemporary Thai society to contemporary Thai audiences.

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<sup>86</sup> Contemporary approaches used in tradition-based contemporary performances include directing approaches: stage direction and mise-en-scène; play-within-a-play approach; characterisation; and hi-tech visualisation.

### **2.2.1 Traditional Literary Works: A Great Source for Reinterpretation**

Tradition-based contemporary works, recognisable Thai classical texts, and popular folk tales have become the main sources of theatrical reinterpretations. The use of traditional content helps portray the identity of the Thai people, including the way we think and the way we look at ‘what/who’ we have been in the past. On the other hand, reworked content is also a dynamic reflection on how the Thai people imagine ‘what/who’ we are today and ‘what/who’ we might become in the future, according to Damrhung (1999:29) and Tiong (as cited in Ean, 2004: 29). The (great) classical Thai story, according to Nagavajara (as cited in Watananguhn, 2003: 66), essentially embraces three attributes: praiseworthiness, contribution to wisdom, and the encouragement of good behaviour. In addition, great, even immortal, classical texts comprise beautiful rhythmic prose and verse and enhanced visualisation. They portray idealistic images of characters and offer viewers omniscient views on the larger-than-life stories of their characters, especially in adventurous romances, which end either happily or tragically. Readers and audiences remember their formulaic plots and vivid imagery favourably. This characteristic of classical texts makes them comparable to ‘The Great Stories’ of Arundhati Roy (1998:218):

The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again...They don’t deceive you with thrills and trick endings. They don’t surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in. Or smell of your lover’s skin. You know how they end, yet you listen as though you don’t... In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn’t. And yet you want to know again.

Tradition-based contemporary performances retain the plotlines of great stories but reinterpret or alter these stories’ themes and texts, to address everyday issues. Forgiveness, benevolence, and morality, which derive from Buddhist principles, are often employed to reinforce themes of enlightenment, to respond to audiences’ concerns about social equity, and to serve as cautionary warnings to viewers to reflect on their day-to-day existence. Otherwise stated, tradition-based contemporary performances employ the old terminology of classical literary works, combined with modern-day parlance, to call audiences’ attention to important matters. Dramatists who are knowledgeable of and skilful in both contemporary and traditional theatre are the key to the crafting of such performances, as described in the following section.



### 2.2.2 Self-Syncretism: Tradition-Based Contemporary Dramatists

The directors of tradition-based contemporary performances must be able to combine traditional and contemporary elements in the creation of Western-style realistic spoken dramas. In 2009, I had the chance to see Hideki Noda direct a contemporary *kabuki* rehearsal.<sup>87</sup> Noda considered his role as a director to involve shifting away from the conventional *kabuki* style (while maintaining the integrity of *kabuki*'s performance structure), because he had borrowed acting conventions from realistic Western dramas; for instance, performers had to interpret their lines and their characters' emotions and remain in-character in each scene. Consistency was maintained in the whole story, not only in the expression of lines (Noda, Interview 2009).

I also witnessed one of Noda's masterpieces, *The Diver* (2007), a modern Japanese stage play that was adapted from the classical *Tale of Genji*, which features *noh* and *kabuki* elements, in Tokyo. From Noda's point of view, hybrid theatre should refrain from wholesome stylisations of *noh* and *kabuki* (2009). However, Noda still used some elements of these traditions. For example, a fan, a common *kabuki* element, was used as a piece of pizza and arrows, replacing real stage props. Moreover, while characters wore contemporary casual outfits, musicians wore traditional *noh* costumes and played *noh* musical instruments. Noda's knowledge of and skill in both the (Western) modern and (domestic) traditions enabled him to create such hybrid theatre. The process of his creation can be called 'self-syncretism'<sup>88</sup>, which, more generally, can be seen as the sort of personal development that enables dramatists to engage in the juxtaposition of Western and indigenous arts.

Self-syncretism has also been demonstrated by Thai dramatists who have combined elements of foreign theatre with traditional Thai elements in their own productions. Contemporary Thai playwrights and practitioners of hybrid theatre have experienced both the modern and traditional worlds of theatre-making. Instead of exploiting Western theatrical motifs, both in the physical and the imaginative realms, many have sought

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<sup>87</sup> Hideki Noda (b.1955), a renowned contemporary Japanese artist who graduated in drama from Drama from the University of London, has contributed a great number of contemporary-*kabuki* productions which combined together the *kabuki* conventions and modern stage theatre motifs.

<sup>88</sup> This term identifies an artist who has background and experience in both modern and traditional theatrical approaches.

alternative ways of creating theatre by returning to traditional performing styles. Indeed, the use of old Thai theatrical forms and content, together with contemporary motifs, is regarded as progressive.

Mattani Rutnin (b. 1937), an initiator of Thai hybrid theatre, was trained in Thai classical dance-drama and achieved her PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London. Rutnin, who has claimed that the Drama Department of Thammasat University pioneered the creation of two culturally different styles of theatre (Rutnin, 1982: 16), presented *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Thai classical dance-drama style in 1975. Positive feedback from audiences assured Rutnin that her experimental approach was extremely successful. Subsequently, Rutnin has continued to work with hybrid theatre forms, focusing especially on tradition-based contemporary productions of traditional performances that have been revived and adapted from Thai classic and romantic literature. Her masterpiece *Busaba-Unakan*, a feminist reinterpretation of the Javanese *Tale of Panji*, was performed at Thammasat University in 1994 and was well received by modern audiences. This piece will be discussed in later sections.

Patravadi Mejudhon (b. 1948), whose theatrical interests revolve around her long-standing fascination with Thai culture, has contributed many reinvented classical works to the Thai theatrical canon. These works feature her experiences in Western and modern theatre, as a drama student in England and the U.S., as well as a professional actor and director. Her trademark performances are adaptations of classical works of Thai literature, performed in contemporary styles; remarkably, they employ authentic, imported Western methods in inventive scenic designs. In 1992, the open-air Patravadi Theatre formally opened in Patravadi's residence, which is situated on the banks of the Chao Phraya River. *Singhakraiphob* (The Great Lion of The Three Worlds), adapted from Sunthonphu's poetic tale of the same name<sup>89</sup>, was the first tradition-based contemporary performance shown in this 200-seat theatre. Another of the Patravadi Theatre's great achievements was *Rai Phra Tripitaka* 1-5 (The Recitation of Buddhist Scriptures, Episodes 1-5). This series, which ran from 1996 to 2004, attended to the Buddhist message and was performed via a combination of contemporary music, dance,

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<sup>89</sup> Sunthonphu (1786–1855) is an important and famous royal poet between the reign of King Rama II (1809– 1824) and King Rama IV (1851–1868). In 1986, the 200th anniversary of his birth, Sunthonphu was honoured by UNESCO as a great world poet.

and movement. Patravadi Theatre's other accomplishments in hybrid theatre are the operatic rock *Inao-Choraka* (Inao and Choraka, 1994); *Ngao Pa* (The Jungle Negrito, 1995); the *khon* adaptation *Sahatsadecha* (A Thousand Powers, 1997); *Chalawan: The Likay Musical*, a contemporary *likay* performance (2006); and *Ro Rak Lo Lilit* (Waiting for Love and Lilit Phra Lo, 2009-2010). Some of these performances are analysed in the following section on 'Performing Thai Literary Works in Contemporary Styles: An Intercultural Approach'.

Another syncretic dramatist is Pradit Prasatthong (b.1960), an actor-director and sociologist. Prasatthong has combined his own theatrical interests in folk and popular theatre, as well as the classical arts, with his university experience in modern theatre and pop music in several productions of the Makhampom Theatre Troupe.<sup>90</sup> Throughout the 1990s, Prasatthong devised performances for social change, treating such topics as HIV awareness education, adolescent sexuality, and drug use in rural areas. His well-known productions, which were performed in a contemporary hybrid style and drew on popular theatre conventions, Thai myths, and Thai literary works, were *Phitsathan Oei* (Daeng between Two Worlds, 1993), *Chao Lo Lo Lam* (Chao Lo, The Handsome, 1994), and *Malai Mongkol* (Auspicious Garland, 1996-1997). Prasatthong was also an advisor of *Chanthakorop... Cho Before Time* (Chanthakorop has a Premarital Sexual Relationship) (1995), which directed by Paluhad Paholbutr. These pieces are discussed in detail in the section on theatre for development, which explains the emergence of folk popular elements in tradition-based performances.

### **2.2.3 The Content and Approach of Tradition-Based Contemporary Theatre**

In this section, I am less interested in conducting a detailed performance analysis of Thai tradition-based contemporary productions from the 1990s to the 2000s than I am in providing an overview of some works, conceptualising their practices, and reflecting on their content and techniques. In the process of reinventing traditional plays, three modern theatrical elements should be considerably utilised, to ensure the effectiveness of the hybrid form: play-scripts, directing, and acting (Anon., 2001). As regards play-scripts, 'myth-making' is seen as the reinterpretation and deconstruction of old or

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<sup>90</sup> Makhampom Theatre Troupe was founded in 1980, using drama as a main tool for human and social development. Its performance work focuses on political issues, social activism and human development.

traditional content. Some necessary conventional elements are accommodated, but themes are adapted, reinterpreted, and reconstructed, in order to communicate new messages, such as on feminism or human and social development. The second focus of analysis of Thai tradition-based contemporary productions is the variety of methods and techniques used to create hybrid styles; the use of different methods and techniques reflects different directing and acting approaches. The success of efforts to reinvent the performing arts depends on the proportions and methods of combination of traditional and modern motifs. I shall discuss these concepts in detail in the following sections.

### **(a) Performing Thai Literary Works in Contemporary Styles: An Intercultural Approach**

The Patravadi Theatre produced a great number of hybrid performances, staging combinations of Thai literary works and contemporary motifs. I will discuss three productions that clearly manifest the dualities inherent in fusions of Western and traditional Thai theatrical elements: *Inao-Choraka* (1994), *Sahatsadecha* (1997), and *Ro Rak Lo Lilit* (2009-2010). In these performances, the influence of Western perspectives inspired the use of many contemporary approaches and motifs, including characterisation, *mise-en-scène*, and play-within-a-play.

Mejudhon adapted the Javanese romance *Tale of Panji*, called *Inao* in Thai literature, into *Inao-Choraka*, which departed from the original story by presenting the bad side of the story's hero and the good side of the story's villain. According to Pavis and Shantz (1998: 52), characterisation may be achieved through means of stage direction, the naming of places, character discourse, stage business, paralinguistic factors, and audience understanding of character motivation. However, the reinterpretation and deconstruction of characters in tradition-based contemporary theatre is another way of achieving characterisation. The main theme of the rock opera *Inao-Choraka* is the karma of Inao, a classic misbehaviorer who cancels his engagement to Busaba because he wants to marry Chintara, another princess with whom he falls in love at first sight. After refusing to be engaged to Busaba, the arrogant Inao changes his mind after seeing Busaba and discovering that she is the most beautiful girl he has ever met; he suddenly falls in love with her and wants her to be his wife, although he is already married to Chintara. To achieve his plan, Inao sets fire to Busaba's palace and the city of Daha and abducts Busaba. Choraka, an ugly villain who also falls in love with Busaba, reveals his

good will when Inao blames him for burning Daha City; Choraka helps extinguish the fire and searches for Busaba. The faithfulness of Choraka and the immorality of Inao, which is seen as the reversal of typical characters, challenge stereotypical characterisations of villain and hero and the convention that physical beauty should align with goodness or wholesomeness; it is not Choraka who misbehaves, but Inao, a self-willed prince.

Mejudhon's productions of performing Thai literary works in contemporary styles relied on stunning visualisations and beautiful soundscapes to capture audiences' attention. Rather than exploiting realistic conventions to reveal the story step-by-step in a matter-of-fact style, the tradition-based contemporary practitioners engaged in what Barba (as cited in Watson, 2002: 210) has called 'imagery usage' - that is, the use of vocal techniques, sound effects, music, and a visual theme. Broadly speaking, music, song, light, sound, visual effects, dance, and movement are regularly used in contemporary hybrid-theatre productions. They were used to great effect, for instance, in the Patravadi Theatre's 1997 production of *Sahatsadecha*, a *khon* depiction of the war between Thosakan and Phra Ram, which was originally related in *Ramakien*, the Thai version of the Indian *Ramayana*. A prolonged battle occurs because Thosakan abducts Sita, Phra Ram's wife, to his city, and Phra Ram wants to bring her back. During the battle, Thosakan asks Sahatsadecha, his friend, to assist him after many of his own sons are killed. However, at the end of the story, Sahatsadecha is also killed by Hanuman, Phra Ram's adjutant. The unrealistic style of *tableau vivant*, presented as a *Ramakien* image and seen in the crafted leather *nang yai* shadow puppet in the play, was deliberately used to depict the overflowing details of minimal actions on stage. Each *nang yai* image represented of the action or actions of a character or characters in the *Ramakien* play, such as in the fight scene between Phra Ram and Thosakan.

Patravadi Theatre productions often combine traditional Thai and Western musical patterns, dance styles, and costumes. Such mixing demonstrates theatrical hybridisation. Contemporary songs, for example, which were utilised in *Inao-Choraka*, the rock opera, were accompanied by a combination of Javanese and traditional Thai and Western instruments and composed by a Thailand-based American composer, Bruce Gaston, who is renowned for his modern interpretations of classical Thai music. Not only are Western and Eastern theatrical elements adopted in the Patravadi Theatre's hybrid theatrical forms; foreign artists are also invited to collaborate in the house's

productions. In *Sahatsadecha*, stage lighting, sound, and special effects were designed by both Eastern and Western practitioners; Japanese artists Katsura Kan and Noriko Tamatani, a lighting designer and a sound designer, collaborated with Anthony Hodgson, an American special effects designer. Similarly, Kyle Dillingham, a world-renowned American violinist, was invited to perform as one of three Phra Lo characters in *Ro Rak Lo Lilit*. Apart from using Western motifs, Patravadi Theatre has also been known to draw on traditional elements of Southeast Asian theatre and literature, such as the Javanese *Inao*. Mejudhon and Meechamras, who staged *Inao-Choraka*, went abroad to learn Javanese and Balinese dance at the STSI Institute in Indonesia and later adapted what they learned to the contemporary production that Patravadi Theatre was crafting.

Another example of the use of Asian theatrical techniques is found in *Sahatsadecha*. Zen San, a Japanese artist, created a new style of Thai shadow puppet from carved paper and plastic, instead of the traditional leather. Zen's open-work design was decorated with coloured paper and gel, which made the puppets more attractive. In addition, *Sahatsadecha* borrowed a Japanese puppetry technique that uses elastic bands to control puppets' movements, including body bending and head nodding (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 168).

The play-within-a-play technique, seen as the paralleling of inner and outer stories on the same stage, was adopted in *Lo Rak Lo Lilit*. Phra Lo, a character in the inner plot of the play, performed a fictional scene, adhering to the original story<sup>91</sup>, while a character in the outer play portrayed a realistic scene. The outer character, a handsome married director who served as a reflection of Phra Lo, a charming prince, flirted with the heroine, an attractive maid in the outer play. While the heroine in the outer story refused to be the director's mistress, the two heroine princesses in the inner framework became Phra Lo's extramarital wives, which led to their deaths when they attempted to protect Phra Lo from assassination. The function of this play-within-a-play, according to Mejudhon (Interview, 2010), was to construct a reflection of a reality that was, to some

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<sup>91</sup> There are two cities which were enemies. The first city is Mueang Suang, ruled by King Mansuang, and the other city is Mueang Song, ruled by King Phichaipisukorn. Phra Lo, an attractive prince, a son of the first city was married to Laksanavadi. Phra Phuean and Phra Phang, the two princesses of Muang Song, the enemy of Phra Lo's city heard about his handsomeness, and wanted to see him. As a result, they asked Phu Chao Saming Phrai, a conjuror, to lure Phra Lo to come to Mueang Song. When the charm took effect, Phra Lo came to see the two princesses and they immediately fell in love with each other. Their love affairs faced an obstacle when the two Princesses' grandmother whose husband was killed by Phra Lo's father knew this news. The grandmother ordered the archers to shoot thousands of arrows at Phra Lo, but the two princesses tried to protect their husband, then three of them died in this incident.

degree, based on and closely associated with a fictional story, an anti-illusionistic approach that provokes self-reflection, according to Fischer and Greiner (2007:xiii). The Buddhist didactic message, which also speaks to the danger of lust and the disadvantages of living with shame, clearly featured in the dialogues of the outer characters and was reflected by the inner roles.

To distinguish the characters in the inner story from the characters in the outer narrative in *Ro Rak Lo Lilit*, Mejudhon designed masks for other Phra Lo characters (Mechudhon, 2010); the *khon* dancer, a modern Lanna dancer and a violinist wore the same white mask and long-haired wig in the inner character (Diamond, 2010: 367). Moreover, she employed the work-in-progress approach (Cardullo, 1995: 3-4), one of the dramaturgical functions of the director who has to reduce, add, or adjust some details of a production to match her material resources, cast, and audience imagination. As a story based in the northern part of Thailand, *Ro Rak Lo Lilit* required the use of traditional northern dance. However, the leading cast member, whose appearance and speaking accent were northern, was unskilled in traditional dance. Mejudhon addressed this issue by changing the actress's role from that of the girl in the inner story to that of the modern girl in the outer story, who represented the same character in a different era (Mechudhon, Interview 2010).

### **(b) Performing Feminism: The Abolition of Gender-Based Inequality**

Awareness of being exclusion from male culture, social, sexual, political, and intellectual discourse are the beginning of being feminism (Dolan, 1988: 3 as cited in Aston, 1995: 8). Otherwise state, the aim of feminism is to recover women's performance that had been "'hidden' and 'silenced' by a body of conservative in male criticism" (Aston, 1995: 3), in which "the defining discourse of feminism is its critique of the 'dominant male discourse'" (ibid: 8). Feminist conceptual frameworks present different sides of women that were excluded from the old world dominated by male power, where 'revisionist mythmaking' was common. Ostricker (1989: 316-318 cited in Shurbutt, 2001: 45) explains revisionist mythmaking as

...old stories (being) changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy...they are retrieved images of what women have collectively and historically suffered...in some cases they are instructions for survival.

According to Aston's three categories of dominant feminist positions - namely, bourgeois, radical, and materialist - the feminism of Thai tradition-based contemporary performances is mainly focussed on 'radical' feminism. It "locates the oppression of women in the patriarchal domination of women by men, and advocates the abolition of the man-made structures which reinforce gender-based inequality" (Aston, 1995: 8-9). Performances of gender-based inequality challenge conventional gender-based stereotyping and, according to Janet Brown, can be described as 'sex-role reversal device[s]' and 'satire[s] of traditional sex roles' (Brown, 1979: 88 as cited in Aston, 1995: 59). Such concepts have been generally used in reinvented feminist theatre in Thailand.

The romantic storylines of traditional Thai literature commonly feature the shared destinies of heroes and heroines in love, relating obstacles, misunderstandings, fulfilment, and even separation. Significant incidents usually derive from male-chauvinist or patriarchal actions. Additionally, classical Thai literary works basically mirror the idealistic qualities of 'good old-fashioned' women, whose good deeds are reflected in their physical flawlessness, graceful manners, obedience, and complaisance. In other words, they present good women as 'non-speaking subjects' (Aston, 1995: 10). Feminist playwrights, therefore, have made an effort to reject the hierarchical worldview that elevates men in this fashion (Keating 2009: 349-350).

In their revisions of traditional stories, feminists, who act as deliberate critics of traditional gender relations, have upended idealised characterisations of women who must be submissive to their parents, husbands, and male rulers. Productions have been recreated from feminist points of view, deconstructing unacceptable aspects of the male world and adapting and rewriting them to fit with the new realities of liberated modern women. Women's roles, therefore, have been redefined in theatre. *Kaki* (1994), *Busaba-Unakan* (1994), and *Pimpilalai* (1995), for example, highlight the absence of choice available to Thai women in patriarchal Thai society. When the female women in these plays make decisions deemed 'wrong' for their incongruence with current conceptions of social justice - for instance, when they select the wrong men to live with - they are legitimately castigated, cursed, and sentenced to death. Some are honoured as wives and must tolerate only living with licentious and domineering husbands. The details of how these stories have been reinterpreted follow.



In 1994, Surapone Virulrak produced *Kaki*, a feminist version of *Kaki Khamkhlon*<sup>92</sup> that was performed at the Chulalongkorn Great Hall during the Chulalongkorn Academic Fair. Kaki, a young wife of the old chess-playing King Phrommathat, is considered the “perfect” woman. Her body is fragrant, which causes many men to try to seduce her and makes her symbolic of a promiscuous woman. As Diamond (2006: 126) points out, “in her traditional role, Kaki is portrayed as a depraved woman given solely to the pleasures of the body.” She is lured into adultery with two men who are the king’s chess partners: the bird-king Garuda; and the king’s musician, Natkhuwen. Garuda abducts Kaki to his heaven-mansion and has sexual relations with her. Natkhuwen, who falls in love with Kaki, as well, transforms his body into a small bug, clings to Garuda, and goes with him to his home. After finding out that Kaki is there, he asks her to have sex with him and threatens to tell King Phrommathat about her adultery with Garuda if she refuses. Although Kaki accepts his offer, Natkhuwen reveals Kaki’s secret, and she is condemned by all three men as an immoral woman. She is then banished from the palace and placed on a raft. When the raft comes ashore, the god Indhra impersonates an ugly individual and tests Kaki’s mind by offering her food for sexual congress. The starving Kaki accepts this offer, to save her life. In the original text, she is accused of being a bad woman because of her promiscuousness.

But Virulrak’s revision calls for justice by portraying Kaki’s adulteries as being provoked by men and suggesting that if women may be accused of indecency for their adultery, men must also be chastised or punished to the same degree for the same offence. In Virulrak’s version of *Kaki Khamkhlon*, Kaki insults the god Indhra as he insulted her, and he forces her to accept his mischievous plan. She is offended that his thousand eyes are actually a thousand vaginas, since, in a previous life, he committed adultery with another god’s wife. In the last line of the feminist version, Kaki’s character convinces her audience that she (as well as another accused women) has been judged by the double standards of a society where men dominate women, who are victims of male passions and desires. Her character speaks directly to the audience about male chauvinism and convinces them that adultery is committed by both sexes, not only by women.

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<sup>92</sup> The original version composed by Chao Phraya Phrakhleng (Hon) during the reign of King Rama II (1809–1824)

*Busaba-Unakan* is another worthy example of a feminist revision of a traditional Thai story. While Patravadi Mejudhon's *Inao-Choraka*, staged in 1994, focused on Inao's misbehaviour, Mattani Rutnin's version focused on Busaba, depicting the events that occurred after Inao cancelled his engagement and then changed his mind, upon discovering that Busaba's beauty was flawless, and tried to abduct her. The play, as Rutnin directed it, presented both conservative women in an old world and modern women in the twentieth century. Rutnin, a professor of dramatic arts at Thammasat University and a director, emphasised the two parts of each woman by dividing Busaba into two contrasting characters - Busaba (Busaba I), a woman, and Unakan (Busaba II), a male impersonator of Busaba. Unakan, a symbol of modern and independent women, prefers to live alone, rather than became a major wife of Inao, a husband with countless concubines in a patriarchal domain. For that reason, Unakan leaves Busaba when the latter chooses to live with Inao and accept his past misdeeds. Since *Busaba-Unakan* was adapted from the Javanese story *Tale of Panji*, Rutnin used modified Javanese dances and costumes in her production. This play was performed at the Cultural Center of Thailand in 1994, where the majority of audience members were students who were excited to see television actors perform stage theatre.

Following *Busaba-Unakan* and *Kaki* was *Pimpilalai* (1995), a revision of the original Thai legend of *Khun-Chang Khun Phan*. *Pimpilalai* was performed in the small auditorium of the Cultural Centre of Thailand. Playwright, director, and lecturer at Thammasat University Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn intentionally made *Pimpilalai*, the heroine, the play's title, instead of using the names of the two men, *Khun-Chang* and *Khun Phan*, who are *Pimpilalai*'s husbands, in order to focus on the female character and her struggles. Throughout the original text, *Khun-Chang* and *Khun-Phan* compete to win *Pimpilalai*'s heart. *Pimpilalai* is married first to *Khun Phan* and later to *Khun Chang*. Her suffering is caused by the unlimited desire and deceptiveness of these men, of whom *Pimpilalai* is finally forced to choose only one. Her selection is incongruous with the king's expectations. The king, as a judge, has told *Pimpilalai* to choose one man to live with - *Khun Phan* or *Khun Chang* - but she cannot choose either, because *Khun Phan* gives her love, while *Khun Chang* takes care of her. *Pimpilalai* is put to death, because the king is dissatisfied with her hesitation.

Pimpilalai's other name is Wanthong<sup>93</sup>, which has become a label in Thai society for women with two husbands. Both names are used in the original Pimpilalai story; the name Pim (Pimpilalai) is used before the protagonist changes her name to Wanthong (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 196). In the play Pimpilalai, Wanthong's spirit appears on stage, questioning the accusation that she is a lustful woman who has two husbands. The incidents that Pimpilalai remembers relate to her relationships with other men who have caused her trouble, are recounted in her actions from childhood to death, and are performed by four characters: a female ghost of Wanthong and three other characters, illustrating Wanthong at different ages, when she had different manners and points of view at different times and in different situations. The spirit of Wanthong acts as a narrator, criticising the story. The three other characters reveal Wanthong's reaction to being condemned as a lustful woman who has many lovers, exposing her emotions, thoughts, and attitudes towards life and society, as well as her relationship with other human beings, and call for fairness, rather than stigmatisation.

In *Busaba-Unakan* and *Pimpilalai*, multiple performers portray individual characters. Sometimes, they wear the same styles of costume or use designated symbols to identify their characters as one. The employment of multiple roles occurs in *likay* performances where two or three leading-male performers play one hero character in different scenes, because all have been invited to act in the same performance. A basic feature of *likay* is the announcement, by a narrator, of cast changes and substitutions. On the other hand, the multi-performer function exploited in tradition-based contemporary performances aims to portray the variety of emotions and behaviours that reflect one character's decision-making and perspective throughout a story. The heroine of *Busaba-Unakan*, for instance, was divided into two opposing characters, Busaba I and Busaba II (Unakan), who, when they encountered each other, both wore golden masks that made them identifiable as the same person in two different guises.

The deconstruction of female characters, which highlights their assertiveness, rather than their submissiveness, can be seen as a revision of traditional epics and is the main attribute of the feministic approach. When Kaki expresses anger, cursing all men who have mistreated her, including the god Indhra, she is freed from submission. In

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<sup>93</sup> In the original text, Pimpilalai had a serious sickness, and had to change her name to Wanthong after recovering, due to the traditional belief that her previous name was an unpropitious one and caused her unfavourable condition.

revealing Indhra's secret adultery in his previous life, she shocks audiences by departing from their embedded perceptions of traditional heroines. In the same way, Yodchak (1995: 57-58) suggests that the presentation, in *Pimpilalai*, of the traditionally graceful and calm Pimpilalai character as a more rustic and jealous character represents the deconstruction of conventional heroines. *Pimpilalai*, *Busaba-Unakan*, and *Kaki* challenge the outrageous conceptions of women in classic literature, which defines the attributes of good, one-dimensional female characters and outlines how women are to be judged by patriarchal values. In the newer revisions of these stories, female characters make efforts to transmute their traditional roles and behave in accordance with modern, more liberal views of female assertiveness and individualism (Diamond, 2006: 128-129). Apart from feminist reinterpretations and deconstructions of classical Thai literary works, another type of tradition-based contemporary theatre is focused on human and social development. This kind of hybrid theatre is chiefly produced by the grass-roots Makhampom Theatre Troupe.

### **(c) Theatre for Development: the Emergence of Folk Popular Elements in Tradition-Based Performance**

Excluding reinterpretations of classical literature, Makhampom's socially-concerned productions were clearly exploiting traditional folk forms and popular folk stories to achieve its aims. These (folk-popular) tradition-based contemporary works, which were subsidised by social development organisations, can be catered for villagers or youth audiences, as Chua Soo Pong (1994) suggests. In terms of social goals for contemporary theatre, Soo Pong emphasised that it is unnecessary to create a sophisticated or complicated work. On the contrary, a performance which presents an up-to-date situation, concerning audiences' lives, in an easily understood method is a better option for contemporary work, particularly at a grass-roots level. In order to promote a discursive contemporary message together with a sense of entertaining, Makhampom employs popular theatre approaches to its social-concern performance, embracing common language in spoken lines, traditional folk music and dance and audience participation. This hybrid approach is inevitably accommodated into Makhampom's theatre praxis. Therefore, the new generation volunteers of Makhampom who had a prior background solely in modern theatre to some degree need to learn and familiarise themselves with the traditional style, both classical and folk popular approaches, since a hybrid theatre form or traditional reinvention style is usually produced in this theatre

troupe. It is worth saying that among tradition-based contemporary theatre forms, Makhampom productions substantially utilise folk popular elements.

The advocacy from national and international financial sources<sup>94</sup> provided Makhampom opportunities to perform its hybrid productions internationally. However, the Thai tradition-based contemporary style of Makhampom was exported abroad in terms of a showcase of social issues with Thai elements and contemporary means of performing arts in an international festival, rather than demonstrating the intercultural techniques from Thailand and the target country. In other words, the objective of this reinvented performance was to highlight contemporary values and raise awareness of social issues by employing some Thai traditional elements. The merger of the global and the local identity or the local production to present in a global level is called ‘glocalisation’ (Taylor, 2001: 155). This kind of work will be responsible for portraying the local as an element in a transnational enterprise (Rebellato, 2009: 51). There were various examples of tradition-based contemporary theatre productions created by the Makhampom troupe, aiming to contribute social development, especially, a didactic message for youth. The major productions,<sup>95</sup> such as *Phitsathan Oei* (1992-1993), *Chao Lo Lo Lam* (1994), *Chanthakorop...Cho Before Time* (1995), and *Malai Mongkol* (1996-1997) were repeatedly performed either in village, school and university tours in Thailand or on international tours<sup>96</sup> These recognised traditional stories, both oral and written forms, were selected as vehicles to communicate a didactic message to contemporary audiences, a form of theatre-making which Barber calls “contemporary issue-specific” (2007: 211).

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<sup>94</sup> *Pitsathan Oei* was sponsored by the German government. *Chao Lo Lo Lam* was sponsored by the State Office of the Narcotics Control Board, a part of Thai government. *Chanthakorop...Cho Before Time* was sponsored by the Canada Fund of the Canadian Embassy. *Malai Mongkol* was corporately sponsored by Public Relations Department, the AIDS Division of the Department of Communicable Disease Control, and Australian government.

<sup>95</sup> *Pitsathan Oei* (1992-1993), *Chao Lo Lo Lam* (1994), and *Malai Mongkol* (1996-1997) were directed by Pradit Prasathong. *Chanthakorop...Cho Before Time* (1995) was directed by Paluhad Paholbutr, one of Makhampom’s prominent members. These examples are drawn from and upon Richard Barber (2007)’s discussion.

<sup>96</sup> *Pitsathan Oei* was performed in Thailand in 1992. It was titled *Daeng Zwischen Zwei Welten* for the German tour in 1993 and *Daeng Between Two Worlds* for The UK performance and Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1993. The three performances were performed many times in many places. For instance, *Malai Mongkol* was performed in Thailand Cultural Centre (1997) and in Australia (1997). *Chao Lo Lo Lam* was performed in Chiang Mai in 1994. *Chanthakorop...Cho Before Time* was performed in Korat, Thailand in 1995.

*Phitsathan Oei* was performed for a campaign against child sex tourism. A Thai farm girl named Daeng (or Daorueang when performed in Thailand) is sex abused. She was a representative of anonymous rural Thai girls who were forced into the sex industry by a consumerist and materialist urban milieu. The polarities of two worlds were depicted in traditional and modern theatrical elements, in rural and urban contexts. The happiness of a farming family's way of life was destroyed by the introduction of a capitalist industry, advanced technology and foreign investment, which forced Daeng into the world of prostitution. Prasatthong states that some Western audiences in UK and Germany were crying while viewing the play because they thought that the despondent lives of Thai (and other Eastern) people were caused by Western capitalist impositions (Anon., 2001: 75). The three other plays, *Chao Lo Lo Lam*, *Chanthakorop...Cho Before Time* and *Malai Mongkol*, purposely focused on a teenage audience. While *Chao Lo Lo Lam* offered didactic guidance on the risks of drugs use, the two latter plays called attention to the dangers of premature and unprotected sex, which can lead to unintentional pregnancy and even HIV.

In *Phitsathan Oei*<sup>97</sup>, the classical dance such as *ram uayporn* (blessing dance) was presented in the first scene when Daeng makes a wish to the Buddha image in her house before going to bed. The farmer dance such as *ram kiaw khao* (harvest dance) and other folk songs were used in the field scenes that villagers gathered in the rice field and did activities such as riding a water buffalo and fishing from a canal. *Nang yai* dance, *ground nok* melody (one melody that used in *khon* performance) as well as *kham pak khon* (*khon* narration) was employed when Daeng and her parents, excitedly, first came to Bangkok. These Thai aesthetic elements, typically presented through design, dance, folk song, and the classical element, reflected the spirits of the peasant way of life, which is identified with the stylised representation of *chaobaan* life and Thainess (Barber, 2007: 202).

The dual role or multiple-function task of a performer was seen in the production. In the rice field scene, some performers played traditional Thai musical instruments such as a long drum, small cup-shaped cymbals and gong when other performers did mimes and dance. Verse, prose and excerpts from the original texts were quoted and adapted, featuring in a song's lyric in order to emphasise the aesthetic value of Thai language

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<sup>97</sup> *Pitsathan Oei* is one of Thai traditional songs, means making a wish. It is usually sung in Songkran Day (Thai New Year).

and offer a beautiful sound to the audience. For example, the *kiaw khao* (rice harvest) melody was new-arranged and played by the Western-techno musical instrument when an American (or other European) character comes to the village and brought some new technologies and modern lives to the villagers. As the narrative bridged rural and urban contexts in *Phitsathan Oei*, colourful wigs and jackets were used by four male characters to reflect foreign (European) tourists and an agent in the sex industry.

*Chao Lo Lo Lam* was produced under government support to campaign against drug use by teenagers. The play exhibited the risk of the neglect of this problem by an absent-minded state. The idea of temptation by exploiting an attractive fowl<sup>98</sup> to bring Phra Lo to the two princesses in an original *Lilit Phra Lo* as well as in other adaptations was replaced by an addictive magic betel nut called *sla hoen* in *Chao Lo Lo Lam*, reflecting and grasping a contemporary context of drug addiction. Audience members were asked to write their bad habits on a red piece of paper and a good habit on a white one. The red pieces were used in the story, but the good habits written on the white pieces were kept by the audience personally (Barber, 2007: 206). This audience interaction was a wise method of presenting didactic and moral issues to teenagers. Seeing as it had no real backdrop on the stage, the performers in black trousers and tops, after finishing their actions, dialogues, or conversations, went to the back of the stage and stood in linear row in a back-turning position to the audience. This human-backdrop, borrowed from poor theatre techniques, facilitated the troupe to conveniently perform in every venue and also appealed to teenage audiences since it demonstrated another idea of making a play.

Next, *Chanthakorop...Cho Before Time* (Chanthakorop Has a Premarital Sexual Relationship) (1995) was remarkably reshaped to bring across the risk of unprotected sex and premarital sex. This original popular folk tale, which is recognised as a typical *likay* story, is about Chanthakorop, who is trained under the sage in the forest. After finishing the course of instruction, he is given a magical box by the sage and asked not to open it on the way back home. Being unwilling to wait, Chanthakorop opens the box, and then appears a beautiful woman named Mora; they become lovers very soon. During the journey, they meet a jungle robber with whom Mora instantly falls in love.

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<sup>98</sup> Phu Chao Saming Phrai, a shaman exploits his witchcraft by using a devil-possessed wild fowl (*kaikaeo*) to lure Phra Lo to the two Princesses, Phra Phuean and Phra Phang.

In the fighting between the men, Mora chooses to help the robber by giving him a blade and this result in Chanthakorop's death. The original text provides a picture of the precarious consequences of the characters' inappropriate behaviour, which can be transformed into a comparable idea of risk in the premarital sexual conduct of teenagers in a contemporary version. Since Mora has two husbands in the story, a theme of female promiscuity was raised in the story as well. According to Barber (2007: 210), a slang word '*cho*', which literally means sexual intercourse, and is generally known among teenagers, was suitably employed in the title. When this word was coined with 'Before Time', it can refer to premarital sexual relationships, and so be of benefit to youth audiences' perception in a modern context. The modern hip hop dance with the pop music accompaniment symbolises a combination of the old content and with a contemporary theatrical element, appropriate for teenage audiences.

Another sex-education performance is *Malai Mongkol*, a production produced in accordance with interest from the End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT), promoting the projects of sexual ethics and AIDS. The story is about the magical monk known as Phra Malai who travelled between heaven-earth-hell in the myth of *suat phra malai* or the *phra malai* chanting.<sup>99</sup> The new version effectively functioned as a didactic message through Buddhist pedagogy and morality to target audiences. Two spirits of teenagers, who died from AIDS, named Mala and Mali, had a journey with Phra Malai to see sexual misconduct in hell and heaven, and flashed back to their behaviours when they were still alive. These actions reflected the temptations which led to HIV infection. The story's focal point was significantly enhanced by the dialogue and discussion on Buddhist lessons on the personal moral accountability of each individual.

In creating a collaborative product, dramaturgy is built up by performers' improvisation and the directors' design. Watson (2002: 175) points out that improvisation, as the source of material for productions, built up by the themes given to each actor can be seen as part of dramaturgy. Prasatthong, for example, did varieties of tasks as the director and dramaturge. His duties, in Cardullo's terms (2009:3-4), were the selection of play texts for performance; advising actors; and educating audiences in their work-in-progress productions. Since *Malai Mongkol* contains a Thai language discursive

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<sup>99</sup> *Phra Malai* is a story of veteran magical monk who tells a tale about heaven and hell to the living people. This chant was originally chanted by Buddhist monks at funerals, but later was replaced by laymen and called the *suat kharuhat*, which literally means a chant of layman.



storyline associated with Buddhist philosophy, when performed overseas, it was to some degree difficult for foreign audiences. Therefore, Prasatthong, a director, functioning as a dramaturge, asked performers to create the body language and movement to explain the character's actions without speaking. After finishing this improvising and devising process, a director brings some meaningful gestures and body-language indicators to substitute for the complicated spoken-text in order to enhance the understanding of non-Thai speaking audiences. Additionally, the dual role or multiple-function task taken by one actor which was used in *Phitsathan Oei* was also clearly seen in *Malai Mongkol* where the technique was borrowed from *lakon chattri*. When actors finished performing the characters, they had to sit on the two sides of the front stage and play musical instruments.

## Conclusion

The modern theatre preferred by and performed in elite circles from the late nineteenth century until the beginning of the 1930s manifested the prestige of the royal court and the values of the upper-class. From the 1930s to the 1950s, it was gradually replaced by more patriotic theatre forms. During this period, Western theatrical elements were used to modernise classical Thai theatre and to propagate nationalism. The modern theatre that was permanently established in Thailand in the 1960s was influenced by globalisation. The main types of theatre that emerged during this phase were modern-based contemporary and tradition-based contemporary. The latter can be identified as a form of hybrid theatre, as an intercultural theatrical approach is the underlying principle of its theatre-making processes. When contemporary artists reinvented plays in tradition-based contemporary styles, classical dramatic texts and techniques were more frequently exploited than those of popular folk repertoires. However, the Makhampom Theatre Troupe, for the most part, employed popular folk art in its reinventions, and this has become characteristic, generally, of Makhampom's works.

Contemporary commercial theatre forms and classical adaptations in contemporary styles are now presented for the middle- and upper-classes and educated audiences, particularly in Bangkok and urban areas in the provinces. On the other hand, televised soap dramas and *likay* function as lower-class entertainment. Educated or middle-class theatre-goers who are fascinated by *likay* encounter the disdain of many others.

Nonetheless, recently, the Makhampom Theatre Troupe has modified the *likay* form, to reflect contemporary content and contexts and to cater to more sophisticated audiences. Makhampom's experimental *likay* has become recognised as the troupe's trademark.

The fundamental concepts underlying contemporary *likay* are discussed in the following three chapters. The contemporary *likay* productions produced by modern theatre troupes other than those discussed in this chapter are presented in Chapter 4. Makhampom's minor contemporary *likay* productions, such as those put on by the Makhampom Likay Academic School, as well as my own production, which was influenced by Makhampom's contemporary *likay* approach, are presented in Chapter 5. The recognised masterpieces of Makhampom contemporary *likay*, which are so known for their script writing, casting, training, and rehearsal and performance praxis, are discussed in depth in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 4

### Contemporary *Likay*: Tradition-Based Contemporary Theatre Contributions

To align with the political outlook of the chauvinistic and nationalistic government that ruled under Prime Minister Phibun (1938-1944 and 1948-1957), the government used *likay*, a flexible adapted theatrical form, as a campaign medium for protesting against Communism in Thailand. They also used it to encourage people to vote in elections.<sup>100</sup> They found it so useful for these functions, because *likay* performance can deliver the intended message through jesting humour as well as romantic and predictable action and story, enabling the actors to intrigue audiences in a direct manner through a light hearted comedic style. Moreover, *likay* performance tends to use audiences' dialects and anecdotes and thus offer them an instant recognition, connection and understanding through their collective memories. Later contemporary artists continued to reinvent this idea of using a loose form of *likay* though present day in order to present a current issue with an enjoyable style according to their unique contexts and unique objectives. Conventional *likay*, although adaptable and adding more modern elements, is not widely popular among upper-class and intellectual audiences. Contemporary *likay*, on the other hand, draws on an experimental and hybrid approach and continuously undergoes renovation, so the form has come to the forefront of attention among audiences ever since it was initially introduced in 1980s.

Contemporary *likay* practitioners have made efforts to adjust some theatrical elements to suit urban or middle-class audiences as well as new generations by borrowing other theatre motifs from a variety of theatrical genres and by combining them into a new style of *likay*. For example, they have changed the content from a melodrama (as normally used in conventional *likay*) to an issue of current concern or a global problem

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<sup>100</sup> Since *likay* is popular among Thai commoners, Phibun organised and sponsored a national *likay* competition for anti-communist campaign in 1952 at the Public Relations Department. There, 83 *likay* troupes competed for a golden trophy and cash. The winner troupe was the Katekong Dhamrongsilpa Troupe. The first runner up was Samuggi Trairong Troupe; Suchin Troupe got the second runner up; and Homhuan Troupe received the third runner up prize.

to make the production more contemporary and communicable, especially to middle class audiences. Moreover, this kind of *likay* serves to invigorate the tradition-based contemporary theatre by embracing interdisciplinary perspectives of a living theatre that adapts a traditional form to present its content in a specific context. Such a practice allows artists to reflect on the combination of traditional, popular and modern Thai theatricality.

The tangible application of the term ‘contemporary’ to *likay* is a very recent phenomenon, influenced by the encounter with and exchange of intercultural theatre. It is a modified traditional form that embraces both folk and popular elements and interrogates social issues and current affairs. Contemporary *likay*, as a tradition-based contemporary performance, is not a single monad of a theatre form that constitutes itself autonomously. It also does not simply involve the coalescence of two binaries of old and new, tradition and modern, or even east and west. The contemporary *likay* represents a production that the different contexts of the traditional *likay* can convey. One can attribute this distinctive context to the style of Western theatre taught in Thailand, since globalisation plays a vital role in framing the Thai perspective and thus the experience of viewing Thai theatre. These perspectives lead to the eclectic content presented in a *likay* repertoire. The contemporary *likay* exploits social-issues, intellectual texts, and reinterpretations of old stories to provide historical context for recent issues.

Contemporary *likay* is distinct from traditional *likay*. In terms of the tradition-based contemporary performance, the artists of contemporary *likay*, as the artists of a neo-traditional theatre, may reinvent theatre on a broad scale by drawing upon conventional structures and elements. The contemporary *likay* is arguably a reinvented traditional culture more than it is a cultural duplication. The principle behind contemporary *likay* practice can be called a neo-traditional approach, which is concerned with reinventing the traditional style with contemporary perspectives and elements. In contrast, the conventional *likay* today seems like an old form but with the addition of up-to-date technology and materials in its performing components; in effect, it is a commercialised version of the old form. Before moving to my analysis of the narratives of contemporary *likay* practice, I would like to give a critical account of the distinction between conventional and contemporary *likay* characteristics.

## Conventional<sup>101</sup> *Likay* Characteristics

*Likay* form underwent hybridisation<sup>102</sup> during its evolution, starting from the Muslim religious performance, losing its sacred element, and then finally becoming a new entertainment form. This hybridisation manifested through the artists' borrowing theatrical elements from the court, *khon* (classical masked dance-drama), the *lakon nai* (female dance-drama of the inner court), and a form of the *chaobaan* (commoner or village resident) popular theatre form, namely *lakon nok* (male dance-drama of the outer court), coalescing them in its performing score. Artists have continually adjusted this entertainment form to feel more modern and to cater to its popular audiences. In addition to undergoing this original hybridisation, *likay* artists have constantly modernised its elements by accommodating other modern theatrical styles through any means possible in order to make the form *thansamai* (modern and fashionable). The term 'modern' in this context means the 'modern elements' that are influenced by globalisation and used in (conventional) *likay* performance. For example, the modern elements used in *likay* are up-to-date news and incidents, and the performers employ them in dialogues, conversations and lyrics, relatively elegant costumes and ornaments, current *lukthung* and pop songs, and the lighting and sound set up of a concert.

I will explain the details of conventional *likay* before discussing the distinction between conventional *likay* style and contemporary *likay* characteristics. A typical *likay* performance makes an introduction with *homrong* (prelude) by the *piphat* musical prelude to *ok khaek* which, in turn, greets the audience and gives a synopsis. After that, the *longrong* comes, which includes a variety of archetypal scenes and actions. The introduction is followed by a range of activities, such as fighting and flirting, and a range of genres. At the end of the performance, which is known as *larong* (ending), the *likay* troupe typically performs a mini-concert, singing popular *lukthung* songs to the audience. *Likay* tunes such as *ranikloeng* and *songmai*, *lakon ram* melodies, the *lukthung* and Thai pop songs as well as classical Thai dance usually join the *piphat*

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<sup>101</sup> The term 'conventional' style of *likay* means characteristics and theatrical elements of *likay*. Some standard practices can be considered '*likay* conventions', such as dances, movement patterns, tunes and songs, stage conventions, and singing and speaking styles (see details in Chapter 2). The 'traditional' style of performance covers both folk and classical styles of Thai theatre form. The artists of folk or popular form are *silapin phuenbaan*, or traditional folk artists, and the classical artists are *silapin kromsilpa*, which literally means the artists of the Fine Arts Department, consecutively.

<sup>102</sup> Based on the biological concept of a hybrid process indicating a merger of two different genres of races, breeds, and species, a theatre hybridisation is a combination of two diverse cultures, traditions, forms, contents, and styles influenced by time and context.

ensemble, which is the *likay*'s music orchestra. The male actors wear fake diamond and crystal-studded jackets and ready-made skirts, while the female performers often wear crystal-decorated, Victorian-style dresses that resemble ball costumes. Both male and female characters might wear various ornaments, such as diamond crowns, earrings, and necklaces, to match the very thick make-up used by both genders. Additionally, the *likay* repertoire might borrow some of the characters' names or plotlines from *chakchak wongwong* stories, folk tales, and televised (melo-) dramas and adapt them to coherent theatrical performances.

Moreover, performers, on occasion, will include basic English words in their dialogues or lyrics to make the performances more up-to-date. Wireless microphones are replacing the old-style mics and their entangled wires. Headset microphones are desirable among leading male actors.<sup>103</sup> Since an actor usually owns his own headset microphone, he wears it as a symbol of wealth and superiority rather than a useful tool, even though it does allow the performer to dance more easily by freeing both of his hands. The technological adjustments alone can bring modern issues and familiarity to today's audience. More to the point, the *lukthung* songs, which are popular among the *likay* audiences, are largely sung during a *likay* repertoire, after the end of the dramatic story or in a concert style before the performance. Very recently, the Chaiya Mitchai *likay* troupe has used a *lukthung* concert-style performance, offering a singer together with a group of dancers performing during a love scene between the hero and heroine throughout the performance. This latest presentation demonstrates the continuity-in-development of conventional-tradition *likay* style in the sense of modernisation and competition among other troupes. The *likay* is arguably still in its conventional form, but artists perpetually combine it with modern theatrical techniques through the use of external modernising elements, and this renovation prolongs the continuation of the form.

### **Cotemporary *Likay* Characteristics**

Whereas the conventional *likay* exploits the modern elements in its performance, which performers and audiences consider *thansamai* (modern or trendy), the contemporary

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<sup>103</sup> The wireless microphone was introductorily used by a troupe's leader, who is usually a male actor. This use became instantly popular among other male actors who wished to show their good financial standing and who wished to acknowledge the support from their personal *mae yok* (matrons).

*likay*, as a tradition-based contemporary performance, is an attempt to adjust the Western artistic frameworks, modern stage play elements, and classical and folk Thai theatrical motifs so that they are part of the *likay* form in terms of *ruamsamai* (contemporary). While theatrical artists produce contemporary *likay*, they broadly apply the form of contemporary stage play, technique, and content; in other words, they are exploiting a conventional form of *likay* while featuring new or reinterpreted content and contemporary theatrical techniques. Contemporary *likay* is normally directed and scripted by contemporary artists, or *silapin ruamsamai*, who stylise the performance with a contemporary touch. Many practitioners claim that the modern elements in ‘modern *likay*’ are something more modern than the conventional *likay* characteristic, while contemporary motifs in ‘contemporary *likay*’ replace and sometimes go beyond the conventional *likay* attributes.

A point worth noting is that when artists combine the folk form with the Western perspectives of contemporary *likay* productions, they often bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary theatre. This technique is known as the ‘post-tradition’ approach, which transforms contemporary *likay* into a renovated form of theatre. Western staging and techniques deliver the traditional form, although the technical crew does maintain selected elements of the conventional style. Notwithstanding that contemporary *likay* is a product of this post-traditional perspective, this form is conceivably not a case of employing the term ‘post’ in the sense of one thing ending and another beginning, which Fortier explains (2002: 173). Rather, the tradition can involve alternative contexts and sources of knowledge, value, and morality set in a modern location (Brien, 1998: 16), which is similar to Boonnimitra’s (2005: 4) claim that authors construct a new genre while the old meaning or image still remains. The ghost of the old image produces a difference beyond its deconstructed imagination. Contemporary *likay* performance, therefore, shows a combination and modification of *likay*, a living traditional performance and a contemporary-stage play that fits the current situation and contemporary tastes. It embraces two aspects of a theatrical amalgamation<sup>104</sup>: Pronko’s conceptualisation of (Eastern) traditional theatre qualities (1967) and the Western modern stage-play characteristics, as defined by Tillis (2003).

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<sup>104</sup> Pronko’s traditional qualities, which characterise a conventional *likay* performance, embrace audience participation, total integration of theatre resources, and stylised performance techniques. Tillis’s Western modern stage-play comprises an intellectual rationale for its content, selectivity in its deployment of resources, and realistic performance techniques.

Noticeably, a contemporary *likay* production lies between these two groups of characteristics<sup>105</sup> in terms of its theatrical hybridity, which is “tied to the idea of cultural syncretism rather than cultural difference solidified by multiculturalism in terms of the interpenetration of elements” (Anthias, 2001: 623).

This chapter is concerned less with the contemporary *likay* praxis and the particular process of making such contemporary productions. Instead, it wishes to demonstrate the ways in which the intensive practices of contemporary *likay* performance are evident as the tendency of many contemporary theatre troupes and artists in Bangkok who employ *likay* form to produce a theatre in terms of reinvented and experimental work. The discussions will reflect contemporary *likay* construction, including (1) the overview of contemporary *likay* in Thailand in the 2000s, including the beginning of contemporary *likay* productions and the notions of ‘authenticity’ in contemporary *likay* form; (2) the purpose and condition that explain why thespians have chosen to adapt *likay* in terms of tradition-based contemporary work; (3) contemporary *likay* artists; (4) the main audiences of contemporary *likay*; and (5) approaches to creating contemporary *likay*.

## **1. The Overview of Contemporary *Likay* in Thailand in 2000s**

The contemporary *likay* performance entered the Thai public consciousness around the last decade of the twentieth century. Many intellectuals, university scholars, students and modern theatre troupes have become interested in *likay* for distinctive reasons. In order to show a modern perspective on Thainess as well as to present a favourite popular Thai entertainment based on comedy, theatrical artists have employed a mixture of *likay* and modern spoken stage play. Given that improvisation is a key part of *likay* repertoire, an actor can speak directly to audiences; in effect, actors may articulate their points with liberty. Additionally, because there is little penalty for forgetting a line or for any interrupting incidents that might occur between shows, *likay* allows non-

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<sup>105</sup> The deployment of traditional popular theatre is manifested in a form of performance, and the audience’s participation is possible, to some degree, in any scene that allows the interaction between an actor and a spectator. The selectiveness of the Western spoken drama approach and the total composition of Eastern traditional popular theatre cooperate to create this form of theatrical eclecticism. The distinction between the two opposing tendencies constitutes the hybrid process of tradition-based contemporary theatre.



professional performers to play and improvise the popular form compellingly among professionals.

In 1986, a group of university students, contemporary practitioners, together with professional *likay* artists, performed a *likay* production entitled *Chee Plueay Alawad* (A Nudist runs Rampage) at the A.U.A. (American University Association) through which they presented their concern about aspects of traditional Thai culture (Bangsaphan, 1986: 43). Their show highly appealed to people and mass media in terms of its mixture of cast members (amateur and professional *likay* performers). Furthermore, to perform *likay*, a traditional Thai form, youth would benefit from employing another traditional Thai theatrical form and thus give a new style of performance.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, high-school students also selected *likay* as their tool for making theatre. They performed *likay* as part of social activities such as an anti-drug campaign. Concomitantly, a mixture of *likay* performance and modern stage play was broadcast by Thai television Channel 9 in September 2000 as a special program in honour of the World Anti-Drug Campaign Day. This production was a collaborative work of contemporary performers and *likay* masters as well as a Thai National Artist in 1996, Khru Boonlert Najphiniij. Professor Mattani Rutnin, a renowned stage play director and professor of the Dramatic Arts Department at Thammasart University, directed this production. A select group of professional *likay* actors and contemporary stage play performers contributed to this special program. However, as an actress in this performance, I characterised the production as the mere superficial conjoining of *likay* and other modern stage plays; that is to say, there was no clear methodology in place to create a hybrid theatre style.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> See Nawikkamun, Anek. (2002). 'Rai Ngan Rueang Likay Sasiliya Thi A.U.A.' [The Report of Likay Sasiliya at A.U.A.]. *Natakam Chao Siam* [Siamese Dramatists]. Bangkok: Saithan, pp. 139-146.

<sup>107</sup> As an actress of this performance, I experienced such a production's confusing because there was no system used and no practice. All performers just came to the studio and remembered their lines. While performing in an introductory scene with a professional *likay* actor, Chumpol Chom-ngam, played a hero role, I simply sang the Thai *lukthung* song while he sang a *ranikloeng likay* tune. Both of us wore the casual clothing with no *likay*-style decorations, whereas the other characters of the hero's family wore traditional Thai costumes: the raja-patterned shirt and loincloths for men and traditional dresses for women. The contrasting costumes were incompatible in an encounter scene, even in a scene sequence that offered a disco-tech and drug party with a full range of stage properties and extra cast members in a televised drama scene, followed by a theatrical-styled a hero family wearing traditional Thai costumes and singing *ranikloeng*. On reflection, there was negative reception to this broadcast performance because the mixtures of costumes were confusing and chaotic; there was no methodology employed; and the actors performed in their different styles: contemporary and traditional approaches.

A number of contemporary Thai theatre groups who are interested in experimental work have produced newer styles of *likay* performances by combining the contemporary stage-play theatrical elements into a *likay* form to intrigue a contemporary audience. Some examples include *Likay Faust* (2002) by the Moradok Mai Theatre Group; *Chalawan: The Likay Musical* (2006) by the Patravadi Theatre Troupe; *Likay Française: The Island of Slaves* (2007), a classic comedy of French theatre by Kriengsak Silakong; and *Sudsakorn* by Jitti Chompee with the Patravadi Theatre Troupe (2010). Nevertheless, these contemporary *likay* productions are not these troupes' main works; instead, they are but a few of the other approaches they use to produce contemporary theatre in various forms and styles. The overview of these contemporary *likay* productions, their characteristic hybrid theatre styles, is the main analysis of this chapter. Unlike these theatre troupes, the Makhampom Theatre Troupe has continually produced contemporary *likay* productions. In fact, this troupe is arguably the most prominent of modern theatre groups in Thailand that have produced contemporary *likay* thus far. The troupe has performed not only major productions, which they usually produce once every year or two, but also occasional performances or commissions for entertainment. The latter are as playful as the original function of *likay*. Makhampom's contemporary *likay* in minor productions as well as my own experience as a playwright and director in producing a contemporary *likay* production will be discussed in Chapter 5. The analysis of major pieces of Makhampom contemporary *likay*, the key informant of this research, will appear in Chapter 6.

The use of contemporary content and theatrical elements in contemporary *likay* raises a concern about a problematic term of 'authenticity' in *likay* aesthetic characteristics. Critics still heatedly debate the extent of the 'authenticity' of the new *likay* performance. I provide argumentation of this term as follows:

### **1.1 Authentic or Unauthentic: An Artistic Approach for Making Contemporary *Likay***

It is worth noting that contemporary *likay* is not as concerned with authenticity or the entire duplication of conventional *likay* elements as it is with the artistry of a contemporary contribution. Adapting the conventional form to fit well into a contemporary context is neither the deliberate conservation of a traditional form nor the means of abolishing a traditional form. Rather, it is a way to proliferate theatre in the

contemporary Thai context. Moreover, the presumption of simplicity<sup>108</sup> of *likay* seems to be an invitation to apply *likay* forms, and this presumed simplicity attracts contemporary dramatists.

It is important to explain that contemporary creators of *likay* are likely to unintentionally produce another version of conventional *likay* style, but in doing so, they invent a hybrid work envisaging the tradition-based contemporary theatre. I would like to suggest here that a contemporary *likay* production is by no means a copy or a 're-creation' of various theatrical motifs but a 'co-creation' of various theatrical motifs and interpretations. Thus, this creative process is not simply a traditional form conserved by the contemporary artist. It tends to signify an artistic alteration and attests to one's ability to accommodate a source of culture into other representations, and vice versa. Therefore, I would venture to say that the notion of 'authenticity' is not a factor in contemporary *likay* productions. Nonetheless, these schemes, motifs, and elements of traditional *likay* are basically embraced in a certain kind of contemporary *likay* repertoire. The degree to which a troupe will use conventional *likay* motifs in a contemporary production is subject to the troupe's specific purpose as well as to the cultural status quo.

Diverse situations and contexts are directly involved in contemporary *likay* productions. It is a seemingly large-scale cultural application in terms of contributors, audiences, agendas, and methodologies. Pornrat Damrhung (Interview, 2011), a renowned Thai theatre practitioner and scholar at Chulalongkorn University, notes that different contexts might create differences in the same content. If a troupe performs the same theatre style in two different contexts, they might nevertheless end up with a different style of presentation or even alterations to the details in the script. For example, the same genre of popular theatre will seem different in a rural environment versus an urban environment. Performing conventional *likay* in a rural area needs not involve as many glittering costumes or as much modern technology; what would be important in that case is a familiar or well-known story to which the audience could relate. In an urban area, audiences anticipate the modern lights and sound, the flamboyant stage, glittering

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<sup>108</sup> This term reflects from the *likay* characteristic that it has no strict rule like those of classical performances such as *khon* and *lakon*. Moreover, *likay* is stigmatised as a popular performance of a working class which uses 'improvisation' as a main tool, so one, without understanding, may presume that *likay* lacks of methodology, practical system, and complicated dramaturgy as well as rehearsing approach like those of modern-based contemporary performances.

and elegant costumes, and ornate decorations. By the same token, contemporary *likay* and conventional *likay* performance seem to target different audiences, thus a use of a variety of non-*likay* elements and motifs in a contemporary production signifies its uniqueness with its own dramaturgical objective of its form, which undermines notions of ‘authenticity’. Although ‘authenticity’ is not necessary in contemporary *likay* performance, *likay* essential elements such as songs, dances, costumes and techniques are considered important in applying in the new crafted piece of contemporary *likay*. I would suggest that contemporary artists may have to learn and understand *likay* when they want to use it.

## **2. Why Troupes Choose to Adapt *Likay* to Tradition-based Contemporary Work**

*Likay* itself, as a popular stage genre, has a selling point that widely captivates contemporary artists’ attention and allows them to employ their artistic experiences and adeptness to accommodate it in their contemporary pieces. Employing *likay* form and inspirations from the West enables succeeding generations of Thai contemporary dramatists to make new *likay* of their own by using montage or miscellaneous pieces of different working styles. Two main principles seem to attract contemporary artists to reinvent *likay*: flexibility and nostalgia.

### **2.1 Flexibility and Simplicity: The Main Characteristics of *Likay***

When artists wish to create a hybrid theatre between folk-popular and modern genres in terms of a tradition-based contemporary performance, they often choose the *likay* for adaptation. Their underlying rationale arises from several hypotheses. One assumption is that *likay* is a flexible traditional theatre, easily adjusted thanks to its genre as a traditional popular theatre, distinct from the strictness of a classical form such as *khon* and *lakon*, which were conserved as the royal version. Classical Thai theatre forms have a strict aesthetic standard and are unable to adapt because these forms are seen to represent the prosperousness of Thailand and regalia of the royal court and nobility. According to the article ‘Kam Wichan Khong Sattrachan Pontri ML Kukrit Pramoch Toh Botbat Krom Silapakorn’ [The Criticism of Professor Major General ML Kukrit Pramoch to the Role of the Department of Fine Arts] (Burutratanaphan, 1991), M.R.

Kuktit Pramoj (1911-1995), the thirteenth Thai Prime Minister (1975-1976) and renowned scholar, gave strong comments to the officers of the Fine Arts Department that the classical Thai performing arts, such as *khon* and music, represent Thai civilisation and heritage, so they must be preserved. Pramoj also said that the Fine Arts Department is not 'a *likay* troupe' that one can adapt or adjust the performance as one likes. His latter point reflects that *likay* is a theatre form that artists are free to modify.

Withal, different from a folk tradition, which is often based on a ritual or a way of life in each agrarian community, *likay* is a popular-commercial form performed purely for entertainment and patronised by the audience. Therefore, its element adjustment relies on audiences' demands and competition among *likay* troupes. More to the point, a *likay* form can be signified as "a relatively open genre that maintains various standards and conventions upon which potentially any theatrical devices can be applied" (Barber, 2007: 275). Artists can use *likay* elements such as comedy, ornate costumes, classical songs and dances, improvisation and audience participation to appeal to the ever-evolving tastes of the audience.

Another possibility for *likay* adjustment involves its less degree in sacred ritual and religious respect. Some other types of popular theatre, such as *lakon chatrī*<sup>109</sup> and *nora*<sup>110</sup>, are closely linked to the sanctified ritual that is, to a certain degree, unsuitable for a purely secular purpose. However, *likay* is indirectly associated with the sacred ritual,<sup>111</sup> as it was once a religious form from Muslim chanting in its origin, but artists

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<sup>109</sup> *Lakon chatrī* was originally performed for ritualistic purposes, such as to thank benevolent spirits for answering prayers. Mary Louis Grow (1991: 11) points out that "ritual performances of *lakon chatrī* include a variety of aesthetic media: food offerings, spirit invocations, song, dance, story, costuming, clowning, and so forth. Performers assemble these in a variety of ways to enhance communication with ritual participants."

<sup>110</sup> The sacred ritual of *nora* masters can be seen in a performances where a 'master spirit' is believed to possess each performer. Master performers usually learn the magic, so they are expected to possess spiritual knowledge for self-protection. Tiyanich (2007: 73) notes that their enemies cannot use black magic against them – black magic that might cause the masters to blank out, forget their lines, and thus ruin their performances. Local people also respect *nora* masters, not only for their performing skills and their knowledge of art and ritual, but for their spiritual powers. Likewise, Ginsberg (1972: 177) suggests that "*nora* master in the former time had a role in the community far beyond that of a mere entertainer. He was in fact the pre-eminent magician in the surrounding area, and was relied upon to perform rites involving the *khwan*, such as exorcisms, topknot ceremonies, ordinations, etc."

<sup>111</sup> Although *likay* is part of temple festivals, ritual ceremonies and other religious celebrations, it is indirectly related to a sacred ritual in its performance, but the sacred ritual is practised in its preparations. These sacred rituals, which are based on Buddhism, Brahmanism and Animism, are completed before performances begin. They include: the paying of homage to *pho kae*, the mythical master-teacher who is symbolised by a mask-model or a bust of Muni Bharata; the paying of homage to the spirits of the late masters when the *sathukan*, a blessed melody begins; the performance of *ram tawai mue*, an homage-

deliberately adjusted its form for entertainment purposes in the present time. Furthermore, the regional dialects in some popular performances form another barrier to making a reinvented, contemporary style, whereas the dialects can enhance *likay*. The *likay* performance originated in central Thailand, so the central dialect of its dialogues and singing-parts can serve all audiences in Thailand, unlike other regional, popular performances, such as the southern *nang talung*, north-eastern *molam*, and northern *sor*, which traditionally use their local dialects for dialogues and song lyrics. This dialect differentiation seems to be a limitation to audience accessibility. Although based in either Bangkok or the provinces, all contemporary artists use the central dialect in their daily lives and dramaturgies.

However, I would suggest that it also needs to be emphasised that adapting *likay* in contemporary style is not as simple and easy as one may think. The process of conducting such a production is by no means simply posting contemporary content in the *likay* repertoire nor a fortuitous mixture of local and global artistic motifs, but it is a way of researching within practice and praxis. Janapakal Chandrueang, a renowned Thai actor and director, proclaimed that he selected *likay* to be a vehicle of presenting the German *Faust* in the Bangkok's International Festival of Dance and Music 2002 at Thailand Cultural Centre, because it is a simple form and it seems to be the only form that can tell any story (Interview, 2011). His claim reflects in his interview to Pravattiyagul (2002: 8) that “*Faust* is a complicated story to tell. It's very difficult to convey the hidden messages. *Likay* can help in the story-telling process because this amazing Thai art form can pretty much tell any tale under the sun.” Chandrueang claims further that there are very few props and no scenery; traveling from one town to another one can be done in a single step (Anon., 2008). Seen as a director's ambition to present a Buddhist philosophy through a simple performance repertoire that the audiences are able to understand without difficulty, the loose structure of *likay* performances, which are perceived as ‘nice and easy’, however, is ineffective in this case. This experiment was a failure. Although Chandrueang tried to produce a more digestible version of

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paying group-dance offering made on a stage or at a shrine in order to please the gods who protect that place or the local spirit lord who controls and cares for the area. These sacred doings provide moral support to performers and musicians before they perform.

*Faust*, he did not understand (well) *likay*. Further explanation is provided in 5.2.1 *Likay Faust*, a Buddhist *Likay*: Fusion or Confusion in Its Play-Within-A Play Approach.

I would suggest here that the success of a contemporary *likay* performance does not rely on the mere adaptation of a method or the embrace of various theatrical motifs; well-designed composition is also important. Therefore, one has to admit that although comedic or popular by nature, *likay* conveys clear, strong message and deals with serious social problems.

## 2.2 Nostalgia: Retrieval of the Past (with New Elements)

Globalisation's effect has been a primary root of 'nostalgic feeling' (Robertson, 2000: 155). The 1997 economic crisis in the Thai metropolis, combined with industrial capitalism, estranged the middle-class urban Thais from the "simplicity" and the alleged totality of tradition and rural life (Taylor, 2008: 10). They have nostalgia for an imaginary rural life where 'in water there is fish, in fields there is rice', following a Thai proverb (Turner, 1994: 125 as cited in Taylor, 2008: 10). To feed the nostalgia, Thai people have engaged in numerous recreations of rurality and tradition. For example, the government officials wear traditional Thai outfits once a week, and some urban-born elites have bought farms in the provinces and go there every weekend to farm and relax. Local communities have refurbished many dying market places, including floating markets, which reflect the *chaobaan* way of life. These places are promoted as 'very Thai' settings to attract tourists. This 'nostalgic feeling' also appeared among contemporary Thai artists during the 1990s. These artists brought traditional literature and theatrical elements back to the stage in the contemporary social context where the nostalgia embodies the past's imagined and mythical qualities in order to offer some correctives to the present (Kerdarunsuksri, 2001: 128-130).

*Likay* is also evident in Thailand's nostalgia. As a part of a populist tradition, some elites and intelligentsia have chosen the *likay* form in auspicious occasions in order to present their 'Thainess'<sup>112</sup>, even if their lifestyles were subject to globalised culture. To perform or be interested in *likay* also represents their willingness to cater to the popular arts. Correspondingly, the nation dubbed *likay* the popular Thai theatre when the *likay*

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<sup>112</sup> *Likay* was excluded from the sense of Thainess through the elite's eyes. Since a *chaobaan* way of life is part of urban middle class's nostalgia, *likay* becomes considered a (folk) national performing art.

troupes from around the country took to the stage in full regalia on the great occasion of HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's birthday in 1995 (Tha Hla and Pornpitagpan, 1995: 33).

Despite the fact that nostalgia plays a vital role in the artists' inspiration and motivation to trace their own culture, they cannot trace it back to a single source. For example, Kriengsak Silakong produced and directed a *likay* version of Marivaux, called *The Island of Slaves*, which the troupe performed at the Alliance Française in Bangkok in May 2007. Silakong chose a *likay* form for this production, because he enjoyed the clash of two traditions of *modus operandi* (Amranand, 2009a). His personal nostalgia is another main reason. The feeling of reminiscence that is, looking back on his own culture with different eyes, occurred after he saw various types of folk performances in India and Indonesia several years ago. The performances inspired him to start watching Thai folk performances. Before making a hybrid *likay* production, he produced another version of *Carmen* for *nang talung* theatre (a Thai version of shadow puppets). He thought that this folk popular performance would convey the characteristic of common people and suggest political issues through its well-known comedic characters (Amranand, 2009a). His contemporary *likay* production showed evidence of a "clash" of two distinctive traditions: famous French literature and a traditional style of Thai *likay* performance. The central characters are masters and slaves who have to swap their roles in a forced situation. Silakong envisioned this social farce in a comedic way, so he thought that this synopsis would suit the *likay* repertoire. I will discuss more on these contemporary *likay* productions in my analysis of contemporary *likay* productions.

### **3. Contemporary *Likay* Artists**

The two main categories of contemporary *likay* contributors are directors and performers. Contemporary dramatists usually take the roles of directors and dramaturges while performers include a mixture of amateur *likay* performers and professional *likay* artists. The collaboration of the artists' distinctions brings about various theatrical motifs in terms of intracultural and intercultural approaches to contemporary *likay* productions.



### 3.1 Directors and Dramaturges

Typically, contemporary dramatists have senses and skills of ‘self-syncretism’, which signifies their expertise or proficiency in both traditional and contemporary artistic backgrounds. In this case, Mechudhon (Interview, 2010) emphasises that by creating a contemporary theatre, an artist should have both theatrical skill and enlightening wisdom. These qualities indicate an artist’s ability to coalesce traditional and contemporary artistic forms for entertainment’s sake along with an intellectual message to connect intuitively with an audience’s perception. Some performers know and excel in *likay*, whereas others are merely impressed by its form and are fascinated in partaking in a performance. However, their backgrounds, talents, and dramaturgical aims are significantly geared towards distinction and uniqueness of production, direction, mood, and tone.

Many dramatists are aware of *likay*’s great ability to communicate through comedy the messages of social-concern, politics, and Buddhist philosophy, such as deprivation of being, lust, and equality of human beings. Chandrueang, for example, used *likay* form to convey a sophisticated message because of how easy it was for him to reinvent. Meanwhile, Mejudhon, who is familiar with traditional *likay* due to her childhood observations at a temple close to her house, believes that she can adapt *likay* to her tradition-based experimental work. Efforts like these preserve and develop *likay*. Despite the fact that Chandrueang and Mechudhon were raised in the *likay* environment and are familiar with classical Thai dance and music, they had no chance to perform with a professional troupe. In contrast, Pradit Prasatthong, an initiator of Makhampom’s contemporary *likay*, has had the chance to practise and perform *likay* professionally. Having learnt professional *likay*, Prasatthong has gained more opportunities to interrogate the roots and qualities of *likay* and how to apply this form to a contemporary content and context. In addition to directing and writing scripts, some of these contemporary dramatists, such as Mechudhon and Prasatthong, also performed in their own productions. The rest of the actors were contemporary practitioners, both amateur and professional *likay* artists. Equally, two other types of dramatists, Kriengsak Silakong, a film festival director and theatre maker, and Jitti Chompee, a dancer and choreographer, have worked together on an interpretation of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* for a *nang talung* adaptation in 2009 (Amranand, 2009b: 8). However, they also combined *likay* motifs, such as *ranikloeng* songs and *likay* costume, for *Sudsakorn* in

Chompee's production, while Silakong's production entirely used *likay* structure and performing styles in its repertoire.

### 3.2 Performers

To perform different dramaturgical aims, *likay* directors took alternative approaches to casting. The casting and performing approaches of contemporary *likay* involved four groups: (i) main contemporary artists, (ii) a mixture of contemporary artists and professional *likay* artists performing in the same scene, (iii) guest professional *likay* artists featuring contemporary performers, and (iv) only professional *likay* artists. This multiplicity of casting depends on the troupe's production aims, process, practice, and type of performance event. In *Likay Faust* (2002), the director casted actors who are talented in both *likay* performing methods and contemporary theatre styles, such as Pradit Prasatthong and Pichet Klunchun. Makhampom Troupe also uses this 'only amateur *likay* casting' method regularly for its contemporary *likay* performance, except for *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001) and *Phra Thong-Nang Nak* (2005), for which the troupe invited professional *likay* artists to perform together with amateur *likay* performers. The first show, which was performed at Suan Phakkad Palace, was led by a couple of professional *likay* artists<sup>113</sup> who presented brief dialogues and songs in a prelude before starting the first scene of the repertoire, while the second performance demonstrated the mixed-cast members of professional and amateur (Makhampom) *likay* performers who performed in the same act and scene. A latter production of *Phra Thong-Nang Nak*, presented at the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, used a cast mixture method of professional *likay* artists and amateur *likay* actors or modern-stage actors in the same scene. Prasatthong (Interview, 2010) stressed that the amateur *likay* struggled to avoid egocentric attempts to push the professional *likay* into changing their styles to match contemporary practitioners. They also strived to avoid giving these professionals unsatisfactory signs or expressions toward their acting styles. Preferably, the amateur *likay* performers should be learning professional *likay* artists' techniques and should try to balance and conjoin these distinctions in a repertoire.

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<sup>113</sup> The famous professional *likay* artists, such as Dhepbancha Sithomhuan and Sakuna Rungruang as well as Suthirach Wongthewan and Jingreed-khao Wongthewan, singing and dancing briefly during an interlude, can attract a great number of 'real' *likay* fans to attend and create an enjoyable and boisterous atmosphere that fits well to *likay* performance.

Correspondingly, thanks to her personal gratitude to *likay* performance, Mechudhon has encouraged her fellows and disciples to learn, train, and practise *likay* with Boonlert Najphini, a legendary *likay* master, and the 1996 Thai National Artist. Najphini taught them the essential elements of *likay*, such as singing and dancing. He made suggestions regarding dramaturgy and direction; however, this guidance was only partly used, since Mechudhon designed a whole contemporary production. She earns her authority as a director by legitimately combining, adjusting, and editing assortments from the *likay* masters until they capture her own idea. In these cases, she employed an obvious blend of *likay* with contemporary stage design to enhance the production. Given the significance of elements and motifs, one should note that a variety of artistic styles presented through a single repertoire evidently represent a concept of artistic manifestation in contemporary *likay* rather than a more conventional *likay* form.

Mixed-cast performers who perform in separated scenes played in the *Sudsakorn* (2010) production. A modern-staging approach, including various modern dance styles, placed the two types of performers in separate scenes. This separation brought a different mood and tone to each scene; in fact, one might see it as a theatrical collage. A troupe composed of solely professional *likay* artists performed a contemporary *likay*, entitled *Likay Française, The Island of Slaves* (2007). Feeling inspired by the performance technique, dancing, singing, and acting of Niran Anchalee's *likay* troupe, Silakong asked them to be co-contributors to this project.

#### **4. Khon-Chan-Klang: The Main Audience of Contemporary *Likay***

Contemporary productions have reached new target audiences, such as scholars, the intelligentsia, contemporary theatre patrons, and some former nobility. These audiences have different characteristics as well as different reasons for seeing *likay*. Watching traditional popular theatre like *likay* represents an individual aesthetic dilemma, because *likay* is both a national cultural performance and a philistine theatre form. This dilemma is captured by the Thai term, '*lak-ka-pid-lak-ka-perd*,'<sup>114</sup> a pejorative connotation,

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<sup>114</sup> According to Boonnimitra's account, '*lak-ka-pid-lak-ka-perd*' is used to refer to a homosexual or someone who occasionally displays behaviours of the opposite sex. This term conveys the meaning of something that could not be decided one way or another. The author refers to Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge regime that suggests and exercises a similar spatial structure and arrangement as the term 'closet' has, which imply the attempt to conceal and the attempt to display at different times, or things are not fully concealed and are not fully visible. Furthermore, '*lak-ka-pid-lak-ka-perd*' attempts to

which literally means, ‘sometimes close-sometimes open’ (Boonnimitra, 2005). I wish to adopt this term to describe ironically the taste of the Thai middle class, or *khon-chan-klang*, for urban contemporary conditions that sometimes they ‘pretend’ to like something to show their ‘superior taste’ and ‘hide’ to like something in terms of ‘guilty pleasure’. Their conflicted taste puts them in a binary relationship of tradition/modernisation, old/new, and local/global; however, contemporary *likay* performance can bridge the gap of their binary taste. Further discussion on audience is required, as I want to devote this section to addressing more specifically the middle class’s cultural acquaintance. Therefore, this section describes the characteristics of the main audiences of contemporary *likay*, which differ somewhat from the main audiences of conventional *likay* performances. Although popular folk manifestations are consolidated in the Thai identity, aesthetic discrimination remains in any folk-popular production. The effort to make *likay* a contemporary style not only frames a transformative dialogue of social concerns but also promotes a *likay* genre that is widely considered suitable for the Thai middle class.

A notable portion of *likay* audiences is the *mae yok*, or typical middle-aged matrons, who generally watch professional troupes and play a crucial role in their survival by sponsoring them. The *mae yok* may give a performer an “extra monetary reward”, often the performer of a *phra ek*, or a male hero, which this discussion will elaborate in detail. This audience typically appreciates four elements: beauty of decorations, performing skills, interaction, and special relation (Sompiboon, 2002). However, this audience group does not comprise the majority of contemporary *likay* watchers. In this phase, perhaps a better place to start is to clarify who the audience of contemporary *likay* is.

As well as performing with a combination of local and global approaches in a tradition-based contemporary performance category, a contemporary *likay* exemplifies the coalescence and crystallisation of traditional and modern form in the creative process, developed within the cultural frame of reference of Thailand. For that reason, a wide range of the grass-root popular audiences, bourgeoisie, educators, and aristocrats should precisely understand and appreciate a contemporary *likay* production. In other words,

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find the in-between space where things can be simultaneously represented (See Boonnimitra, Sopawan. (2005). *Lak-ka-pid-lak-ka-perd: Contemporary Urban Conditions with Special Reference to Thai Homosexuality*. Malmö Academies of Performing Arts, PhD thesis, Lund University).

every theatregoer from any social class, even the 'real' *likay* fans, can be the targeted audiences of contemporary *likay* performance. Even the form itself is not firmly indicated as a performance for any specific audience, whether high or low class. I would not say that a contemporary *likay* performance is too complex for the commoners or popular viewers to appreciate, nor would I say that they are incapable of understanding the sophisticated message in a repertoire, even if the audience finds the repertoire distasteful. In fact, the contemporary form leads to be less popular amongst working-class audiences because its content and style of presentation as well as the contemporary theatrical techniques are less familiar to them. On the other hand, the demands of the 'real' *likay* fan clearly come through the performers' qualified skills of dancing, singing, and performing in the recognised and repeated plots rather than new theatrical interpretations, controversial presentations of social concerns, and a hybrid technique of contemporary *likay*. In terms of a ticket price, which is considered too expensive by popular audiences, they usually watch contemporary *likay* if it is a free event. Furthermore, popular audiences prefer the open air space where they can talk, drink and eat while watching a performance to the auditorium or theatre.

The staging location also shapes the audience. The contemporary *likay* performance has normally been performed in the city area both at open-air stages and auditoriums such as the association, private commercial theatres, the national theatre, the national cultural centre, cosmopolitan theatre festivals, and even in the palace for select few events. There is little chance of finding a contemporary *likay* performance at night in an open-air market or a community space as the traditional *likay* style does. The question is, therefore, who the main audience of contemporary *likay* is. The form appears to serve the urban-dwellers or city-people who can readily access those theatre spaces and who prefer to see stage plays in various styles. These main audiences are predictably members of a middle-class.

A contemporary *likay* performance is, therefore, marked as a '*lakon samrab khon-chan-klang*', or a theatre for middle-class people. This term was recently adopted for labelling the idiosyncratic credentials of contemporary theatre in particular. This premise reflects the form, content and targeted audience who are, more or less, unlike viewers of traditional or popular theatre or mass media. The middle-class audience is generally interested in a performance with an intellectual style, a sophisticated story, or the reinterpretation of old literary works through the combination of modern stage plays or

the traditional forms reinvented in a hybrid contemporary style. The sense of nostalgia and reminiscence is another factor that encourages attendance.

However, I would suggest here that the middle-class aspirations and intentions to see the performance are disparate. Each substratum of this class has its own characteristics, backgrounds and reasons for engaging with the contemporary *likay* performance. It may now be worth examining some major characteristics of the middle class and its contribution to a contemporary *likay* performance. To begin with, the middle-class construction is the consequence of the contact between Thailand and the outside world, resulting from global trade, foreign culture and education influences. Despite the fact that finance and Western-style education are the two main factors in the construction of a middle class, there are no sharp boundaries between the two factors. Either wealth or accessibility to higher education can provide the middle class with a chance to experience contemporary theatre styles. Given that the middle class has numerous reasons for watching contemporary *likay* performances, these reasons can be subdivided into heterogeneous stratum according to individual education level, revenue, profession, and social values (Rojanaphruek and Lueang-uthai, 1995: 11-14). The middle-class audience can be categorised into two groups: the former nobility and businesspeople, and the intelligentsia and NGOs. The following accounts briefly provide their emergence and the characteristics that influence their aesthetic tastes and choices.

#### **4.1 The Former Nobility and Businesspeople**

After Thailand changed regimes from absolute monarchy to a democratic system in 1932, the noblemen and elite circle declined. Their descendants' social status shifted from the elite class as a lesser royal family to the upper crust of the middle-class. Since the late nineteenth century, the number of middle class, bureaucrats, and government officials has been growing with the support of tertiary education together with, to some extent, their well-heeled background. They had the prospect of receiving tertiary education both at domestic schools and overseas, especially in the Western-oriented education system. As a result, modernity and globalisation inevitably overwhelmed their world-view and beliefs. In addition, Eoseewong (2005) points out that the external and internal trading during the reign of King Rama III (1824-51) led to an emergence of a merchandising class, called *kadumphi*, or bourgeoisie. The financial and commercial

determinant continues to serve as a foundation for these new rich and industrialist classes. A recent phenomenon of economic prospering, which transpired during the 1980s and the 1990s, manifests capital and consumption as the core essence of its character. The members of the rich and business classes invest in business and industry, as doing so allows them to gain numerous monetary profits. As a result, they are stigmatised as a luxurious class who consumes only world-class goods, including high-end entertainments. They attend exclusive performances, such as international imported performances, Broadway-style theatre, and modern stage plays with expensive tickets.

However, it is of little surprise that these former nobility and businessmen tend to appreciate a contemporary *likay* performance. This appreciation displays their sense of cultural awareness by showing their preference for the amalgamation of cultures between the Western, urban, grassroots and folk artstries, in which this tendency has recently come to stand at the summit of cultural status. These cultural practices can be explained through Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital scheme (Swartz, 1997: 43). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, including verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, scientific knowledge, and educational credentials, can become a powerful resource in the broadest sense of the term. These kinds of non-economical goods are the instruments for acquiring cultural competence (Koanantakool, 2002: 220). They attempt to distinguish their social perspectives and cultural awareness from the preferences of people who focus merely on different kinds of artistic style. When the bourgeois blend their knowledge of the two worlds of globalisation and localisation, outsiders view them as legitimised and culturally competent.

The middle-class attendance of a contemporary *likay* performance signifies the compromise of class-taste differentiation, and it is considered a way of showing interest in popular theatre form. The ideological benchmark does not lay the boundaries between different culture and economic classes for the legitimization of social hierarchies, according to Casey (et, al. 2008: 283). Moreover, sponsoring, funding subsidies, and patronising this tradition-based contemporary performance enables them to show their awareness of being Thai with either direct promotion or indirect advertisement through their companies, institutes, associations, or organisations. Other types of middle-class audiences that are seemingly different from the bourgeoisie will be addressed in later discussion.

## 4.2 The Intelligentsia and NGOs

Thailand has witnessed the growth of a highly educated population and an upsurge of intellectuals since 1970. Teachers, masters, scholars, and students from the university or other forms of tertiary-level education are part of this sub-division called intelligentsia, or *panyachon* in Thai. This education-orientated class normally exhibits openly their identity, lifestyle, and vision; essentially, their experience of higher education shapes their outward behaviour (Koanantakool, 2002: 220). The *panyachon* can be a member of the former nobility or the working class. Those in the latter class lack aristocratic birth, so their access to education is their means to acquire worldwide knowledge, some of the middle-class's way of life, and urbanisation. Those who studied abroad usually come back and bring with them new and distinctive world-views, ways of living, social values, and aesthetic tastes that they borrow from Western perspectives. Their double vision from their new perspective and their own experiences tends to create their reference for comprehending and appreciating a hybrid theatre of popular and modern taste. Seeing a contemporary *likay* enables them to share their own aesthetic experience, combine tradition and modern motifs, reflect on their local roots, connect their roots with new global identities and vice versa. In addition, students and scholars, particularly in a field of performing arts, are, to varying degrees, interested in various kinds of performance on a local to global scale: the imported forms of theatre, collaborative and creative performances, avant-garde performances, physical theatre, contemporary style and neo-traditional productions. They might have a personal passion or a school assignment to view a contemporary *likay* production.

Former activists, students, and intellectuals who have been involved in political activities and movements<sup>115</sup> tend to be key figures in theatre and indigenous cultural patronage. They developed their grassroots perspective, democratic minds, and passion for equality through their activities and from their ideology concerning indigenous culture, folk wisdom, and traditional technologies (Koanantakool, 2002: 220). The contemporary *likay* performance matches their interests closely, because it embraces social issues, political satire, and philosophy, and it performs a combination of popular theatre and modern elements, and this social relevance captures their attention. One must admit that other than viewing contemporary *likay* for entertainment and fulfilment

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<sup>115</sup> There were three political movements: the student uprising events on 14 October 1973, the Student Massacre on 6 October 1976, and the political crackdown in May 1992.



of social status, audiences attend performances to increase their cultural awareness of localisation and globalisation as well as social concerns.

## **5. Approaches to Creating Contemporary *Likay***

*Likay* itself, as the most entertaining stage-popular genre, has a selling point that widely captivates contemporary artists' attention and allows them to employ their artistic experiences and adeptness to accommodate this form in their contemporary pieces. By employing *likay* form and inspiration from the West, succeeding generations of Thai contemporary dramatists have managed to create new *likay* of their own by using montage or miscellaneous pieces of different working styles. I contend that a hybrid form of contemporary *likay* production enables artists to choose what is most significant, worthwhile and playful. Elements from the original main genres of popular theatre, classical theatre, and Western-style theatre may enhance productions. The key ingredients in a process of contemporarising a *likay* form are *likay* dramaturgy within a contemporary context, including its adaptation beyond original texts, and analyses of contemporary *likay* productions, including theatrical approaches and techniques for making such performances. A number of eclectic non-*likay* motifs appear in contemporary *likay* productions and embrace stylised costume-centred character tableaux, contemporary dance, modern music and scores, makeup, stage-design, light and sound, and special effects. The themes and examples of significant conceptualisation, which are utilised in these hybrid projects, are intracultural theatre, intercultural theatre, and cultural collage.

### **5.1 *Likay* Dramaturgy within a Contemporary Context: Meaning beyond Original Texts**

Critics must pay particular attention to myth making while analysing content and context. The process of myth-making in *likay* is the reinterpretation of an original text towards a contemporary context, so studying this process would provide important insights into the dramaturgical determination of a given troupe. The contemporary *likay* performance customarily caters for its audience by combining comedy with moral or didactic concerns. This section will highlight four examples of main themes in *likay* and specific productions that use these themes. First, *Likay Faust* (2002) portrays the

concept of Buddhist Nirvana, demonstrating wisdom and enlightenment without materialistic aspects such as money and prestige. Second, *Chalawan: The Likay Musical* (2006) shows that one difference between human beings and animals is the former's ability to control desire. Third, the exchange of roles between masters and servants in *The Island of Slaves* (2007) conveys the notions of equality and democracy that humans must learn. Finally, the importance of responsible parenting is evident in the reinterpretation of an original story in which the main character, Sudsakorn, has to search for his father Phra Aphaimani, who has left him behind with his mermaid mother in *Sudsakorn* (2010). Artists, content, context, staging elements, and motifs should be the key ingredients of any analysis of the contemporarised *likay* form.

Scholars have credited the post-modern as being one of the conditions of contemporary theatre. It goes beyond modernist principles or somehow ironically rejects those principles as such, which is a common occurrence in contemporary *likay* productions. Contemporary *likay* makes a wide use of satirical stories about capitalism and materialism (Whitmore, 1994: 3 as cited in Fortier, 2002: 174). While capitalism obviously influences contemporary *likay*, this art form has the ability to satirise capitalism. It tends to show the negative effects of modernisation, giving implicit or explicit commentary about greed, sarcasm, and immorality in an increasingly materialistic world. Scholars see elements of post-colonial performance in contemporary *likay* dramaturgy as political negotiations on dramaturgical and aesthetic levels that express modes of resistance among race, class, gender, education, society, economics, and any other phenomenon that is often the subject of Western imperialism (Lo and Gilbert, 2002: 5, 15). Audiences can also see these post-modern elements in a comedic context when dramaturges put together slapstick humour in a typical *likay* performance and combine it with an intellectual wittiness that exposes social critiques through funny dialogue.

The first category, which Apte (1992: 69) defines as 'emotion-based theories', explores a standard range of emotions by delving into various kinds of misfortunes (including physical deformity and infirmity and punishment) and utilising peculiar make-up styles, and outlandish costumes. Chandrueang (Interview, 2011) has claimed that these characteristics including humour, romance, violence, and other elements of melodramatic theatre are universally shared by melodramatic genres, such as pantomime and *commedia dell' arte*. Of course, these features belong clearly to *likay*.

Other forms of humour embrace ironic and satirical views of current political, economic, and social affairs on both the national and international levels. In satire, factious people, objects, and events allude to real-life politicians, brand-name products, consumers, wars, class differentiation, gender, and social justice, all of which actors touch on in dialogue that engages the audiences' recognition of the satirical targets.

Furthermore, contemporary *likay* performance regularly uses a combination of realistic and stylised acting. A great number of contemporary artists, who are trained in realistic approaches, regularly utilise Stanislavski's inner-technique<sup>116</sup> alongside exaggerated or stylised acting and directly address audiences. These two different acting approaches legitimise the delivery by contemporary dramatist of ironic and satirical messages to audiences, as well as create scenarios in which dialogue with audience members is possible. They also suggest directions for further discussion and imagination. That is to say, dramaturgists cooperatively unite realistic perspectives of modern-spoken theatre with popular entertainment in making contemporary *likay*.

This source combination also, in some measure, reflects an amalgamation of different tastes between those of highbrow and lowbrow in terms of aesthetic-benchmark differentiation. However, McGrath (1981: 54-59) suggests the important details of taste discrepancies that exemplify some fairly generalised differences between the demands and tastes of the middle-class and working-class theatre audiences. According to McGrath, the penchant of the working-class audience comprises directness, comedy, music, emotion, variety, effect, immediacy, localism, and sense of identity. These tendencies seem to contrast starkly with those of the middle-class who prefer seriousness, hidden emotion, realism, new interpretation, and privacy. The cultural provincialism of these opposing tastes is only on a different side of the continuum line and not a sharp separation. Contemporary *likay* is able to blend these two sides, embracing the proper components of each side through the production aspiration. Sophisticated messages, such as political and social agendas, and didactic orientation

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<sup>116</sup> The inner technique can be applied to the 'inner impulse' and 'inner action' of characters. This technique is about internal belief or spiritual activity, and reflects on a character's inner movement and impulse. The performer does not simply 'pretend' or 'mime' his/her body activity and speech. This method aims to accomplish a character's objective. See Richard Drain, 1995, *Constantin Stanislavski: From Inner Impulse and Inner Action; Creative Objectives* (1916-20), pp. 253-257. In Richard Drain. 1995. *Twentieth-Century Theatre: A Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.

can, in a seemingly paradoxical manner, be conveyed through ornate clothes, flashy make-up, over-acting, and the vulgar burlesque of *likay* performance.

Consistently, *likay* has a useful framework that draws on the inseparable boundary between the audience's tastes, often by using analogies from the sphere of Thai people attending temple fair activity. Chandrueang (Interview, 2011) illustrates the difference of appreciation and understanding of arts between the participants by comparing activities in a Thai Buddhist temple. The outer layer, or the activity outside the temple wall, typically offers an amusement-park entertainment such as an acrobatic performance and a monkey theatre<sup>117</sup> and thus provides loud noise and laughter. By contrast, the inner area is for the people coming to meditate who require wisdom from Buddhist practice. Although the preferences of the people in the outer and inner areas are dissimilar, all events take place in the same space and time and the participants, of course, are able to walk across the boundaries, cast a look, or even attend all activities. Correspondingly, the mixture of two (or more) aesthetic styles clearly reflects the Thai taste, because they come with no sharp boundary between popular (indigenous) and contemporary (Western-style) performance. Many gaps set in between the different theatre genres are bridged in this type of hybrid theatre of the contemporary *likay*.

The next section will focus on the analysis and discussion of contemporary *likay* productions. It will consider the directors' ideas, working processes, and performance details to reveal the productions' specificity in terms of creating a contemporary *likay* performance.

## 5.2 Analysis of Contemporary *Likay* Productions

This section presents analyses of four contemporary *likay* productions: *Likay Faust* (2002), *Chalawan: The Likay Music* (2006), *The Island of Slaves* (2007), and *Sudsakorn* (2010). It can be said that the methods of creating these productions can be divided into two basic formats: a '*likay*-based' approach and a '*likay*-featuring' approach, depending on directions and specific purposes. The *likay*-based approach is based on *likay* motifs and elements to varying degrees, and it seems to have been used in *The Island of Slaves*.

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<sup>117</sup> Monkey theatre is a kind of animal theatre or animal show. In this show, a well-trained monkey performs its talents such as playing a musical instrument, slam dunking a basketball, and lip-synching a song to the audience.

This performance utilised nothing but traditional *likay* motifs, even performers. Although the story was based on a French comedy, its text was translated into Thai. The *likay*-featuring approach can be seen in *Chalawan: The Likay Musical*, *Likay Faust* and *Sudsakorn* in that there were traces of conventional *likay* elements such as *ranikloeng*, classical Thai dance, and *likay* costume. In *Chalawan: The Likay Musical*, the director made an effort to employ many *likay* motifs, including styles of introduction, dialogue, song, dance, naturalistic pantomime, and music accompaniment by *piphat* ensemble. Nevertheless, the director also adjusted these conventional motifs to fit well into the core contemporary assemblage, which Mechudhon called in her production, ‘the musical’. She claimed to have employed the Western musical show as a template for creating such a production, and this could be seen in the way the performers danced, sang, and acted simultaneously (Mechudhon, Interview 2010). *Piphat* musical ensemble, *ranikloeng*, Thai classical songs, and *likay* costumes were used in *Likay Faust* for presenting *likay* elements in the inner-play scene. The production of *Sudsakorn* employed several non *likay*-elements to fulfil the dramatic aim; these include contemporary dance and motion pictures projected on the backdrop.

### **5.2.1 *Likay Faust*, a Buddhist *Likay*: Fusion or Confusion in Its Play-Within-A-Play Approach**

In his *Likay Faust*<sup>118</sup> (2002), adapted and interpreted from the original text of *Faust* by Goethe, Chandrueang tried to connect the story with *anatta* (non-self/non-ego), one of the essential features of Buddhism, as it is the foundation of Chandrueang life; he asserted that the present is the most important moment of living a life much more than the past and the future. To live a life in the present moment enables an individual to create a peace inside and avoid being enslaved by lust, seduction and physical temptation in a material world. In the play, Mephistopheles, adapted as an evil businessman, seduces others by offering them such pleasures. Dr. Faust is tested and tempted by materialistic desires and earthly pleasures by Mephistopheles. As in the original, Faust cannot resist this lust and finally sells his soul to the devil in order to become immortal. As a pleasure-seeking protagonist, Faust represents the foolishness and lustfulness of human beings.

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<sup>118</sup> *Likay Faust* performed at 8.00 pm on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> October 2002 in the 4<sup>th</sup> of Bangkok's International Festival of Dance and Music at Thailand Cultural Centre

Based on Goethe's play, Chandrueang interweaves an original version of *Faust* and his contemporary adaptation into a contemporary *likay* form. Chandrueang explained in an interview with me in 2011 that he saw *likay* as a simple method for presenting a complex issue. However, Prasatthong (Interview, 2012) an actor of this production asserts that the story of *Faust* was too difficult to digest through the play-within-a-play story, with varieties of performance genres and styles. Kriengsak Silakong has also contended that the *Faust* story is too complicated to present through a *likay* performance (Mahasarinand, 2007). So the director exploited a situation in one theatre troupe as a parallel to the situation when Faust sells his soul to Mephistopheles. According to Prasatthong, combining the idea of a play about a theatre troupe as the outer play with the idea of life and existence of humankind in the inner play of *Faust* is confused. Similarly, Suvannanonda (2002: 2) suggests that an inner play (*likay*) within an outer play (a theatre production) made this already complex story more difficult to follow and not easy to transpose across culture.

It is particularly the over-attempt of showing too many genres not synchronised, such as *likay* uses and Japanese-*butoh* gesticulating in the same repertoire. *Likay* traditionally has much higher energy rhythm and pace, while the *butoh* has a slow movement, and these two forms together were not make sense. This attempt at fusion was carried to an extreme, since the director could not exert control over the performers' distinctive styles. As the two performing styles were extremely unbalanced, the message was not efficiently conveyed; as the critic Suvannanonda (2002: 2) comments, "...there were too many things to take in, and by the end of Faust's ordeal, I was rather lost in space." More to the point, Chandrueang (Interview, 2011) also admitted that the inclusion of many 'hi-tech' visuals within the story (a screen which was projected transparencies, pre-recorded videotape pictures and some live video) was somewhat difficult to understand and seemed incongruent within the overall story.

On starting work on a contemporary performance featuring *likay*, Prasatthong advised Chandrueang to add various elements of *likay* performance. Prasatthong helped rewrite Chandrueang's lyrics, which could not be sung to *ranikloeng*, in order to make them more similar to proper *likay* verse. Additionally, Prasatthong (Interview, 2012) commented that this play lacked '*nha phat*' (scene) presentation, the backbone of *likay*. In each *nha phat*, a character makes his/her entrance by dancing and then introducing themselves by singing and speaking a monologue. After telling their objectives to the

audience or other characters accompanying that scene, the characters usually state what will happen next and make their exit by singing again. Each *nha phat* normally connects to another and this continuity reveals conflicts and solutions of the repertoire. Prasatthong presented *likay* dancing and singing in his part as well as bringing *likay* costumes for other performers to wear in a scene where the characters disguise themselves and go to another country. He introduced the golden jacket used in *lakon ram* style and the conventional *likay* glittering crystal jacket worn with the long-cloth sarong called *nha nang*, while female characters wore conventional *likay* Victorian-style gowns which he borrowed from Makhampom Theatre Troupe. These ornate costumes and decorations, symbolising avarice, formed one of the inspirations which led Chandrueang to use a *likay* form to display the disastrous effects of a materialistic world, which include excessive wealth, and brand and drug addiction; these give only artificial excitement and happiness, but not peace, mindfulness, wisdom, enlightenment, or Nirvana as one might attain from Buddhist practice.

In the performance of *Likay Faust*, there were only amateur *likay* actors, talented in *likay* performing methods and contemporary theatre style: Pradit Prasatthong, an experienced *likay* performer and playwright, played Mephistopheles; a talented *khon* and classical ballet dancer Pichet Klunchun took the role of Dr. Faust; and Bismilla Nana, an accomplished singer and actress, performed Gretchen, the object of Dr. Faust's desire. Highly skilled professional *likay* artists were not selected to perform because this production mainly relied on a text-based performance rather than improvisation. Furthermore, given their busy schedules, it would be difficult to keep them for a few months to rehearse (Prasatthong, interviewed with Pravattiyagul, 2002: 8). Regarding the music, Kaiwan Kulwadhanonthai, a renowned Thai conductor and composer, led the scoring of the music, together with a Bangkok-based American-Thai musician, composer and conductor, Bruce Gaston, and his son Teddy Gaston, along with his Orchestra, Fong-Num Band, a hybrid-style group. The 'two worlds' in the performance were represented by different styles of music: the 'real' world of Director and Producer in an outer play represented by the string combo, while the '*likay*' world of Faust and Mephistopheles was represented by the Thai traditional ensemble (Suvannanonda, 2002: 2). This combination captivated Thai audiences (of classical Thai music and classical Thai and Western instruments).

### 5.2.2 The West and Thai Cultural Duality: *Chalawan: The Likay Musical*

*Chalawan: The Likay Musical*<sup>119</sup>, derived from well-known Thai literary fiction *Kraithong*, recounts a story of a Chalawan legendary crocodile prince who can transform into a human being. He lives in an under-water crystal cave with his two wives Luamlaiwan and Wimala. Mechudhon said that she reinterpreted the original version, in which the hero Kraithong overcomes a villain, Chalawan. The former lives happily with his wives. In fact, the two characters of Chalawan and Kraithong are not dissimilar in that neither is able to resist covetousness. The director formed the main idea that human beings differ from animals because of their ability to control immoral thoughts, greed and unscrupulous desires, thanks to Buddhist philosophy. It is immoral when Chalawan, a magical crocodile prince who can transform himself into a human, steals Phraya Pijit's daughter, Tapao Thong, to be his wife even though he already has two crocodile wives. In the same token, Mechudhon wanted to make the point that Kraithong's behaviour is also immoral; after Kraithong kills Chalawan and then marries Tapao Thong and her sister, Tapao Kaew, Kraithong takes away one of Chalawan's wives, Wimala, with him. Without controlling their desires, therefore, human beings are not dissimilar to animals, and humans cannot claim any superiority over them, according to Parivudhiphongs (2006:8).

A critique of gender politics played a key role as Parivudhiphongs (ibid) states:

...the play did address gender issues and feminist values in the society. Whether it was the human Kraithong or the beast Chalawan, the show presented male characters who were too obsessed with greed and lust and, for that, their wives, or 'the women', suffer in return.

This situation can be seen in a synopsis provided in the performance's programme:

Phraya Pijit organises the wedding for Krai Thong and his two daughters. A short while after the wedding, Krai Thong lies to his wives that he is going to visit Professor Kong. Krai Thong sneaks back into the cave and puts a spell and a magic ring on Wimala's head, bringing her back to earth. Tapao Kaew and Tapao Thong scold Wimala for commit adultery. Wimala feels that the human world is too disturbing and she should not do the same thing that her husband does to her to the girls. She takes off Krai Thong's ring and turns back into a crocodile and swims back to her Magical Crystal Cave (Anon., 2006).

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<sup>119</sup> *Chalawan: The Likay Musical* performed in the seventh Bangkok Fringe Festival at the Theatre in the Garden (Main stage), Patravadi Theatre Bangkok at 7.30 pm from the preview on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005 and continued on every Saturday in the year 2006 until the end of March.



There were minor encounter scenes between professional *likay* actors; Boonlert Najphinit took the role of governor while his fellow Leangpha Tawan, a professional *likay* clown, played the part of a sage named Arjan Kong, a master of the hero Kraithong. Mechudhon herself performed as Wimala, one of Chalawan's wives. The great crocodile Chalawan was cast by a television star and drummer, Napassakorn Mitra-aim, while a *khon* dancer, Petra Srivaranond, played Kraithong. The individual talent of each particular artist was selected to be shown on the stage. Mechudhon highlighted the exceptional drumming talent of Mitra-aim, a Chalawan cast by designing the action that Chalawan had to beat the drum. Moreover, he had a chance to beat a traditional northern-style big drum (*klong sabud chai*) in his scene in which rarely relates to a Chalawan character. This additional element signifies, in some way, the director's effort to add interest to the scene and to challenge the assumption that a *likay*'s performing skills is limited to singing and dancing. However, with his abundance of skill in drum-beating, his talent was sufficiently presented in the repertoire.

Since Mechudhon's tradition-based contemporary work typically features contemporary and Western elements, most of her design team are foreigners. This different artistic perspective would be beneficial in terms of hybrid theatre creation. Various internationally renowned designers included Ruth Pongstaphone, the New York-based American-Thai set and costume designer. The lighting was created by Chris Parry, a Tony-Award winner for the Broadway version of the Who's "Tommy". Moreover, a designer of video and projection is a German media artist named Patrick Palucki who has received several theatre awards such as the Mandala Award from the European Institute for Media, and the Focus Award from the School of Applied Sciences, Dortmund. As well as international influences, national culture played a part in shaping the genre. Among those Western designs, Mechudhon still exploited a variety of Thai classical music<sup>120</sup> together with a *ranikloeng*.

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<sup>120</sup> Classical Thai songs used in *likay* can be divided into two types. The first are melodies used for describing actions; for example, the *samoe* melody is played for the first appearance of a performer; the *choet* melody accompanies a fast action such as running or fighting or when a character makes a journey; the *rou* melody indicates an exciting and rushing moment or a sudden change; and the *od* melody is used when a character cries or is in mourning. The second are melodies that a performer usually uses for singing such as Burmese and Lao accent melodies as well as music from Thai *lakon ram*.

The sloped stage, with the appearance a river, was located between two stage layers: the upper floor represented the earth and the downstage illustrates the underwater world. Additionally, there was a trap door on this ramp space used when a character dived under water. The water surface was lit up by a projector. Furthermore, the two human-being heroines, Tapao Kaew and Tapao Thong, were alternatively presented by large puppets. Mechudhon (Interview, 2010) noted that she found no one suitable for these roles in an audition, so employing puppets and voice dubbing was a better solution. Costumes of the performers were also different from the conventional *likay* artists and were unrecognisably *likay* since Mechudhon requested her Western-based costume designer, Ruth Pongstaphone, to design the crocodile costumes showing a characteristic of half-human being and half-crocodile without a fake crocodile mask or head protruding. Only the characters of Phraya Pijit and his wife wear *likay* costumes in the *likay songkhrueng* style,<sup>121</sup> which designated a *likay* performance.

### 5.2.3 *Sudsakorn*<sup>122</sup>: Contemporary Dance Featuring *Likay*

The next musical-style contemporary *likay* story was adapted from the Thai legendary literary work called the *Phra Aphaimani* saga, composed by Sunthorn Phu, a late royal poet who was honoured by UNESCO as a great world poet in 1986. Sudsakorn is a son of Phra Aphaimani and a mermaid named Suwanmatcha. Phra Aphaimani comes to Koa Kaew Pitsadaan (the Magical Crystal Island), the place of the hermit, Phra Chao Ta. Phra Aphaimani meets a mermaid named Suwanmatcha, falls in love with her, but has to leave her after she becomes pregnant. After a while, Suwanmatcha gives birth to Sudsakorn. In one episode, Sudsakorn has to begin an adventure journey with his magic horse-dragon Ninmangkorn to search for his father. However, in the *likay* version, Chompee added more to this scene so that the audience could question a parent's responsibility toward his child.

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<sup>121</sup> *Likay songkhrueng* (elaborated *likay*) costume is adopted and adapted the the royal family outfits by wearing a cloth of gold, decorated by insignia, shoulder strap, jewellery chest, and a face shield to the top of the crown. A long-sleeved cylinder with sparkling embroidery was worn by a female character. The use of *likay songkhrueng* costume might remind the audience to the ancient *likay* that is a symbol of *likay* in its (beginning) popular period, demonstrating standard pattern of *likay* costume that was adapted from *lakon nai* and the outfits of the courtiers in the beginning of the 1900s. Furthermore, costumes of *likay songkhrueng* could distinguish *likay* from other dramatic forms (Virulrak, 1980: 73).

<sup>122</sup> *Sudsakorn* opened on 15 May 2010 and performed every Saturday at 7:30 pm until 12 June 2010 at Patravadi Theatre, Vic Hua Hin, Prachuabkirikhan province.

This production can be described as combining many aspects of contemporary dance and performance with elements of *likay*. Chompee, a contemporary dancer and choreographer, purposefully employed several non-*likay* elements to his contemporary production to fulfil the dramatic aim: a mixture of Thai dance, contemporary dance, movement, acrobatics, and a *likay* style with a Thai story. His modern-staging approach included various contemporary dance styles, which he placed in separate scenes from those of the mixed-cast scenes. This separation created a different mood and tone in each scene, so one might view this performance as a theatrical collage. Once Chompee broke the genre barrier to work outside tradition, his major characters and performing elements in *Sudsakorn* have focused on contemporary dance, music, and performing style. For example, classical Thai music was played in a piano score, replacing *ranad* (wooden xylophone), *ching* (small cup-shaped cymbals), and *taphon* (two-faced drum), which are the musical instruments of conventional *likay*. Chompee invited music director and pianist Suriya Phuengthongthai to compose an original classical tune in the Western music style while keeping the lyrics from the original verses of *Phra Aphaimani*. The assorted talents of contemporary performers such as acrobats, Latin dancers, and physical theatre actors were all present in this repertoire. There were only two *likay* performers in the production, Samruay Keurthong (also known as Leangpha Tawan) and Krit Chaisinboon, who performed the hermit and Sudsakorn, respectively. The list of other performers and designers clearly exhibits contemporary performance motifs and aesthetics, both Thai and non-Thai. They collaboratively worked and designed many sections with costume designers Nicole Lamarcha and Chana Losaengthong.

The first scene is set at a hospital, and it exploits a non-*likay* motif. A female nurse is wheeling in a patient who appears to be disabled and does not speak. Suddenly, he starts singing ‘Khammun Sanya’ (The Promise) with lyrics from *Phra Aphaimani*’s verse. Two contemporary dancers appear on the stage and dance in choreographed form, following the lyrics’ interpretation. This dance slightly connects to *likay* performance. The female dancer wears a loose, red shirt with shorts, black thigh pants while the male dancer wears red trousers, sports a naked torso, and has his head wrapped in white turban from the crown of his head to his chin so that only his face show. The sloped stage had a trap door that characters could use if they were coming from a different place; Sudsakorn often made his appearance by coming from this trap door. The set design and live drawings presented via projector by Tweesak Wangrangsaisatit were

used as the 'live backdrop' and also functioned as a 'narrator' throughout the repertoire. Although unorthodox, the drawings were suitable, as narration is a conventional element of *likay* performance. The story's situations and the characters' sensations were unburdened through the lined figures and drawings. For example, the English sentence 'Ten months later' appears on a backdrop when Sudsakorn makes his appearance a minute after he was born, indicating his magical maturation.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, when Phra Chao Ta asks him to look for his father, the audience sees an English sentence that reveals Sudsakorn's feelings: 'Do I need the father?' These live backdrops not only serve as silent narration but also present visual commentaries that provoke the audience to question the characters' behaviour.

Other aspects of combination between two different theatrical elements can be seen toward the end of the story, when an angel dances in the classical Thai style together with a group of contemporary dancers as well as in the scene when Sudsakorn begins his adventure to look for his father, Phra Aphaimani. In this scene, a group of dancers sing Bill Withers' song, 'Ain't No Sunshine', in English, employing energetic choreography, which reflected the danger in the new world that Sudsakorn and his dragon horse, Ninmangkorn, will encounter.

Although this production was a *likay*-featuring performance geared towards a Thai-musical-dance-theatre, the professional *likay* artists performed in several scenes to convince the audience that they were watching a *likay* performance. For example, Phra Chao Tha, the hermit, still performed a comedic line in a *likay* style by adding improvisational conversations and talking directly to the audience, reflecting *likay* mirthfulness (or *khwaam sanuk* in Thai). Furthermore, Sudsakorn and Phra Chao Tha repeatedly sing *ranikloeng* and other *likay* songs throughout the performance. Sudsakorn made an appearance with conventional *likay* costume only once, during his introductory scene. Dressed with a conventional *likay* glittering jacket and a fish tail over his legs, Sudsakorn sings a song to describe his mermaid mother, Suwanmatcha, suffering from the labour pains of giving birth to Sudsakorn himself; this kind of surreal situation is licensed in *likay* performance. An adaptation of make-up and costumes can be also legitimate due to few stringent rules in *likay*; so many characters wear casual or

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<sup>123</sup> In the original version of *Phra Aphaimani*, there is a verse explaining that only 10 months after being born, Sudsakorn grows up quickly and looks like a 10-year-old boy, so he can speak, walk, and do other activities as a full-grown and intelligent boy. This time lapse during which a character becomes older or becomes an adult is usually employed in the conventional *likay*.

skin-tight costumes that would be convenient for contemporary dancing. However, I would suggest that including only a few *likay* elements (dance, *ranikloeng* and classical Thai song), but a great numbers of contemporary dancing styles might interrupt the audiences' expectations of watching *likay* performance. More to the point, the producers of *Sudsakorn* used the visual of a child *likay* actor wearing full make-up and conventional costume seated on a Volkswagen car as an advertising play.

#### **5.2.4 Conventional Thai *Likay* Form of a French Play: *Likay Française: The Island of Slaves*<sup>124</sup>**

When comparing it to contemporary *likay*, many critics regarded *Likay Française: The Island of Slaves* as a *likay*-based production when it was actually an entire *likay* production performed by professional *likay* artists with a Thai-translated script of a classical French novel, *L'île des Esclaves* [*The Island of Slaves*, 1725]. Kriengsak Silakong's experience in traditional performance as well as contemporary theatre became his source for this work. Although it followed a Thai translation of Marivaux's *L'île des Esclaves*, the structural and aesthetic forms of conventional *likay* are explicit in its production. It presented the servant and master, Iphicrates and Arlequin, together with Euphrosine and her maid, Cleanthis, who find themselves shipwrecked on a remote island. They soon discover a group of runaway slaves, who established a democracy one hundred years before to achieve a society of absolute equality. They make their determination to collapse class differentiation into a law that anyone arriving on this island must strictly follow. If anyone disobeys this rule, then the society will execute the offender. The master and servant exchange roles, names, and clothes, and have to engage with a peculiar situation that leads to comedic consequences. The reversal of the master and the servant is similar to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Although this production utilised an original text without reinterpreting it, the story provided a social commentary to the audience through comedic sentiments. Having been impressed by the performance, dancing, singing, and acting of Niran Anchalee's conventional *likay* troupe, Silakong selected them to be co-contributors to this project. Thus, the performance was composed of solely professional *likay* artists.

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<sup>124</sup> *The Island of Slaves* from Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux's *L'île des Esclaves* performed at 8:00 pm on Wednesday 9 May and Saturday 12 May 2007 at the Auditorium of Alliance Française in Bangkok.

To convey an island environment, the designers placed a rock at the centre of the stage, and this rock functioned as a bench of conventional *likay*. Replacing the conventional bench with a rock created a slight change in the characters' appearance, yet the performers continued to make entrances and exits in the conventional *likay* style. They entered stage right, dancing or walking in a refined manner, and they exited stage left. Moreover, the leading actor sings a French song, *Non Je Ne Regrette Rien* (No Regrets), at the end of the story. Niran Anchalee's singing brought a sense of strangeness and difficulty to the environment, since a *likay* performer typically sings a *lukthung* song at the end of the show. However, Anchalee (Interview, 2010) tried his best to do justice to this difficult French song in order to capture the *likay's* nature. Indeed, adjustment and adaptation of 'new added elements' are one part of the *likay's* identity. Singing in French by Thai accent, Anchalee, who does not speak French could imitate well the French accent through his singing. His singing amazed the French guests with the ability of this traditional Thai performer. The audience's positive response suggests that the 'clash' of two traditions might more effective as long as the audience interprets it as a 'mesmerising clash' of multiple cultural elements, not a 'conflicting clash' that the directors could not control during the process of making a performance. Unlike in this performance, I propose that it is important for contemporary artists to understand the qualities of differing theatrical perspectives throughout the process of making contemporary *likay*.

Humour is the main ingredient of Marivaux's *L'île des Esclaves*, but the French humour is probably difficult to present authentically in the Thai context after undergoing a process of translation. As Amranand (2007b: 8) deftly worded the conundrum, "...it is less a question of how much of Marivaux's humour will be lost, but more what can both the *likay* and the play gain from each other." It is worth noting that repartee, the signature of Marivaux's comedy, can be presented through the *likay* form since repartee is also *likay's* trademark. Amranand (ibid) observed that some of the meaning of the jokes was lost in translation. However, the performance of repartee by Thai performers captured the spirit of the humour effectively, and provided a source of laughter to both Thai and foreign audiences:

the performers spilled out gag after gag imbued with deliciously dirty wordplay that tickled the audience's funny bone, Thais and foreigners alike. The sly exchange between Arlequin and Cleanthis barely allowed us to come up for air

between laughter... the two quick-witted actors were a true highlight of the show.

Additionally, performers might play with words by speaking Thai with an English accent, giving word-by-word translations from English to Thai, or even transliterating words to entertain Thai audiences.

In 2004, I took my American colleague to see *likay* at a *wik* (theatre) in a temporary market in Bangkok, and the performers let him play a drum in the *likay* musical ensemble. As he joined them, they engaged in Leangpha Tawan, one of the troupe's favourite jokes. They improvised their conversation with this American by speaking Thai with an English accent to tease him. The accidental appearance of *farang*<sup>125</sup> on the *likay* stage surprised the audience, and they laughed at him when 'the *farang*' reacted to the joke's performance. Likewise, in *Likay Française: The Island of Slaves*, the female character descends from the stage into the audience's area and she announces that she wants to have a '*farang*' husband. Her broken English plus her suggestive Thai words, together with her exaggerated, physically erotic gestures (e.g., "You you, *ao mai ma pum pum*<sup>126</sup> *kan* [Hey you, would you like to have sex with me?])), made the '*farang*' as well as the Thai audiences laugh rather than feel embarrassed.

The performers also regularly employed the *likay* off-and-on-stage technique in this performance. When a bodypack-wireless microphone slips out of the back rim of *nang ek* (a heroine)'s gown, she begs the musicians to stop playing for a moment. She also asks the male performer who accompanied her in the same scene to draw it out. She cannot resist adding some banter by telling him to put his hand deeply into her clothes before she returns to the dialogue of the story. Another in-and-out style, which illustrates the *likay* performers' ability to improvise and be resourceful, unfolds when the characters forget their French names or the names of the other players. Silakong (Interview, 2012) told me that the performers teased one another: "What is your name again? I cannot remember, again please. OK. I would not forget your name anymore"

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<sup>125</sup> *Farang* is a Thai word for describing white foreigners and Caucasians. According to Kitiarsa (2010: 60-61), this word, used to refer to the Portuguese who were the first Europeans to visit Siam in significant numbers, was borrowed from Muslim Persian and Indian traders during the Ayutthaya period. This term is successively used to refer to other Europeans, Caucasians and the West in general. In general, this term is neutral in its denotation, but when it is referred to imperialism, materialism, capitalism, and globalisation, '*farang*' has pejorative connotation.

<sup>126</sup> *Pum pum*, which sounds familiar to Thai people, demonstrates the sound of sexual intercourse.

(and then a character spoke directly to the audience, explaining that the *likay* performers found it difficult to remember French names). This improvisation, which drew away from the inner role, is by no means inappropriate to a *likay* performance; to the contrary, it contributed another moment of laughter. Some dirty words that can be used in conventional *likay* were censored by Silakong after a performer asked for permission to use them. For example, he forbade the Thai word for female genitals, although a conventional performer would not articulate that word in its exact sound, but its similar sound might be suggestive expression and lead to sense of obscene to the audience.

Negotiations between the two different theatrical cultures, or ‘clashes’, were apparent in other stages of the process of creation. Niran Anchalee was a leading actor of a traditional *likay* troupe who performed this story. He confessed that he and his team was confused by the Thai translation and felt uncomfortable during the rehearsal period, even though Silakong allowed them to adapt some dialogues and narrations from the French play to fit the *likay* style, music, and performing rhythms by means of *likay* storytelling techniques (Anchalee, Interview 2010, and Mahasarinand, 2007). He also licensed the *likay* troupe to do *ok khaek* and permitted them to respond to interruptions by their matrons and fans while performing the play. The other ‘clash’ arose when Niran Anchalee’s troupe interpreted the narrative and connected the word ‘slaves’ to their own preconceived notions. At the end of the show, they included this word in their song of thankfulness to King Rama V in honour of his slave emancipation decree. This linking is quite mismatched to *The Island of Slaves*, because Marivaux simply demonstrated the humorous consequences of masters and servants exchanging their roles; he did not invoke a slave emancipation theme. Kriengsak, nevertheless, compromised by giving them permission to articulate this point in a unit of verse.

*Likay* is normally performed outdoors on temporary stages at the market place or at temple fairs. Remarkably, the performance usually lasts three to four hours without intermission, during which the audience members can do other activities or come and go as they please. Furthermore, a conventional *likay* story is somewhat repetitive in its performance, so the audience members could follow the story even if they missed some scenes. Silakong deviated sharply from this convention by giving *The Island of Slaves* a mere 90-minute run time. Naturally, the *likay* performers in the Niran Anchalee Troupe felt worried that the performance duration was too short for what the audience had paid. However, the troupe felt a sense of relief after hearing Silakong’s explanation. He



presented to them the unique circumstances for the performance, explaining that they would be in an auditorium for a middle-class audience who would be captive for the entire 90-minute duration and who would be paying close attention to the performance details. Thus, the relatively short run time for *The Island of Slaves* was quite appropriate, because the audience would be giving it the level of attention that they would give a Western performance.

## Conclusion

*Likay* itself, as the most entertaining popular stage genre, has selling-points that captivate contemporary artists' attention and allows them to employ their artistic experiences and adeptness to accommodate *likay* in contemporary pieces. Employing *likay* forms, as well as inspiration from the West, succeeding generations of Thai contemporary dramatists have also made new *likay* of their own, by assembling montages of different working styles. Contemporary *likay* combines themes of morality, and enlightenment with socially-conscious message, hilarity, and merriment

Although these contemporary *likay* productions present the contemporary performance experimentation in terms of adaptation, it may be argued that without knowing and understanding *likay* conventions, solely adopting a very new approach to the deconstruction of *likay* motifs, may lead to the clash of traditions rather than contributing to the creation of hybrid theatre. This could thereby lead to confusion rather than fusion. The next two chapters will discuss Makhampom's contemporary *likay* performances, the *likay*-based productions, and the troupe's *likay* praxis which present *likay* motifs and elements through contemporary style.

## Chapter 5

### Makhampom's Contemporary *Likay* Praxis

Founded as a non-profit grassroots organisation in Thailand and utilising drama as a tool to foster human and social development, Makhampom Theatre Troupe's core mission is to conduct performances for social change. Four types of troupes, each with a unique orientation, reflect the consolidation of art and society: Community Theatre Projects provide performances that educate people on various issues at the grassroots level, both in remote and urban areas. Theatre Education Projects enhance teachers' and students' knowledge of and agility with the use of theatre as a communication tool. Performance Projects seek to promote communication within theatre and performing arts. And, finally, International Projects offer international theatre and performing techniques, directing styles, and workshops that exemplify exchanges between Thai artists and foreigners (Sentoku, 2009: 1).

'MKP', or 'Makhampom', stands for 'Mad', 'Knowledge' and 'Participant'. These three words clearly represent the troupe praxis that Richard Barber (2007: 90-109) characterises as 'living theatre, evolving culture'. Barber divides these attributes into sub-characteristics, such as participatory democracy, *chaobaan* solidarity, neo-traditionalism and a culture of fun. These qualities reflect the troupes' involvements and activities. *Chaobaan*, for instance, provided the context for the radicalism of the student theatre activism of the 1970s, in which academic volunteers and grassroots NGOs were heavy participants. In its praxis, Makhampom uses 'participatory democracy' as a political model for the troupe, reflecting in its working process the notion that 'participatory ideals' are the main tool of social change. Thus, volunteers and members adhere to the principle of equality and learn from one another. Makhampom's praxis, like *chaobaan*'s solidity, incorporates encounters and exchanges between the urban and the rural. The troupe highlights the ways in which theatrical ideas and techniques can be used to approach the stories of rural residents and bring their ways of living back to urban dwellers via performance. Not only are the previous tradition-based contemporary productions discussed in Chapter 3, the troupe's signature and characteristics of 'neo-

traditionalism’ and a ‘culture of fun’; they are also characteristics of the troupe’s contemporary *likay* contributions.

After participating in conventional *likay* troupes, a number of Makhampom members have attempted to bring to their own groups a new style of *likay* that combines various theatre components and configurations adapted from folk forms into court and classical theatre. In so doing, they have fostered the coalescence of indigenous elements and foreign motifs, crafting *likay* as a neo-traditional style with an experimental approach. Derived from community theatre, developments in grassroots movements and the social pursuit of individual efficacy, the contemporary *likay* of the Makhampom Theatre Troupe, functioning as a practical example of a Performance Project, has drawn upon a primary troupe interest and also contributed to the core principle of social efficacy and community development, to promote communication, through a new style of national-popular form, in terms of cultural reinvention. These foundations underpin the thematic content of the work, not just its artistic potentialities or those of its artists, *per se*.

Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* provides perspectives on the ability of *likay* to promote the transformation of performance discourse and practice in a socio-cultural context that currently, and to some extent, encourages a dialogue on social efficacy. In addition to employing a combination of Eastern and Western approaches to performing, Makhampom’s contemporary *likay*, which developed within a cultural frame of reference in Thailand, exemplifies the coalescence and crystallisation of traditional and contemporary forms in the creative process. For that reason, its contemporary *likay* productions, which are well-scripted and well-produced, can be precisely understood and appreciated by a wide range of audiences.

Regarding the troupe’s effort to reinvent *likay* in a new style, this effort has not followed a single method, set or idea, but, instead, has drawn on a wide range of theatrical forms. Despite this, the totality of Makhampom’s *likay* pieces is a balanced and cohesive repertoire, not a singular presentation of various theatrical motifs. In its *likay* performances, Makhampom preserves the key features of *likay*’s identity, such as *ok khaek* (an Indian-style dance interlude), *ranikloeng* structures, classical Thai songs, stock character roles (hero, heroine, villain, villainess and clown) and *nha phat* sequencing. To be precise, Makhampom’s work is clearly seen as ‘*likay* added to contemporary theatrical elements’, not ‘contemporary performances featuring *likay*

motifs'. In addition, Makhampom's contemporary *likay* performances regularly solicit audience participation in scenes on stage or involve performers teasing audience members during scenes. This is because the troupe intentionally creates an atmosphere in which "theatre is a place to live, not a place to sit" (Pronko, 1967: 179). In this atmosphere, audience members are not overwhelmed by seriousness and intellect. Rather, they find themselves able to gain both 'enjoyment' and 'food of thought' at the same time.

Barber (2007: 256-257) points out that the differentiation between Makhampom's contemporary *likay* and conventional *likay* is the distinction in praxis. Makhampom's *likay* performers rely heavily on scripts because they lack improvisational skills. The performers usually improvise only their dialogues, not their singing. Furthermore, costumes are recognisably *likay*, but they are not as ornate and vibrantly colourful as the costumes of conventional *likay*. Moreover, the troupe utilises various costumes from *likay songkhruang* and *lakon panthang*, to create new patterns that fit their stories' contexts. For example, Mon and Burmese theatrical costumes were employed in *Suek Mueang Prae*, a story about the battle between the Mon and Burmese (2003), while Javanese-style costumes were adapted to create a new *likay* costume design that was featured in the production of *Akaoni* (2009-2010), which presented a conflict between islanders. The extravagant backdrops of commercial troupes are unnecessary to Makhampom's contemporary *likay* performances, because the troupe is able to perform at a range of venues, including movie houses, black-box spaces, river banks, and public streets.

Having continually developed for more than a decade, Makhampom has become a prominent troupe of contemporary *likay* in Thailand. Its performances signify the cooperative (re)interpretation of selected Thai myths, legends and literatures in a contemporary socio-cultural context and through a contemporary socio-cultural discourse, elaborating on melodramatic and comic styles, along with contemporary staging, in a *likay* repertoire. This concept is truly revealed in Makhampom's scripts, which represent a hybrid form of theatrical elements (Amranand, Interview 2011). With its roots in a folk context, Makhampom *likay* has developed via a social-efficacy route that goes beyond artistic form. This inroad into the reinvention of *likay* performance brings various challenges in terms of socio-cultural reconceptualisation.

This chapter focuses on Makhampom's contemporary *likay* praxis and the troupe's minor productions, as well as my experience as a playwright and director who creates contemporary *likay* that is influenced by Makhampom *likay* praxis. The discussion includes:

1. Politics in Practice and Practice in Politics: Makhampom's contemporary *likay* praxis
2. The inauguration of Makhampom *likay*: From local roots to contemporary route
3. Contemporary praxis: A process beyond practice
4. Makhampom *likay* minor productions
5. *I Have Always Loved You*: Makhampom *likay* impetus
6. Makhampom *Likay* Academy School (MLAS)

## 1. Politics in Practice and Practice in Politics: Makhampom's Contemporary *Likay* Praxis

In terms of politics in practice, the Makhampom troupe, which is based on the Marxist-oriented political theatre groups of the 1970s, does not reject feudal literary sources or their political formulas; rather, the hierarchical hegemony and dominance of feudalism can be adapted, to reflect differentiations in contemporary forms (Barber, 2007: 287), or can be used satirically. This approach exhibits a tendency toward theatrical hybridity; in fact, it is the emergence of a congruent interchange and integration of the four traditions of Asian theatre suggested by Brandon (1967: 80-82), in terms of theatrical hybridisation. The form is determined by the context of socio-political factors and socio-economic conditions and by folk, popular, court and Western traditions.

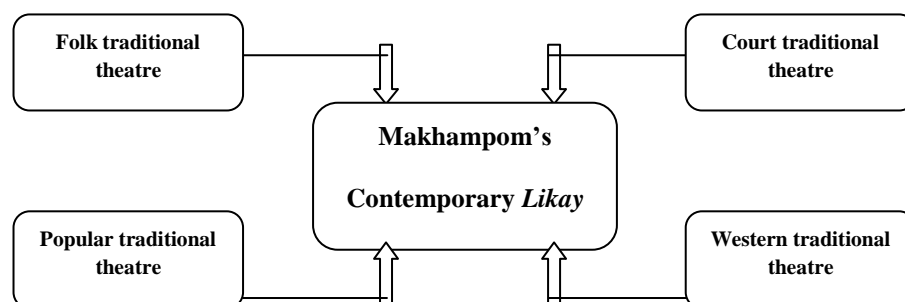


Figure 3: The combination of four theatre traditions in contemporary *likay*

The amalgamation of these four genres is employed in three cooperative themes of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* repertoire, as Barber (2007:286) points out: pre-modern feudal literature and myth, reinterpretations of content within contemporary socio-political contexts and localised, melodramatic characterisations (tragic, romantic and comic) of current socio-cultural stereotypes. Sophisticated messages, related to soul-searching, political and social agendas and didactic orientations, can, in a seemingly paradoxical manner, be conveyed through the ornate clothes, flashy make-up, over-acting and vulgar burlesque of *likay* performance. Social critique or satire is typically presented in Makhampom's contemporary *likay*. The hybrid theatrical form of Makhampom's contemporary *likay*, therefore, enables the troupe to transcend the boundaries of high and low culture.

Thai society is perceived as a "highly hierarchically structured society" (Bechstedt, 1987 as cited in Reynolds, 2002: 241) in which superiority and inferiority are commonly employed to rank social class, social hierarchy, cultural etiquette and even aesthetic expression on the basis of a patron-client framework. Because elitism has so much direct control over the ways in which the arts are perceived, the authorities and politics inevitably play a crucial role in aesthetic judgements of artistic expression. To this point, Kennedy and Yong (2010: 10) state "one must keep firmly in mind that the aesthetic never loses political nuance." Social distinction and class discrimination, therefore, result from a system of dominance that conforms to Bourdieu's concept of aesthetic judgement (Ferguson, 2007: 114), according to which "the dominant classes define and recognise themselves by their aesthetic judgements, tastes which are in opposition to the tastes of the dominated classes." Bourdieu (1984: 6, as cited in Storey, 2003: 43) suggests further that "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier." In other words, "[w]e are classified by our classifications and classify others by theirs" (Storey, *ibid.*) Even though aesthetic judgement can probably be discerned as "an implicit culture hierarchy which is judged in an intuitive sense rather than in a formal or critical way" (Danesi, 2008: 5), it seems to be employed by the higher classes, in particular, as a tool to differentiate classes. Storey (2003:45) makes a similar point, that "a hierarchy of taste is mapped onto a hierarchy of social class and the former is used to legitimate the latter." More to the point, academic factors and Thai lifestyles currently play a crucial role in distinguishing classes of theatre. The so-called binaries of status - between poor and rich people, rural and urban habitants, and uneducated and well-educated persons - are also exemplified by this situation. Consequently, the distinction

between elite and popular theatre, upper class and lower class performances and educated and uneducated artistic work, have gradually taken shape in Thai perception. The westernisation of the country, combined with upper-class Thai cultural values, to a large extent discriminates against the tastes of the Thai working class.

Artistic elements established in Thai society and value added from the West was introduced for a long period, in which the standard apparently excluded a great number of *chaobaan* (villager or commoner) performances. A (high) standard is specifically classified as the classical genres that derive from the tastes and preferences of the court and the theatrical influences later imported from the West. *Likay*, for example, is considered unrepresentative of 'Thai identity' or 'Thainess' because it is a form of coarse entertainment for low-class people. That is, *likay* is seen as a substandard form that fails to meet the aesthetic standards of Thai national arts. However, since *likay* has a crowd-pulling capacity and is popular among the common people, it is often exploited by government campaigns and for public relations purposes.

The reinvention of Thai popular performance - contemporary *likay*, in particular - speaks to the question of how theatrical practices can be understood within the context of their social and political orders; this reinvention must necessarily be seen as much about the politics of the practice of *likay* performance as about the political nuances in other contexts within Thailand. Traditional *likay*, with its non-court origins, emerged from the cultural diversity of Thailand, but the form has developed via a cultural contest with an aesthetic hegemony. It has also encountered a dramatic challenge in its discriminatory exclusion from national art forms by those in power; 'official' Thai theatre has typically included only those forms in contact with the former nobility or Western adaptations (Mitchell, 2008: 223). Middle-class and highly-educated people may experience guilty pleasure if they enjoy viewing *likay* performances. Furthermore, it can be said that *likay* theatrical elements are the main appeal of Thailand's popular entertainment, since *likay*'s dramaturgical formula has been used in some dramatic films and consistently adapted into television soap operas, as mentioned in Chapter Two. However, no matter what its popularity with a wide variety of audiences, *likay* is still categorised as a performance for the working classes. *Likay* may reflect a discursive concept of substandard art, unworthy of preservation, but *likay* practice has undergone a long journey of development and represented the quality of Thailand's popular theatre and Thai cultural values.

There is, however, another effort to promote *likay* performance by substituting for stereotypical views of *likay* a new public awareness of *likay* as ‘Thai culture’. This perspective involves less ‘cultural exclusivity’ and more association with ‘cultural appropriation’, both in terms of intellectuality and intertextuality (Storey, 2003: 47). Virulrak, a prominent *likay* advocate and professor of the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, organised a *likay* series in 1990 that was broadcast on television. *Likay*, in Virulrak’s projects, was performed in a conventional style by professional *likay* performers. However, some unconventional socio-educational issues, such as breast-feeding, family planning and social development in small villages, were added to the repertoire (Mitchell, 2008: 228). Unlike Virulrak’s contribution to *likay*, Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* is more interested in the functions of contemporary adaptations that could cultivate new audiences and a new dramaturgy (Barber, 2007: 244). Whereas Virulrak made an effort to “portray *likay* performers as cultural intermediaries who can bridge the gap between the peasantry and the government” (Mitchell, *ibid.*), the Makhampom troupe is attempting to bridge the gap between aesthetic manifestations of populist and middle class tastes and to contribute dramaturgical innovations, manifesting a dynamic of intracultural theatre that combines popular and contemporary theatrical elements in tradition-based contemporary theatre in Thai society. The praxis of Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* has become part of the renaissance of tradition-based contemporary Thai theatre, in a socio-political sense; it is not only framing a transformative dialogue of social concerns within the context of tradition-based performance, but is also promoting a *likay* genre that is a ‘total theatre’ or a theatre for all.

With its roots in folk-popular and *chaobaan* recognition, the Makhampom troupe, by reinventing *likay*, has developed a route towards social effectiveness that goes beyond artistic form. Having been brought into a contemporary socio-cultural context, Makhampom’s content focuses on socio-political issues that touch on global social concerns. The troupe’s effort to make *likay* into a contemporary style is not meant to transform *likay*’s characteristics, but to frame a transformative dialogue of social concerns in a contemporary-popular form. Therefore, it is possible to say that Makhampom has sought a sense of cultural diversity that brings together disparate elements. The shared cultures of various theatre genres have become an important part of the troupe’s aspiration to contribute to contemporary *likay*. Makhampom Troupe is relatively prominent in its practise of tradition-based contemporary theatre, known for



its cultural collaboration. Its selection of content and motifs from different performance forms within specific contexts enables Makhampom to choose what is most significant, worthwhile, playful and effective from each genre. Makhampom's contemporary *likay*, therefore, is, to some degree, adjustable and evolving form of communication on issues, rather than being merely a rigid presentation form (Hirunsri, Interview 2010).

## **2. The Inauguration of Makhampom *Likay*: From Local Roots to Contemporary Route**

Makhampom's contemporary *likay* praxis is part of a programme titled 'Learning About Folk Art' that Pradit Prasatthong initiated in the 1990s. The troupe's members, who are interested in *likay* performance, gathered to see *likay* performances at temple fairs and market places, both in Bangkok and the provinces. Some members preferred to be in the audience, but some became *likay* performers, playing minor roles with the professional *likay* troupes that they learned and practised with. The first Makhampom *likay* performance was an *ad hoc* show performed to entertain and raise the morale of 'the poor peoples' assembly', a group of citizens protesting against the government in 1996. An excerpt from *Khun Chang, Khun Phan*, a popular Thai piece of literature, was incorporated into the performance, because the script was familiar to (almost) all Thai people and because, through it, viewers could enter into both feelings of authority and enjoyment. Makhampom's *likay* volunteers used free space around the protesters, as well as their protesting stage, to perform *likay*. Wearing slightly ornate costumes, they used conventional *likay* forms and styles but inserted political ideas between the texts and verses. This performance illustrated the troupe's initial inspiration and aspiration to later develop a contemporary form of *likay*.

Makhampom has continually exhibited creative dynamism, producing a number of contemporary *likay* productions in which it combines popular-folk performance with the treatment of such topics as human and social development, as well as modern theatrical techniques. In so doing, it presents a hybrid form to contemporary audiences. Pradit Prasatthong, actor-director and a pioneer and founder of Makhampom, has contributed to the troupe's conceptual and practical approaches to contemporary *likay*. Prasatthong has applied his own theatrical interests in folk and popular theatre, as well as the classical arts, to several of Makhampom's productions, in addition to drawing on his

university experience in modern theatre and pop music. His self-syncretic and hybrid approach has inevitably been accommodated into Makhampom's theatre praxis. Other prominent erectors<sup>127</sup> of Makhampom *likay*, to a certain extent, have similar geographical backgrounds and personal passions. Apart from their tertiary levels of education in various subject areas, the majority of Makhampom *likay* members were born in Thailand's provinces and raised in *chaobaan* circumstances. They were brought up amidst folk and popular genres but have gained personal expertise in modern and contemporary stage performance, and some also have had valuable opportunities to familiarise themselves with and take part in various professional *likay* troupes. Their knowledge of both local/global and traditional/contemporary performances and their strong awareness of the interrelation of stage theatre, TV drama and film within Thai performance cultures, serve as the wide-ranging foundation upon which Makhampom's performers build their contemporary *likay* performances. Additionally, some academic university lecturers<sup>128</sup> in classical performance, Thai studies and the performing arts have volunteered for Makhampom's *likay* team. Their inclusion in this team has significantly promoted the concept of specialisation, which has begun to define various areas of Makhampom's praxis.

To show a modern perspective on the idea of Thainess and to present a favourite Thai alternative to audiences, based on laughter and hilarity, a mixture between *likay* and modern spoken stage plays has been employed. Whatever the extent of their debts to Western theatricality, Makhampom *likay* artists passionately express their sense of ideological equality in their theatrical works, rather than using their educated power to contribute performances that are used to oppress the illiterate, as in some cases recounted by Ross (1989: 216). They manifest themselves as people who realise their local roots but are able to connect with the global route.

Since Makhampom's contemporary *likay* relies on scripts to communicate precise and concise content, improvisation, an important element of the *likay* repertoire, is limited. The majority of Makhampom's actors are trained in textual reproduction, which is difficult for them to memorise scripts and has made them nervous and uncomfortable with the use of improvisational methods in professional performances. Pradit

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<sup>127</sup> Their brief bibliography, experiences and interests are provided in Appendix 1

<sup>128</sup> Also see in Appendix 1

Prasatthong, therefore, has tried encouraging Makhampom to practise improvisation during rehearsals, both in regards to scripts and to articulation. With knowledge of the plot, script, scenario and direction of a story, performers are assigned to compose verses and rhymes that are suitable for their characters and the context of the repertoire. In so doing, they strengthen their skills while contributing texts in *likay* style. However, actors can articulate their points with liberty when scenes need interaction between them and audiences, and those improvisations are crucial to engaging audiences. Although the troupe has good performers and talented singers who can adapt *likay* forms in different ways, there are few strong dancers and connoisseurs of verse improvisation. Though lacking some *likay* performing skills, Makhampom *likay* performers are able to perform entertainingly, concisely and vivaciously, while retaining the sprightliness and wittiness characteristic of *likay* (Mahasarinand, Interview 2011).

Basic skills in *likay*, yet, are required of all of Makhampom's performers; for example, they have to be able to sing *ranikloeng* and other kinds of Thai classical and folk songs and to carry out classical dances that follow fixed patterns, for feelings such as love, grievance and anger. However, most contemporary audience members understand the limitations of the singing and dancing skills of Makhampom *likay* performers and admire the stories they tell and the techniques, acting styles and tight repertoire they employ. Thus, Makhampom *likay* is concerned less with imitating every aspect of conventional *likay* performance. As Barber has claimed, its actors seem to follow the maxim that "they should try to be what they are, not to be a real *likay* because they are not" (Interview, 2010). Makhampom's first major piece of contemporary *likay* performance was performed at the one-hundred-year ceremony of Pridi Banomyong, Thailand's former Prime Minister and Statesman, in 2001. This prominent performance established the troupe's contemporary *likay* production. Analysis and details of this production will be presented in Chapter 6.

### **3. Contemporary Praxis: A Process beyond Practice**

Praxis is a process of translating idea into action by learning, exercising and applying those knowledge and skills by which theory, skill, practice and embodiment are engaged. It is seemingly an insight that takes shape prior to any explicit formulation of such understanding. The praxis of Makhampom *likay* is different from that of

professional *likay* and from the praxis of other theatre troupes who have contributed to the development of contemporary *likay*. Makhampom players undergo lifelong training in the praxis of professional *likay*. In Chapter 2, I referred to such training as ‘*likay* home schooling’, whether formal or informal. Makhampom *likay* performers develop their *likay* skills in three stages (Barber, 2007: 258). First, they observe traditional or professional *likay* troupes as audience members. Subsequently, they ask permission to practice with these professional troupes, and then start performing as minor roles and extras. Finally, after spending time in occasional or *ad hoc* performances, the artists create experimentally and contribute their own styles and intentions to *likay* productions, bringing to public audiences a contemporary performance style.

I would suggest here that the differentiation between Makhampom’s *likay* and the contemporary *likay* of other contemporary theatre troupes is manifested in distinctions in praxis- and, in particular, in perspectives on learning. The learning and practise approach of the Makhampom *likay* team can be seen as an application of the anthropological approach that uses an insider perspective called ‘emic’, which refers to “...the insider view, which seeks to describe another culture in terms of the categories, concepts and perceptions of the people being studied”(Ferraro and Andreatta, 2010:17). In simpler terms, Makhampom *likay* actors have made efforts to comprehend and acquaint themselves with traditional styles of *likay* performance before adjusting and contemporising a form that Sapakhun claims has earned legitimacy as the result of Makhampom’s attempts to research, train with and perform with real *likay* troupes (Barber, 2007: 279). While the Makhampom *likay* team employs an insider perspective when developing their contemporary *likay* performances, other troupes apparently utilise an ‘etic’, or binary concept, of the insider perspective. Etic “refers to the outsider view, in which anthropologists use their own categories and concepts to describe the culture under analysis” (Ferraro and Andreatta, *ibid.*). This can be seen in some troupes’ working processes, which centre around the principle of expertness, then linked with *likay* motifs. In other words, it is unnecessary to know and practise all artistic aspects of *likay* performance before adapting and adopting the form.

Makhampom differs from other troupes that produce contemporary *likay* in that the core principle behind the working process used to produce its performances is performers’ self-syncretism, self-discipline and willpower to learn and practise. Makhampom operates on the principle that artists should profoundly understand the characteristics of

*likay* before employing it in their adaptative projects. Neelacha Fueangfookiat (Interview, 2010), an actress with Makhampom, notes that performers have to understand well what kind or genre of theatre they will perform or are performing. She also contends that personal passion alone is insufficient when crafting any kind of theatre. Her assertion would seem to be strengthened by Pornrat Damrhung's suggestion that when artists want to adapt an old form by fitting into it a new element, they should have a deep awareness of both the old principle and the new formula (Interview, 2011). Damrhung cites Pichet Klunchun's contemporary dance, which is interspersed with traditional Thai music, as a case in point. Klunchun's production of intercultural performances is self-assured, because he profoundly knows and understands the varied artistic styles he employs. Klunchun knows well when Thai dancers must move from one position to another or from one style to another, and when a song beat and pace must change. As a Thai dance connoisseur, Klunchun is able to harmoniously and conjointly register his ballet in Thai classical music. The moment and pace of the changing ballet movements, along with the pace and rhythm of Thai music in Klunchun's performances, are based on the changing conventions of movement in classical Thai dance.

When practising with professional *likay* artists, Makhampom members perform both the *khru-pak-lug-jum* technique (an informal learning technique in which a novice watches, engrosses, memorises and imitates a master's performing skills and styles) and formally learn knowledge and skills from a *likay* master. As a modest disciple, Prasatthong has had a chance to learn various *likay* techniques from Winai Pungamnaj, a late *likay* master. Despite the fact that the *likay* master customarily transfers his/her knowledge and skill only to their successors, Pungamnaj willingly passed on his abundant artistic skill and experience to Prasatthong, because he realised the strength of Prasatthong's enthusiasm, aspiration and aptitude.

What also needs to be emphasised is that dramatists should conduct research on and familiarise themselves with the contents and contexts that they will apply in productions. As regards *likay* performances, scripts must be adapted to fit the *likay* narrative style. This makes it more likely that artists will apply the *likay* form in a way that conveys their stories comprehensibly. Furthermore, dramatists should know well the elementary and necessary details of the anecdotes and chronicles they are working with. This point is exemplified by Prasatthong's attempt to research and adapt Javanese

and Indonesian tunes, along with Thai classical tunes, which are compatibly employed in Thai classical music and Thai lyrics, to *Likay Akaoni* (Red Demon) in 2009 and 2010. These kinds of music fit well in the play's repertoire, since the project was designed to portray islanders or Muslims in the southern part of Thailand. Additionally, Cambodian and Lao's melodies and tunes were borrowed and used with Thai lyrics in *The Message* (2007-2008), which drew on not only Thai *likay*, but Cambodian *yike* and Laotian *lamlueang*.

More to the point, artistic embodiment is seemingly structured by the different styles and contexts of theatrical praxis. Traditional and classical performers, dancers and musicians, who are skillful in their roles, become self-directing after long-term learning and practising in imitating an approach from the master who is typically a former actor. According to Brandon (1993:5), a traditional Thai musician with basically know and be skilled in approximately 200-300 songs before accompanying a Thai dance-drama performance. Similarly, Indian *kathakali* performers have to experience 600 hand gestures as well as the movements appropriate to the expression of various emotions. Since they perform in the same roles or type of characters, extensive training is essential; on the other hand, the Western ideas of a scene rehearsal and direction from the specific outside vision of a director are unnecessary in their practice (Schechner and Appel, 1997: 5; and Brandon, 1993:6).

Contemporary artists, who are familiar with realistic acting styles and contemporary acting workshops, frequently employ their contemporary knowledge and skills when performing *likay*. They usually interpret characters, their objectives and their relations with other characters before 'acting' roles. On the other hand, traditional acting styles are, to a certain degree, different from what they once were. The *likay* performing style is typically understood as 'performing', not 'acting'. Song and dance performances demonstrate more graceful movements and refinements than trying to 'act' or 'being' a character. Otherwise stated, *likay* characters are stock characters: *phra ek*, *nang ek*, *itcha*, *kong* and *chok*, which performers are needless to interpret deeply these characters' efforts to achieve the meanings of dialogues and scenes. However, contemporary *likay* performances require both 'performing' and 'acting' be united, as this makes for better communication with audiences. This implies that a contemporary actor should learn and practise a form of *likay* performing technique that is accompanied by modern theatrical acting skills. For example, Pichet Klunchun has

expressed that he learned more about acting from the Dramatic Arts Department after attending and participating in a Thai classical dance class in the Fine Arts Department, because he thought that graceful movement alone was insufficient to fully communicate messages to contemporary audiences (Petchnamlai, 2009). In the same way, as contemporary stage performers, most Makhampom *likay* actors have learned to adjust their bodies and expressions to suit *likay* presentations. Apart from these methods of practising *likay*, Makhampom *likay* performers have had a chance to gain more experience in performing minor productions that are seen as full-scale dress rehearsals, before attending their troupe's masterpieces.

I have got involved as an actress in the following minor productions of Makhampom's contemporary *likay*. My own experience can be explained as reflexive ethnography in that my own personal knowledge and understanding become important, primarily in how they illuminate the other factors under study (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). Although born in Bangkok, I had opportunities to experience popular cultural events outside the city and popular performance has become my aesthetic preference. Thai *lukthung* music, traditional Thai music, folk music, *lamtad*, and *likay* are sources of entertainments I watched, listened to, and practised in my childhood. My favourite scenes of the *phra ek* (hero) and the *nang ek* (heroine) flirting with each other in televised soap operas can also be seen in *likay* repertoire. More to the point, beautiful *likay* make-up and costumes greatly attracted me to go to many *likay* performances.

My passion and inspiration for *likay* performance have strongly influenced my development both as actress and academic. Not only has my academic knowledge of *likay* increased, but also I have had a chance to perform *likay* at least ten times while writing in my Master's thesis in 2000-2001. I travelled, lived and performed both in Bangkok and the provinces with various professional *likay* troupes, such as Noparat Maihom Troupe and Chumpol Chomngam Troupe. These opportunities enabled me to gain valuable experience from learning, practising, and performing in a real locality. Professional *likay* performers' personal backgrounds and their ways of living and performing are also told as part of the study and helped me understand their performing praxis and relationship with the audience and how to maintain such a rapport. However, my artistic standpoint towards *likay* became more contemporary after having become involved as an audience member in the *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth*, the first masterpiece performance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* in 2001,

and finally becoming the troupe's *likay* actress. I started performing the first contemporary *likay* production with Makhampom, named *Suek Muang Prae*, in 2003, and have continually developed my skills as well as perception in making a contemporary *likay* production since then.

#### 4. Makhampom *Likay* Minor Productions

Performing for entertainment as its original function, contemporary *likay* of Makhampom Theatre Troupe have been hired by a number of organizers to perform *likay* according to the events' theme. *The Winner*, for example, was an easily adaptable plot, performed both in Thai and English versions. This plot about the selection of a partner in marriage was performed in two adaptations. The first presented a story of a prince who finds a partner while the second version involved a princess who wants to find the best man to be her spouse.

The story similar to that of Cinderella presented the deserved outcome of being a virtuous woman in marrying a prince, it was adapted from a typical *likay* plot, and was performed in a Loi krathong Festival<sup>129</sup> (2007) at Phukhao Thong (The Golden Mountain) and Thai Food Festival (2007) at Rachaprasong Road. A step-daughter named Salika<sup>130</sup> is intimidated by her step-mother and an ugly daughter, named Nok-Eiang<sup>131</sup> and Nok-Air<sup>132</sup> respectively. Salika lives her life as a slave of this mother and daughter until one day a prince comes to this house, looking for a righteous woman to be his wife. In this case, Salika and Nok Air have to demonstrate their ideas how to create the best *krathong* for the prince. Nok Air negligently exhibits the quickest and easiest way of making *krathong* by using Styrofoam as a vessel and synthetic petals of

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<sup>129</sup> *Loi krathong* is a festival celebrated annually throughout Thailand. It takes place on a night of full moon of the 12<sup>th</sup> month in the traditional Thai lunar calendar, which is frequently in November, when it is hide tide. *Loi* literally means to float and *krathong* is a lotus-shaped vessel which can float on water. Originally, the *krathong* was made of banana leaves or the layers of the trunk of a banana tree with plaited banana leaves in the lotus blossom shape. Modern *krathong* are more often made of Styrofoam. In this event, individuals pay tribute to the river's goddess called Pra Mae Khongkha, make wishes and hope that bad fortune will be removed through the ceremony; so a *krathong* usually contains betel nuts, flowers, joss sticks, candles, coins, strands of hair and a clipped nail.

<sup>130</sup> a kind of bird which has a beautiful voice

<sup>131</sup> a black bird which always accompanies by a water buffalo in a rice field

<sup>132</sup> a parody of Thai budget airline named Nok Air airline



lotus blossom decorating that receptacle. By contrast, Salika embellishes her *krathong* with a layer formed of the trunk of the banana plant and plaited banana leaves, thus utilising environmentally friendly materials, and in this way she wins the competition. Although the typical plot of competing in love in melodramatic style is used in conventional *likay*, it was borrowed as the main plot in this minor contemporary *likay* production, but adapted by Makhampom to send a message of environmental awareness. This ‘call-to-mind’ issue was frequently seen in a Makhampom *likay* repertoire. This production, performed at Phukhao Thong (The Golden Mountain), was full of a temple fair or carnival atmosphere. Actors performed in a very entertaining way for the target audiences, who were familiar with conventional *likay*. Audience participation was clearly seen in this production since I, playing the role of Nok Air, the villainess, talked directly to the audience and asked them to take a side. Their laughter, applause and shouts, after being asked, were signs of reaction and participation. Additionally, during my scene, one audience member gave me rewards, a can of Coca-Cola and 20 baht cash (40 pence), since he appreciated my histrionic acting.

There was an extremely different atmosphere when we performed the same story at International Food Festival near Rachaprasong Road. The audience here was composed of sponsors, organisers and cultured participants, and there was little laughter or involvement. This event was set up for promoting Thai foods for foreign tourists and international foods for Thai people, so the *likay* performance was merely seen as an additional attraction. Some office-workers walked past and took a glimpse; they seemed embarrassed to take a seat and enjoy this popular entertainment since it has become somewhat devalued in urban Thai society. A detail of the contest in the story was changed to suit the event theme: in this food festival at Rachaprasong, the *krathong*-making contest was changed into a competent-housewife contest between Salika and Nok Air; they have to demonstrate the best way to cook. Nok Air presented her cooking method by buying all instant and readymade foods from Tesco Lotus (a brand of Tesco in Thailand), and then put everything in a microwave. Salika, on the other hand, used an organic water plant and a homemade chilli-paste as the main ingredients with the result that she won the contest and finally lived her life happily ever after with the prince.

The plot for the other two productions of *The Winner* was changed. The main character selecting a partner for marriage changed from a prince to a princess. She set up a competition and made an announcement inviting men to participate. As the princess in

the performance, I invited all good men to attend this competition. In the first performance, presented at the Thai Bank Public Relations Association party in 2007, the contest was between three bank officials, whose manners were friendly, aggressive and tricky; the winner was the one with a friendly manner. With a temple fair as a party theme, set in the grand ballroom of Erawan, a five-star hotel in Bangkok, the host considered the *likay* performance as an entertainment to add to the theme; the performance was not considered as a highlight. The organisers put our performance as the final show in the temple fair series, by which time some participants were sleepy, some were exhausted, and some were drunk, so less than one fourth of all participants watched our *likay* performance. We were unable to gain the participation that the performance needed.

The next performance of the same plot was performed at the Royal Cliff Hotel, Pattaya, for a party of International Doctors in 2008. The characters of various kinds of doctors were presented: Dr. Cut (a plastic surgeon), Dr. Active Bird (a urethra doctor), and Dr. Look<sup>133</sup> (a fortune teller). Dr. Active Bird was the winner in the contest because this conference composed of urethra doctors. We performed in English and it was successful since three real doctors joined us on a stage and this made all audience members pay attention to the performance. However, some audiences who did not know about Makhampom *likay* Troupe, whose cast members are relatively skilled in English, were surprised when the characters were able to speak English in the performance. This is simply because, according to their attitudes, *likay* artists are typically stigmatised and seen as uneducated people or *chaobaan* who have few chances to study at a high level, and they are not able to use English. Another experience of being discriminated against happened on a departure flight from Thailand to Japan of the Makhampom *likay* team in 2008. Airline ground staff members spoke discourteously to us, according to their low opinion of us as folk artists. They gave excessive advice and guidance on how to sit properly on a plane, and how to behave on arrival in Japan. They did not know that most of the Makhampom *likay* members regularly perform overseas and have visited many countries, and are familiar with travelling and staying in a foreign country. Explicitly, these stages of *likay* performance provided the actors not only with performance experience *per se*, but also with understanding of audiences' perspectives

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<sup>133</sup> Dr. Look is not a doctor but in Thai we call a fortune teller a '*mo doo*'. The word '*mo*' is used to refer to a doctor or an expert.

towards *likay* form in terms of aesthetic judgement towards the Thai contemporary context, whereby the popular folk style of *likay* is to some extent viewed as a symbol of lowbrow culture.

The following analysis is of my own production, which was created in 2006, in cooperation with my students, fellows and *likay* masters. This university-level *likay* was constructed with the intention to develop another contemporary form of *likay* production that was concerned with the reinterpretation of both artistic style and socio-cultural contextualisation. I call this production ‘a chip off the old block’ from Makhampom’s contemporary *likay*, since it was mainly influenced by Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* approach.

### **5. *I Have Always Loved You: Impetus from Makhampom Likay***

This production is an example of my experience of scripting, directing and organising a contemporary *likay* on my own rather than only performing with Makhampom Theatre Troupe. In 2006, I scripted and directed a *likay* performance named *Chan Rak Thoe Samoe Ma Took Natee* (I Have Always Loved You), performed by the students of the Performing Arts Department, Chulalongkorn University as well as amateur performers. This university *likay* troupe names ‘*Likay Noom Sao Chao Mahalai*’ (The University Youngster *Likay* Group). Its first and foremost *likay* project was contributed as part of the Thai Health Promotion Foundation’s Sekseu Sekfan Peu Wan Prung project<sup>134</sup> to promote activities among the young through the performing arts, and to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 6 October 1976, Student Massacre.<sup>135</sup> This performance provided an opportunity for graduates and undergraduates to demonstrate their courage and curiosity to know and perform a traditional popular form. These students were familiar with Western-based performance exercises, but had little knowledge about *likay* performance. This would introduce something new: a living folk popular theatre in

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<sup>134</sup>The term literally means to dream up good performing arts for a better tomorrow. This project was organised by the Department of Speech Communication and Performing arts Chulalongkorn University.

<sup>135</sup>In the incident, students from various universities were demonstrating against the return to Thailand of Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachon, a former right-wing military ruler after he was banished from the country in The Student Uprising event in 1973. The students were labeled as the left-wing activists and had tendency be a communist. This accusation led to a crackdown between students and outraged paramilitary and armed-force troops. Many students were attacked and killed.

a contemporary style. Furthermore, it was a challenging project to recruit young, middle class urbanities to perform *likay*, which for them was considered not only an out-of-date theatre form, but also only appreciate for unsophisticated actors and audiences. However, the performers in this project showed no signs of embarrassment when performing for their peers, since they considered it an opportunity to show another talent and grasp a chance to practice *likay* in the university. I also invited a child *likay* troupe under Khru Jarechai Lertporn, a *likay* master, to join this performance.

Based on a poem of the same name, by Associate Professor Tiran-an Anawaj-siriwong, who arranged the poetry of different writers, especially Naowarat Pongpaiboon, a National Artist in Literature in 1993, I adapted *Chan Rak Teau Sameu Ma Took Natee* (I Have Always Loved You) to a *likay* verse-style script to fit in a *likay* performance. The original tragic-political-satire story with the additional melodramatic sentiment and comedic flavour, which focused on the 1976 Student Massacre, was presented through the love of a working class student for a wealthy young woman and his compatriots. The heroine, Sai (sand) is from a well-to-do family, while the hero, Mek (sky), is the son of labourers. He attends politic activities as a head of protesters for democracy, expelling a former leader of the military dictatorship. Sai supports his demonstration but her parents strongly prohibit her from joining in the protest. Sai does not realise that Mek loves her, and only discovers this from a letter from his father after his death in the event. In my *likay* version, following the original plot, I adjusted the characters' names, lives, and their activities to suit *likay* style: named Phandin (earth-world), the hero learns martial arts with a sage in a forest and the heroine, named Piengfah (as the sky), is a member of the nobility. They meet in a fighting competition which leads to love at first sight. However, their love is taboo since the hero is the son of farmers. Phandin dies in a civil war, when the outraged military corruptly attempt to overthrow the state.

My production employed a great number of conventional *likay* elements. Actresses started the repertoire with *homrong* motifs: *ram tawai mue*, a prelude dance that paid tribute to the spirits of *likay* masters. Afterward, a child *likay*, impersonated by a female Indian, solo danced *ok khaek*. The longrong started when Piengfah's parents, who played a millionaire governor and his wife, appeared in the first *nha phat*. I intended to satirise politicians who are selfish and dishonourable by making the heroine's middle-class parents people who would not allow their daughter to attend a political protest. In this scene, Piengfah's mother sang *ranikloeng* to show off her luxurious brand-name

handbags. I was inspired by the ‘women scene’ in *Likay Apiwat*, one of Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* (details will be discussed in Chapter 6), to compose this verse:

ฉันนั้นเป็นภริยา	ระดับแนวหน้ามั่งคั่ง
มีลูกน้อยร้อยซั้	ชื่อเสียงคังก็ก้อง
ใช้แต่สินค้าโก้เก๋	ทั้งเวochaเซ่กุชชี
นี่พร้าด้าอามานี่	แบลลี่ยลยส์วิตตอง
มีเงินมีทองเต็มท้องพระโรง	แต่ไม่เคยโกงทุจริต
แต่เรื่องผูกขาดฉันมีสิทธิ	ในธุรกิจพี่น้อง
ร่วมมือร่วมใจใช้อำนาจ	เพิ่มปริมาณการเงินทอง

*I am a wife of the first-class millionaire.*

*I have a celebrity-beautiful daughter.*

*I use only luxurious brand-named handbags- Versace, Gucci,  
Prada, Armani, Bally, Louis Vuitton.*

*Although our treasury is full of money, we have never been corrupted.*

*We only monopolise the market and promote our cousin’s businesses.*

*We only abuse official functions to gain more and more money.*

Since comedy is one of the most important elements of *likay* performance, I added two characters as the heroine’s servants, to play clown roles. At the first meeting of Piengfah and Phandin, two female servants of Piengfah and one unwise friend of Phandin flirt by singing and dancing *lukthung* songs in a comedic style that made this scene the most hilarious of the performance. After, Piengfah and Phandin start singing songs about their hope that their country will remain a democracy. They fall in love but keep this feeling secret before parting.

During the rehearsal of *I Have Always Loved You*, I invited *likay* masters Wanna Sithomhuan, and Jaraechai Lertporn, as well as their musicians, to help improve students’ dancing and singing skills with a live *piphat* music ensemble. As a director, however, I frequently negotiated with Lertporn and Sithomhual for the use or omission of their guidance. Moreover, professional-child-*likay* performers were also interspersed in a repertoire for a weapon-dance demonstration that was presented in a fighting scene, which further fascinated the audience. The dialogue and songs in the repertoire were scripted, instead of entirely improvised, as they would have been with professional *likay*

performers. This made it easier for the young *likay* apprentices to perform confidently and also shortened the play's running time to an hour.

Since improvisation was the troupe's main limitation, I focused more on the use of jests and jokes. A sense of humour and a focus on up-to-date situations that were familiar to middle-class students were combined with bawdy humour. This combination was concocted in an effort to retain *likay* aesthetics and contemporary elements.



**Photograph 22:** '*Likay Noom Sao Chao Mahalai*' (The University Youngster *Likay* Group) including graduates, undergraduates and child *likay* actors performed *Chan Rak Teau Sameu Ma Took Natee* (I Have Always Loved You) in 2006. (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Another point worth noting was the big gap between students and *likay* teachers, as these two groups of people rarely came into contact with each other. When they first met, the professional *likay* team was abashed and sat on a ground floor, instead of sitting on the chairs provided, since they were convinced that they were uneducated, and low-class people who deserved to sit on the floor, in keeping with Thai attitudes about hierarchy. However, their anxiousness was relieved when the students also sat on the floor and respectfully greeted them. They also had lunch together on the floor, and this made the *likay* teachers more comfortable and amiable. Two months after its first, successful performance at Chulalongkorn University, The *Likay Noom Sao Chao Mahalai* Troupe was invited to perform again at the public theatre house of the Musical

Art Centre, Bangkok Bank in October 2006. The audience members at this second performance were ‘real’ fans of conventional *likay* and other kinds of traditional Thai performances. They did not expect much of the performers’ skills, since the brochure for the performance announced that the actors were students and amateur artists. However, the audience admired the plotline and scene sequence which were precise, coherent and comprehensible.

In terms of performance interaction, the audience members at conventional *likay* are allowed to talk together at any time during performances. Therefore, they usually comment on and discuss performances or performers during shows<sup>136</sup>. On the other hand, discussion of contemporary *likay* is usually conducted both formally and informally after performances, as Susan Bennett has pointed out: “...the non-traditional theatre practice tends to stress the importance of the immediate post-production talk” (1997: 164). Such discussion is usually underlined by pedantic and enlightening concerns. The post-talks at The *Likay* Noom Sao Chao Mahalai Troupe’s two performances lasted about one hour each and saw scholars, artists and social critics giving almost solely positive comments on the amateur actors’ proficiency in depicting history-based stories in a *likay* repertoire. However, these experts also recommended that the performers keep practising *likay* and search for other opportunities to perform regularly, in order to strengthen their singing and dancing skills, which were apparently the weak points of their performances.

Another minor demonstration of the Makhampom *likay* team was the introduction of the Makhampom *likay* Academy School (MLAS), which started in 2009. This school is another effort to foster self-learning and training in various kinds of basic *likay* skills, teaching amateur actors to reflect their enthusiasm in their own unique contemporary *likay* projects. MLAS widely opens its doors to everyone who is interested in *likay*. Members of Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* team, such as Boonsueb Phanpraserd and Bhumini Dhanaketpisarn<sup>137</sup>, initiated and run the programme.

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<sup>136</sup>They are likely to judge the good or bad of a performance and personal life of actors as well as their performing skills during a performance.

<sup>137</sup>Boonsueb Phanpraserd, a medical technologist, performed *Likay Apiwat* (2001), *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006) and *Likay Akaoni* (2009-2010), while Bhumini Dhanaketpisarn, an electrical engineer, performed only the former two productions.

## 6. Makhampom *Likay* Academy School (MLAS)

In terms of current Makhampom *likay* progress, the *Likay* Academy School was started in September 2009 by Makhampom members, including myself, to systematically provide a *likay* training course to interested theatre practitioners. MLAS members who are adept in dancing, singing or the playing of musical instruments serve as trainers, teaching skills to others, though their roles change from learner to facilitator consistently. The distinction between Makhampom's contemporary *likay*, as performed by Pradit Prasatthong and as performed by MLAS, is the script. The former usually scripts or reinterprets stories in the context of social issues or political satire, whereas the latter adopts melodramatic plots from conventional *likay* and tries to perform them in the style of conventional *likay*. MLAS' focus is mainly on the use of archetypal *likay* performing skills in conventional *likay* stories. However, the performers at MLAS are limited in their ability to improvise verses and rhymes, since they have no personal rhyme collections and little chance to perform regularly.

The inauguration of MLAS' productions occurred at the performances at the OTOP Festival (One District, One Product) in April 2010, at the heart of Bangkok's most luxurious shopping areas, the Siam Paragon and Central World, which ran for seven consecutive nights. We invited one or two professional *likay* artists to join our performance each night. Our free-of-charge, outdoor event was, to some degree, successful in drawing a random audience of passersby or those just leaving work. Some sellers at the festival frequently rewarded us with snacks, nibbles and drinks and also asked to take pictures with us when we walked past. This demonstrates that *likay* performance still has its own charismatic, popular appeal to Thai audiences. Unlike other, unreachable superstars, *likay* artists, who are *silapin chaobaan* (populist artists), seem accessible to audience members; they are able to talk casually.

MLAS members have personal passion and, in performing *likay*, are more focused on the opportunity to gain experience than they are concerned with income, since all have full-time jobs. Since MLAS' troupe size is quite small and since we are only an amateur *likay* troupe, the wages for MLAS actors are insignificant, compared to those of professional *likay* troupes. MLAS' wage is approximately 10,000-20,000 baht (200-400 pounds sterling) per night, while the wage for a typical professional troupe is around 50,000-100,000 baht (1,000-2,000 pounds sterling). MLAS tends to perform at themed



events or celebrations where employers and audiences are less concerned with costumes, decorations and backdrops, which are not as extravagant as those of commercial troupes.

Normally, a team rehearses only once or twice before performing. Verses, rhymes and songs are prepared and shared in a group, as are gags and sequences. However, due to time limitations on practises, which exist because the majority of performers work full-time jobs, basic dancing and singing skills seem to have gradually degraded. In the last ten years, Makhampom *likay* members went regularly to professional *likay* performances as a *likay* fan club, but this activity has declined and led to members' skills falling below a standard level. Despite the fact that Makhampom *likay* is considered a contemporary style, the essence and basic technical performance of *likay* play vital roles in the group's praxis, in terms of *likay* contemporarisation. Therefore, in-house training on basic elements and outdoor practise are still encouraged for *likay* practitioners. Richard Barber (Interview, 2010) has pointed out that practicing is crucial, as passion and eagerness alone are not enough. However, most volunteers tend to approach the genre superficially, attracted by its excitement, rather than by its artistic essence. This point, however, is currently the main concern of all members, who tend to make improvements.

## **Conclusion: The State of Contemporary *Likay***

Contemporary *likay* productions reflect both new perspectives on theatre making and Thai aesthetics that challenge Thai socio-cultural traditions and contemporary Thai society. Contemporary *likay* has become part of an exercise in the revitalisation of Thai tradition.

Contemporary *likay* is an experimental work of contemporary troupes who are interested in making tradition-based contemporary performances. Both Thai literary works and foreign play scripts are reinterpreted to suit current situations or dramaturgical aims. Makhampom contemporary *likay* praxis, in particular, demonstrates a combination of popular theatre forms and modern stage styles. This amalgamation is seen as the nexus between the middleclass and the lower class and between contemporary theatre and popular (or populist) theatre (Barber, Interview 2010). In

contemporary *likay* performances, although notions of cultural ‘authenticity’ are not necessary, the congruence and compatibility of elements is required and must be combined with solid design. Once the Western and foreign motifs associated with classical genres signified the modernity of the middle class and elite circles. This has changed, as the use or mixture of folk and popular theatrical elements with Western theatrical elements has made classical genres, to some extent, more contemporary.

The contemporarisation of *likay* practice reflects Makhampom’s use of a popular and populist theatrical form to present a progressive theme and to challenge a neo-traditional trend and new middle class audiences and culturists. This ideological idea and practice is further advanced by the troupe members various ways of regarding dramaturgical aims and artistic adeptness. The next chapter investigates the use of both theoretical and practical approaches to presenting the underlying theoretical and practical praxis of Makhampom contemporary *likay*. Background to the development and transformation of Makhampom’s *likay*, as well as to Makhampom’s theatrical aesthetics, techniques, training processes, and current state, will be principally embraced. At this point, I wish to scrutinise Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* major performances, from its beginning to the present (2001-2010). To do this, I will focus on the following topics: the formation of ideas, an experimental *likay* dramaturgy, the scriptwriting process and the process of making a performance. A reflexive ethnographical method, as well as in-depth interviews and performance analyses, will be used.

## Chapter 6

### Makhampom's Contemporary *Likay* Praxis and Major Productions

Makhampom's contemporary *likay* productions have been the result of 'cultural praxis', not just 'cultural exoticism', a term that has only superficial appeal. Balme (1995: 5) suggests that exoticism involves the use of indigenous culture without regard to original cultural semantics. The masterpieces of contemporary *likay* produced by Makhampom from 2001-2010 developed within a cultural frame of reference and exemplified the coalescence and crystallisation of traditional and contemporary forms in the creative process. For this reason, the troupe's productions were precisely understood and appreciated by a wide range of audiences that included the general populace, the bourgeoisie, educators, and aristocrats. Makhampom's *likay* productions were hybrid performances that featured narratives and methods that bridged the gap between different theatre genres, as well as diverse class-tastes, and moved beyond the boundaries of the aesthetic realm.

The Makhampom troupe's performances were intently focused on both truly political content and context, on the one hand, and local and global social concerns, on the other. Having participated in these performances as an audience member at *Likay Apiwat* (2001); as an actress in *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003-2004), *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006), *Naga Wong* (2005-2006), and *The Message* (2007-2008); and as a staff member in *Likay Akaoni* (2009), I will discuss the troupe's conceptual framework and the practical principles it employed in each production. I will also explore the way in which Makhampom's performance praxis reflects the troupe's ethnography. Makhampom's contemporary *likay* masterpieces can be divided into two types of productions, namely, socio-political-based and intercultural-based.

#### 1. Socio-Political-Based Productions

Contemporary popular performances are democratic, proletarian, and politically progressive (Schechter 2003: 3), as clearly evidenced by the political-based productions

of Makhampom's contemporary *likay*, which illustrate Thailand's democratic development and the numerous factors that have driven it, including corruption, demoralisation, and democratic awareness. Three of the troupe's socio-political-based contemporary *likay* productions are *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001); *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003); and *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006).

### **1.1 *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth***

The first large-scale performance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* was performed in February 2001, in the one hundred years ceremony of Pridi Banomyong, the Thai former Prime Minister, Statesman and the Father of Thai democracy. The event was entitled *Likay Apiwat: Pridi Ayothaya's Centenary*, and the performance was entitled *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth*. The story is based on the regime change in 1932, from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. This production, performed at the Suan Pakkard (Cabbage Garden) Palace, the historical palace building that has been transformed into a museum and cultural centre, also celebrated the Makhampom troupe's twentieth anniversary. It was later restaged in the United States of America in the same year. Pradit recounts that Anant Nakkhong, a lecturer-composer-musician, recommended him to use a *likay*-ready script entitled *Phrachao Chang Phueak* (The White Elephant God-King) to perform in this celebration. But Pradit needed to create an original script which related to Pridi's characteristics and made reference to his progressive idea of 'dare to change' and 'being very honest and loyal, but never surrendering to the obstacles in doing a good thing' (Thamaphrueksa, 2001: 63-64). So, *Likay Apiwat* positively referred to Pridi's great contribution to democracy in Thailand, reflecting his manner of "revolutionary consciousness and Buddhist reformism" (Barber, 2007: 266).

*Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* was jointly organised by The Pridi Banomyong Foundation and Makhampom Theatre Troupe. *Likay Apiwat* provided Makhampom with an opportunity to use the *likay* form as a challenging vehicle for the promotion of a neo-traditionalist work in a contemporary context. The significance of using a popular entertainment form to address the evolution of democracy in Thailand was implicit in the production's content and was viewed as highly relevant to common people. In general, popular theatre consists of a 'festive style' and a 'revolutionary perspective', thus playing a crucial role in social change (Orenstein, 1998: 6).

Makhampom's contemporary *likay* adopt a 'revolutionary perspective' by daring to employ contemporary texts, content, and dramaturgy and to impart a spirit of festivity through use of the *likay* form. Furthermore, Makhampom's selection of the Suan Pakkard grounds as a venue for staging its productions not only provided an ideal ambience, but also symbolically indicated that *likay* can be performed in regal spaces (Sapakhun, Interview 2010). Creating a temple fair atmosphere in the beautiful scenery of the Suan Pakkard palace allowed for the cross-aesthetic expression of court ceremonies and a *chaobaan* festival atmosphere.

As stated in Chapter 5, the paradoxical amalgamation of feudal literature and myth, the reinterpretation of content within the contemporary context, and the popular theatre characteristics were all seen in this production. The signature elements of conventional *likay* are commonly used in Makhampom's contemporary *likay* repertoire, such as *ok khaek* introduction, *ranikloeng* structures, *piphat* music ensemble, the standard character roles, and melodramatic plots. These elements correspondingly go along with contemporary content and designs. The multi-layered performance can be seen in the collaboration of members from the guest cast and the Makhampom's cast. Firstly, a couple of the famous professional *likay* artists, such as Dhepbancha Naksiri and Sakuna Rungrueang, Suthirach Wongthewan and Jingreed-Khao Wongthewan, were invited to perform a short scene, present brief dialogues, or sing and dance in short interlude. Secondly, Dhebsiri Suksopa, a renowned Thai painter and poet, and Sulak Sivaraksa, a great Thai scholar and historian were invited to perform *ok khaek*, the prelude dance in Indian or Malaysian style, in the different shows. Both of them wore pseudo-Indo-Arabic costumes and sang the welcome song with the chorus from backstage. This strategy of using a variety of artists, serving these interlude shows as 'appetiser' to attract a great number of mixed audience: scholars, intelligentsia, NGOs, progressive middle class, contemporary theatre patrons, some former nobility, and *likay* fans to attend and to create an enjoyable and boisterous atmosphere which fits well to with *likay* performance.

Based on the true story of the loss of the absolute monarchical regime, the symbolic and stylistic motifs, which are legitimately employed in *likay*, were significantly used in this performance rather than using the realistic style. In one of the most important scenes when the King lost his absolute power, the nightmare of the battle between the King himself and the *krut* (garuda) was a stylistic portrayal. The *phrakan*, the King's majestic

weapon, was used as a metaphor for the power of the King. After the stylised movement of the stick fighting, which has been formalised in *likay*, and *phrakan* was given to Luang Pradit (the portrayal of Pridi Banomyong), it represented the transfer of power from the absolute monarchy to the constitutional monarchy (Barber, 2007: 271). Although the dramaturgical theme implied that ‘if we refuse to adapt, we might become extinct eventually’, the librettos should be seen as symbolic and metaphoric since the story and some characters clearly refer to real persons in Thai history, particularly the royal family and nobility.

In terms of a liberal interpretation and discussion as one of contemporary approaches, Prasatthong usually tries not to ‘end’ or conclude a performance, and he to some degree adds ‘critiques’ to a protagonist’s behaviour and ‘reasons’ behind those actions. This scene, therefore, deliberately provided a diversity of public reactions to this radical change of the ruling system which made by Luang Pradit and his fellows. Nonetheless, Prasatthong exploited the verse in *ranikloeng* song to indicate Luang Pradit (Pridi)’s responsiveness through the great change he has done:

...ไม่เคยไม่คิดเสียใจ	ที่ทำลงไปครั้งนั้น
จะเกิดคุณอนันต์	หรือโทษมหันต์ต่อแผ่นดิน
ที่คิดตะแบงแปลงเปลี่ยน	เหมือนเริ่มเขียนหน้าใหม่
ประวัติศาสตร์จารึกไว้	ไม่เสียใจทั้งสิ้น
คนข้างหลังจะประนาม	หยาบหยามว่าเปลี่ยนฟ้า
หรือพลิกพื้นพิภพ	ไม่เกรงใครมาดูหมิ่น
(ลง) ขอมแม่ถูกตราหน้า	ว่าเปลี่ยนฟ้าแปรดิน

*I have never felt unsorry for what I have done.  
No matter whether it benefited or seriously affected the country.  
However, I admit that I was condemned as the person  
who caused the historical transformation.  
However, I admit to being condemned as the person  
who changed the earth and the sky*

(Author’s translation)

Drawn from the socio-political and socio-economic issues, the conflict scene between Luang Pradit and the foreign diplomats symbolically represented the cultural predominance of those powerful countries over Thailand, both in the past and present time. Firstly, the Japanese delegates in *kabuki*-mocking costumes sang a *ranikloeng* song and spoke a monologue to parody the modern presence of Japanese culture in Thai society (Barber, 2007: 268). In the following scene, the Western representative in the Victorian costume expressed the superiority of the West over Thailand by sitting beside the King on the throne bench: this is prohibited in Thai royal custom and it is adopted to use in *likay* performance as well. This prohibition is ignored for the joke character when he or she makes a funny scene. The Western representative also proudly demonstrated Western culture by singing a *ranikloeng* in an opera style. These two scenes ironically reflected the need to reform Thai society to be equal amongst other dominant states, but instil a nationalist sensibility.



**Photograph 23:** The Western representatives are in Victorian costumes (left) while characters of Thai courtiers wear *likay songkhrueang* (elaborate) styles (right) in *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

The satire of the extravagant life style of the high class was presented in a quarrel scene of the female characters, offering the sense of both a ‘black comedy’ and ‘slapstick’, offering satiric song, sang along with the quick-beat tempo of *piphat* ensemble and comical movement. The two conservative women, Chamchoi and Rachsamee-Kaekai, wives of the court’s consuls, presented their lifestyles as upper-class people, recognised as so-called ‘hi-so’ (a high social class or a high society) in Thai discourse. Their splendid dresses and jewellery mocked the ‘hi-so’ lifestyle and reflected their modern Western materialism. Lyrics of the *ranikloeng* song, translated by Barber (2007: 269-270) include the following lines:

*If you want to be hi-so,  
You need to lift your neck and face like this, (with gesture)  
You need to wear Versace to look very glamorous,  
And carry a Louis Vuitton bag.  
You need to wear a Rolex to look modern,  
And drive a big Benz to feel supreme.  
Spray Gucci perfume, strong scent and expensive like gold,  
And wear Benetton shoes.*

Although the ‘hi-so’ scene must be seen in the context of the political radical change in Thailand in 1932, this contemporary discourse and practice was licensed to be used in the *likay* repertoire. Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* is able to blend these two contexts of contemporary and popular tastes. Ironically, the costumes of these female characters demonstrated an intentional paradox. While the two court women, Chamchoi and Rachsamee-Kaekai, who symbolised the conservative ideology of court heritage, wore the glamorous ball-style gowns, the other two women, Permsook and Laor, wives of the advocates of the democratic coup, suggested progressive thinking, wearing Thai traditional costumes, which signified their Thai identity. This may suggest that democratic regime is not representative of westernisation or socio-cultural colonisation; on the other hand, the conservative countenance may not represent a Thai identity.



**Photograph 24:** The two court women (two on the left) wear glamorous ball-style gowns, while the progressive woman wears Thai traditional costume in *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)



## 1.2 *Suek Mueang Prae*: Political Parody

*Suek Mueang Prae*, a parody of Thai politicians that was based on a very well-known piece of Thai literature, *Phu Chana Sibtid*<sup>138</sup> (The Conqueror of Ten Directions), was a contemporary *likay* project that was performed at the second Bangkok Theatre Festival (BTF) in 2003 and at The National Theatre of Thailand in 2004. I was invited to play Mangtra's wife, Nantavadi, at the BTF performance<sup>139</sup>, which was held at Buddha Smakom (the Buddhist Association). At the performance staged at the Thailand National Theatre, I played Atetaya, a royal niece of Mueang Prae royalty.<sup>140</sup>

Mangtra, king of Mueang Tong-U (ancient Burma), sends Chadej, his adjutant, to be a spy in Mueang Tong-U's adversary, Mueang Prae (ancient Mon). Chadej changes his name to Mangcha-ngai, a Mon name, and embarks on his mission. Phrachao Prae, king of Mueang Prae, discovers Mangcha-ngai's mission but is not angry. He offers Mangcha-ngai the opportunity to be lord chamberlain of Mueang Prae and to not return to Mueang Tong-U. Mangtra assumes that Mangcha-ngai has betrayed him, so he moves troops to Mueang Prae, to test Mangcha-ngai's loyalty. Mangcha-ngai refuses to fight Mangtra, because he is still faithful to Mueang Tong-U. Mangtra finally beats Phrachao Prae. Phrachao Prae persuades Mangtra to be his ally by asking him to band

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<sup>138</sup> This story was composed by Jacob, a pen name of Chot Phraephan, one of Thai renowned novelist in 1932. The story is about Chadej, a Burmese charming hero who is the great warrior and licentious man. He marries to Chantra, a princess of Mueang Tong-U and Kusuma, a princess of Mueang Prae, and he finally comes to be the king of Mueang Tong-U. Kru Boonlert Najphinij, a *likay* master composed *Suek Mueang Prae*, a war between Mueang Tong-U and Mueang Prae in a *likay* version. Pradit Prasatthong adapted and borrowed some verses from Najphinij's version to his contemporary *likay*.

<sup>139</sup> The first performance of *Suek Mueang Prae* in which I participated was at the second BTF. The play's characters wore costumes made in the *lakon panthang* style. As the wife of the king of Mueang Tong-U, my costumes were adapted from traditional female Burmese outfits. I wore an ornate tube top, covered with a short, see-through organdie jacket and a golden belt. I also wore an ornate, long-tailed sarong that was pleated in the front. Pradit Prasatthong played the role of King Mangtra himself and wore the same style of sarong, with long sleeves, and an ornate, V-shaped collared shirt. The other female characters in Mueang Prae wore colourful, form-fitting long sleeved blouses, with ornate shawls draped across both shoulders and sarongs with pleated fronts. Male characters wore sarongs shorter than Mangtra's.

<sup>140</sup> The costumes used in my second performance of *Suek Mueang Prae*, at the Thai National Theatre, were different from those used in Makhampom's performance at the BTF. Prasatthong adapted the male costumes from *Likay Faust* (2002) for use with Mueang Prae's male characters, which helped distinguish Makhampom from the professional *likay* troupe that performed after it. The male characters in Mueang Prae wore conventional ornate *likay* jackets and long-tailed sarongs, which distinguished them from the characters from Mueang Tong-U. Mangtra, king of Mueang Tong-U, wore the same style of costume as the male characters in typical professional *likay* troupes. All of the female characters in *Suek Mueang Prae* wore ornate Victorian gowns and diamond crowns.

together and thereby bolster both Muang Tong-U's and Mueang Prae's power. Mangtra declines this offer and recalls his troops to Mueang Tong-U.

Prasatthong was inspired to write *Suek Mueang Prae* by the political situation in Thailand during the 2000s, when politicians can be bought from their previous small parties, becoming members of one big party, by the rich and powerful politician to win majority votes in the Thai parliament. 'Prae' literally means 'changeable' or 'varying', while Prasatthong has indicated that one can put the word 'Pak'<sup>141</sup>, which means either 'face' or 'party', after 'Prae' in the play's title, making it *Suek Mueang Prae (Pak)* and thus satirising politicians' disloyalty. Prasatthong himself took Mangtra's role, adding lines for Mangtra in the last scene, where Mangtra blames Phrachao Prae for his craftiness to keep Chadej with him, and Mangtra refuses to unite with Mueang Prae, because he prefers to retain his dignity as a common king.

Satires and parodies of powerful political leaders were key elements of *likay* performances during the 2000s, as *likay* was recognised as a form of popular theatre that subverted social norms (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009: 51). In *Suek Mueang Prae (Pak)*, Phrachao Prae and his wife reminded audiences of Police Lieutenant Colonel Thaksin Shinawatra, the twenty-third Prime Minister of Thailand (2001-2006), and his wife. The play mocked the ex-Prime Minister's businesses and character, as well as his personality. Makhampom's performers satirised the 'real situation' surrounding Shinawatra by having conversations about him that were 'outside' of the story; eventually, one performer would comment that they should stop talking about politics, lest they be put in jail. All involved would then laugh and step back 'into' the story again.

Although most of the actors with whom I performed in *Suek Mueang Prae* lacked skill in such fundamental *likay* areas as singing and dancing (except Prasatthong and Rotjanasuksomboon who are very skilful in classical Thai dance), they presented strengths in alternative areas that are important in contemporary *likay*. Freezing, for instance, was used to stop the play's action while one character talked directly to the

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<sup>141</sup> Similarity in pronunciation but difference in written words, 'Pak' which can be added at the end of the title *Suek Mueang Prae* can be implied into two meanings: Pak (พักตร์) 'face' and Pak (พรรค) 'party' which can be ironically used in both terms. 'Prae Pak' (แปรรพักตร์) means 'be disloyal.' 'Prae Pak' (แปรรพรรค) means 'go over to another (politic) party.'

audience. Phrachao Prae's wife, Phrachao Pa, a very commanding character, interrupted a conversation amongst Chadej, Kusuma, Atetaya, and Sopinya, who were appearing before her and husband at court. When Chadej (Mangcha-ngai) showed his love for Kusuma, Phrachao Pa's daughter, Phrachao Pa, clapped her hands once, signalling to the lighting controllers that she needed a spotlight on her and that the main lights of the auditorium needed to be turned off. Meanwhile, all other characters froze. Phrachao Pa, who was downstage the audience of her plan and, when she had finished, clapped her hands once again and walked back to the bench on which she had been sitting. The spotlight faded, the main lights brightened, and the other characters continued to talk and act. This technique was used twice in the same scene and made the audience laugh and cheer.

<p>Please see DVD 2 clip 1 (duration: 3.55 minutes) An example of a freezing technique</p>
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The audience, who are fans of conventional *likay*, admired this scene because the 'in-and-out' technique used by Phrachao Pa is typical of conventional *likay* performances. Furthermore, the audience had high regard for the troupe's accurate blocking and sharp freezing actions, which were part of their rehearsals. One can see Makhampom's contemporary *likay* as employing '*likay* techniques' to which scripts and rehearsals are crucial.

I took different roles in the two performances of *Suek Mueang Prae* in which I participated. In my first performance, at Buddha Smakom, I played a female protagonist, or *nang ek*. In the second, at Thailand's National Theatre, I depicted a villainess, or *itcha*. Although *itcha* are labelled as a bad woman, according to the binary conception of female characters as passive/good or aggressive/bad (Diamond, 2006: 118), the character I inhabited exhibited masculine trickery by manipulating the masculine world that surrounded her. This character can also be seen as a radical woman who does not follow the social norms defined by patriarchy. Furthermore, I performed this role in a clownish style that made the character go from bad to not too wicked.

<p>Please see DVD 2 clip 2 (duration: 3.14 minutes) A clownish villainess exhibits sexual attack a hero</p>
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According to Carlin (1984: 179), the typical *itcha* is “portrayed as sexually loose, foul mouthed, unworthy of respect and takes the brunt of many sexually oriented jokes and actions. She is also pig-headed, outspoken and sexually explicit.” Carlin (ibid) also indicates that the standard *itcha* character is aggressive and openly boasts about her sexual seduction, attacking her male targets with great wildness. Hence, she is labelled a villainess, because she behaves in ways that are opposite to the ways in which (passive) good women behave. *Itcha* characterisation can be seen as sexual politics, whereby good women should not seduce men. Correspondingly, Modleski (1990: 94 as cited in Laughey, 2007: 105) suggests that in the division between ‘ideal woman’ (good mother) and ‘villainess’, the latter is completely hated by most women spectators, who view the villainess as a negative image of women. However, Seiter et al. (1989: 239 as cited in Hollows: 2000: 98) argue that, according to their interviews with many women, the villainess is loved and admired for her transgressions and independence. Additionally, in their research, Seiter et al. (ibid.) suggest that working-class women see the ideal woman, who is dependent on men, as objectionable. The *nang ek* in *likay* performances are a case in point. Their manners are refined and graceful. Many male characters fall in love with them, causing conflict. A *nang ek* always loves a *phra ek* at first sight, is easily seduced by a *phra ek*, and is willing to sleep with a *phra ek* without knowing his background, thus highlighting her passivity.

### **1.3 Mueang Ho Mok: A Likay Memorandum for Thirty Years of ‘Student Massacre’**

*Mueang Ho Mok* was played in October 2006, as a ‘Commemoration of Thirty Years of Student Massacre’ (6 October 1976). It also illustrated democracy’s journey in Thailand. Performed at the Small Auditorium, or Sriburapha Auditorium, at Thammasat University, the central place of that bloodbath, *Mueang Ho Mok* presented the story of undergraduate and postgraduate students who tried to help the grassroots democracy movement in Thailand, as well as working-class people, protect their rights to equality and freedom from corrupt politicians and dictatorial leaders. However, the story had no conclusion, because Thailand’s democracy was unstable. Prasatthong convinced the audience that not learning from the mistakes of the past would make it difficult to improve the Thai regime under the democratic system of the present and future.

*Mueang Ho Mok* exploited a great numbers of political symbols that represented the development of democracy in Thailand - for example, the Ho Mok<sup>142</sup> (wrap and hide) monument signifies Thailand's Constitution at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. While Thai citizens believe that constitutional democracy is the best system of government, they do not understand its significance or essence and (seem to) ignore opportunities to profoundly learn about or practice it. In *Mueang Ho Mok*, for instance, nobody knows what is inside the Ho Mok, but no one wants to open it. The immoral politicians and enemies of the people were symbolised by *yak* (demons) and *phisaj* (devils) in the story.

The names of the main characters in *Mueang Ho Mok* reflected their personalities and attitudes. The hero, Thai Tha Atham ('challenge to injustice'), and his three friends<sup>143</sup>, Det ('power'), San Khwan ('axe edge'), and Kamrai (profit), represented students and intellectuals. The two other main characters were a labourer, Kom Kiaw ('sickle'), and a peasant, Dam Kon ('hammer handle'). These six characters entered the staged and were introduced one-by-one by the narrator, who took a *khaek* role, as well. They sang *ranikloeng* songs that illustrated their characters in rhyme. They also held over-sized tools that symbolised their characters and attitudes. Thai Tha Atham held a lute, representing his joyful and liberal character, while Det held a sword that alluded to his rugged personality. San Khwan had a megaphone, indicating his panic-stricken and outspoken behaviour. Kamrai, as the scholar of the group, held a book covered with a dove and an olive branch. Kom Kiaw and Dam Kon held a sickle and a hammer, respectively. These two characters regularly put their tools one over the other, suggesting communist symbolism, "...the hammer, the workers; and the sickle, the peasants" (Danforth, 2003: 64). However, this usage also indicated an association with the working class and the peasantry and, hence, the grassroots movement in Thailand, which played a key role in democratic demonstrations of the 1970s.

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<sup>142</sup> Ho Mok literally means steamed fish and vegetable with curry paste in banana leave. Since this food needs being wrapped by banana leaves before steaming, no one can see the food before unwrapping the banana leaves. Therefore, its name and figure can be implied to the 'unknown democracy' in Thai society.

<sup>143</sup> Pradit Prasatthong played Thai Tha Atham; Anukoon Rotjanasuksomboon played Det; Boonsueb Phanprasert played San Khwan; Yada Kriangkraiuttikul played Dam Kon, Pongjit Sapakhun played Kom Kiaw; and I played Kamrai.



**Photograph 25:** Main characters (on the platforms) hold over-sized tools that symbolise their characters and attitudes in *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

Please see DVD 2 clip 3 (duration: 3.23 minutes)  
The main characters introduce themselves holding over-sized tools.

Prasatthong instructed the cast of *Mueang Ho Mok* to research the 6 October 1976 Student Massacre and share their findings at a round-table discussion. He then distributed the script, which could be adjusted throughout rehearsals, as necessary, because Prasatthong saw his role as a director as being that of a ‘surveyor’, rather than that of a ‘master’ (Pavis, 2003: 309). His collaborative attitude allowed his performers to combine and accommodate one another’s abilities, styles, and desires (Royce, 2004: 10). Prasatthong explained the ‘between and under the lines’ of the script during reading rehearsals, after which performers practised singing with the *piphat* musical ensemble. Dancing and blocking with real stage props was part of everyday rehearsals. Improvisation was used as ‘improvisation while rehearsing’, rather than ‘improvisation while performing’, because performance time was limited and Prasatthong wanted to keep the performance from straying from the rehearsal ‘score’. This can be explained with reference to Pavis’s terminology ‘preparatory score’, which is “constituted in the course of rehearsals through a series of choices that are concretised in a basic structure that evolves continuously” (2003: 97).

Playing the intellectual protagonist Kamrai, I illustrated the imperfect manners of a bigheaded academic who did not understand and looked down on the poor. This

character reflected the blindness of the intelligentsia and leaders who are influenced by unpredictable political events and beliefs that they obtain from education at the tertiary level, both nationally and internationally. Kamrai could not use ‘understandable’ terms to explain taxes to working-class characters, such as Kom Kiaw and Dam Kon. Rather, she employed such jargon and technical terms as ‘GDP’, ‘percentage’, ‘ratio’, and ‘tax calculation’, which were consistent with her snobbish personality.

Kamrai and Det are disappointed when Thai Tha Atham marries to Kom Kiaw. They then sided with the enemy (a demon) and propagate *chaobaan* that Thai Tha Atham and Kom Kiaw are dishonoured by their membership in a *phisaj* (devils) party. Even today, in the tumult of the current Thai political climate, opinionated leaders verbally attack the opposition and try to motivate people to take sides. Sometimes, they fabricate stories with which they hope to take down their opponents. In *Mueang Ho Mok*, the antagonists were members of the Mafia and politicians. A demon symbolised the type of powerful and greedy politician who steals from the poor. The demon’s minions force people to pay them many kinds of levies; even their breathing was charged. When one *chaobaan* asks the head of the demon’s subordinates, Mok Med (‘hiding’), whether the demon has to pay taxes or not, Mok Med angrily replies that the demon is the country’s benefactor, so he is ‘exempted from tax.’ This *chaobaan* character immediately says that the demon is ‘avoiding taxes’, which lead to a fight between the *chaobaan* and the demon’s underlings.



**Photograph 26:** Kamrai and Det take side with the enemy (a demon) when they are disappointed their friends (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

*Mueang Ho Mok* demonstrated another type of experimentation. The bench normally used as a throne hall was replaced by a platform and steps on which the main characters stood. The Ho Mok Monument was placed near stage centre, behind the platform and steps. There was no *likay* backdrop, either, only the plain white wall of the auditorium, on which was written the Thai: “If there is no liberty, fraternity and equality, there is no need to revise the history of the October event” (author’s translation). These lines highlighted the performance’s message about the journey of Thailand’s democracy. Additionally, whereas the main characters wore *likay* costumes, the minor characters and the ensemble cast, who played working-class and *chaobaan* characters, wore black *jongkraben* (loincloths) and black T-shirts with diamonds and other ornate decorations, which were largely improvised from Makhampom’s extensive collection of classical and folk dress, suggesting *likay* costumes. Such improvisation was a result of the troupe’s lacking *likay* costumes for all performers. The highest demon, or the ‘top man’ role, was played by a five-metre-high cloth puppet with backstage voiceover.

Songs that were widely sung during the Student Massacre and its aftermath in the 1970s were adapted, so that their lyrics could be sung with the classical and folk Thai music played by the *piphat* musical ensemble. For example, the song *Num-Sao Seri* (Liberate Youngsters), composed by Sujit Wongthes, was sung with the original melody named Lao Chiang:

เราเกิดมาแล้วชาติหนึ่ง ต้องคำนึงสิทธิและศักดิ์ศรี  
ถ้าปล่อยให้ตกต่ำถ่อยย่ำแล้วจะมีชีวิตอยู่ทำไม  
เจ้าหนุ่ม เจ้าสาวเอ๋ย เจ้าเคยแล้วรียัง ตายเพื่อสร้าง ตายเพื่อสร้างเสรี

*We were born into this life; we must preserve our rights and dignity  
If we let our dignity decline and be devastated, do we deserve to be alive?  
Boys and girls, have you ever died for freedom?*

(Author’s translation)

Another song was adapted from the lyrics of the song *Phuea Muan Chon* (For the Public), a *phuea cheewit* song<sup>144</sup>, sung to the melody of a *lae*, a kind of Thai folksong.

<sup>144</sup> *Phuea cheewit* song literally means ‘song for life’, that is sung for leading to social change and benefit the lives of common people including labourers and peasants.



ถ้าหากฉันเป็นนกที่ผกผัน	จะโบยบินดั่งนกพิราบขาว
ไปแสนไกล สูดฟ้า ดาราพราว	เพื่อนำชาวประชาสู่เสรี
ถ้าฉันเป็นเมฆาบนฟ้ากว้าง	จะสรรสร้างความชุ่มเย็นเป็นสุขศรี
เป็นเม็ดทรายปราวโปรยโรยธุลี	ถึงถมเป็นวิถีแม้ทุกข์ทน

*If I were a flying bird, I would fly like a white pigeon.*

*I would fly high, until I reached the skyline, and take people to freedom.*

*If I were a cloud in a wide sky, I would create refreshment and happiness.*

*If I were delicate sands, I would devote myself to covering the path of suffering.*

(Author's translation)

The *e-saew* melody, sung in *lamtad* performances, and the *ground-nok* melody, used in battle scenes in *khon* performances, were employed when the students in *Mueang Ho Mok* came together to fight the demon and his minions.

Before the beginning of the second act, the ensemble wore white outfits with white wings, recalling angels, and raised signboards over their heads, reading:

Thirty years have passed, but a white pigeon still spreads its wings, though weary, when encountering strong wind. Though it is exhausted, the pigeon has strong will power and never stops flying, because it believes that it never flies alone.

(Author's translation)

The variety of performance genres in *Mueang Ho Mok*, which included *likay*, *lamtad*, *khon*, *nang*, and contemporary theatre and could be seen as a combination of 'intercultural and intracultural theatre', made the presentation's message strong and accurate. Richard Barber (Interview, 2010), one of Makhampom's administrators, and Duangkhae Buaprakhon (Interview, 2011), a Makhampom Theatre Troupe member and actress in *Likay Apiwat*, told me that the characters were clear, the music and songs beautiful and touching, the storytelling sharp, and the choreography well-arranged and rehearsed.

Prasatthong usually leaves his stories open-ended, allowing audiences to use their imaginations, together with their personal experiences, to think about the future of Thailand's democracy. This was evident at the end of *Mueang Ho Mok*, when a *khaek* came on stage and spoke directly to the audience:

Whether or not the chaos is over, the Ho Mok remains on the tower, as a monument, as it has been, and the people have always loved the Ho Mok. However, it is somewhat strange that nobody wants to open and see what is inside the Ho Mok. They keep saying they love and believe in the Ho Mok, although there might be nothing inside it. Goodbye.

(Author's translation)

## 2. Intercultural-Based Productions

Apart from creating *likay* based upon political issues, Makhampom has also attempted to develop another innovative type of *likay*. This style reflects locally and globally problematic issues and features characters who are evildoers and characters who are victims of materialism and selfishness. Therefore, Makhampom's contemporary *likay* is not only entertaining, but is also serious, as Amranand (2009c) states:

The jolly traditional *likay* is capable of the kind of depth and perceptiveness that Pradit gives his creations. What makes his *likay* stand out, however, is the artist's daringness to venture into the dark side and stay there. You come out of Makhampom's *likay* remembering as much about how it had made you laugh as how it hadn't.

This section investigates the prospect of crossing cultural borders through the type of intercultural collaboration and exchange featured in three performances of Makhampom's contemporary *likay*, namely *Naga Wong*, *The Message*, and *Likay Akaoni*. *Naga Wong* received national and international support<sup>145</sup>, debuted in 2005, and led to theatrical bartering between Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. The project celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Makhampom Theatre Troupe and was also part of a research project conducted on the Mekong region's folk theatre; it

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<sup>145</sup> Bangkok Art Culture Centre, Asian Cultural Council, ARTSNETWORKASIA, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center and Thai Airways International LTD

was performed in Bangkok in 2005 and in Phnom Penh and on the Mekong River's banks in 2006.

*Naga Wong* manifested a collaboration of content and technique, reflecting the cultural affinity between Thai, Lao, and Cambodian myth, music, and dance. Furthermore, distinctions were made between languages and theatrical styles, allowing artists and audiences to fully experience the production's intercultural approach. The cultural exchange and collaboration evidenced by *Naga Wong* subsequently developed into a form of Thai contemporary *likay* that was more focused on social concerns. The next production entitled *The Message*, developing from *Naga Wong*, was formed in 2007. This performance theme was based on the sufferings of people, again living in the Kong River Area in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. They have miserable lives due to changes resulting from a dam project in China. *The Message* represented the stories and the characters of the three nations, but was performed solely by Thai performers and musicians. *The Message* was performed in Thailand between 2007 and 2008 and it was also invited to play in Yokohama, Japan in 2008.

Makhampom has conducted another contemporary *likay* performance from a Japanese play script, *Akaoni*, literally the 'Red Demon', performing in Thailand and Japan in 2009 and Singapore in 2010. A story illustrates racism in the face of cultural conflict. It was reinterpreted to fit the current situation for the continuing political and religious turmoil in the three southern frontier provinces of Thailand including the difficulties of worldwide refugees and displaced people. Discussions of these three projects focus on the process of inter-Asian cultural exchange, cultural flows beyond the boundaries and cultural issues in theatre devising. These projects are more interested in cultural exchange and cooperation than in cultural encounters of hegemony and supremacy.

## **2.1 *Naga Wong*: A Collaborative Performance Based on Asian Folklore; Cambodia, Laos and Thailand**

*Naga Wong* was originally inspired by the common belief in Naga (a serpent or dragon) between Cambodian, Lao and Thai peoples. It was corresponding to the legend of Naga in *Pra Thong- Nang Nak* production in 2005. This collaborative production demonstrates how cooperation of multinational artists from 3 nations crafted a piece

that crosses beyond the cultural and national boundaries. The performances were given in 2005 at Siam Association in Thailand, Cambodia and Nong Khai province, the border of Thailand and Laos in 2006.

The nations situated in the Indochinese region along the Mekong River have had a history of interactions, reflecting their mutual relationships. Exposure to the meeting points exploited by roaming, migrating, trading and warring has been immensely influential in providing a performative interchange at individual, group and national levels. Whether the interactions emerged in peace or war, the performing arts of those nations have influenced one another in negotiating and creating new theatrical forms. Artists have been inspired by witnessing different forms of artistic creation, which have transformed their artistic body of knowledge and skills, and led to an inauguration of interculturalism (Martin, 2004: 1-2). Surapone Virulrak (Anonymous, 2005: 65) has pointed out that there was a profound shared belief and history throughout the greater Mekong region for a long period. It inspired cooperation between the three nations bordering the Mekong to create a unique form of art and culture. This did not belong to any particular nation, but reflected peace and harmony in living together in the present. Given some similarities, such as language and movement, each nation still has its own uniqueness. In *Naga Wong*, the unity of diversity played an important role in its success, displaying the uniqueness of each nation.

Historically, Thailand frequently sought control over Laos and was at war with Cambodia. According to Miettinen (1992: 48), Thailand and Cambodia exchanged their performing arts and court dancers during the ancient wars that took place at the Thai conquered Angkor in 1431, through the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767), while Laos had cultural exchanges in performing arts with Thailand when Laos was predominantly ruled by Thailand before being colonised by France in 1893 (Osnes, 2001:190). The folk theatre forms among the three countries have, without doubt, had mutual connections to one another. While Thai *likay* and Cambodian *yike* have the same original source, derived from the Muslim chanting and musical instrument such as *ramana*, a one-faced drum, Lao *lamlueang* was influenced by Thai *likay*.

Thai *likay* ultimately derived from ceremonial Muslim chanting and incantation, known as *dikir* or *dikay*, and was transformed to secular entertainment called *likay* in the modern period (Smithies 1975; Virulrak 1980; Carkin 1984). Likewise, Cambodian's

*yike* which was possibly introduced to the country in the end of the nineteenth century by the Muslims in Java, shared some characteristics with Malay *jikay* and the Thai *likay*, (Thiounn, 1996: 32 cited in Diamond, 2003: 155). Banham suggests that *yike* developed from Malay *bangsawan* troupes who toured Cambodia the late 19th century (1995: 155). Lao *lamlueang* (or *molam lueang*) was considerably influenced by Thailand's *likay* which was performed in Isan or the north-eastern region of Thailand, where a local dialect is similar to Lao. Around the 1920s Thai *likay* troupes began touring the Isan region and the local indigenous groups started combining *likay* with their folk arts. *Likay* has been adapted to *khan* (mouth reed-organ) musical instrument to suit the Lao *lamlueang* style, which gained in popularity among both Thai-Isan people and Lao natives. The stories often originated from *jataka* stories, Thai legends and also Lao historical tales, (Brandon, 1967: 68-69 and Foley, 1993: 191). Brief description and theatrical motifs of Cambodian *yike* and Lao *lamlueang* are presented in the following accounts (details of Thai *likay* is provided in Chapter 2).

### ***Lamlueang***

'*Lam*' means to sing and '*lueang*' means a story-recounting, so *lamlueang* means storytelling through sung. The stories in *lamlueang* were often taken from the *jataka* stories, the legends of the Buddha's life. Initially, monks played the roles as story-tellers in a *lamlueang* performance, portraying the different characters in dynamic and witty ways in order not to bore the audiences. Later this story-telling technique was spread widely by local people who had a sense of humour, using various tones of voices to make the story interesting. Artists developed their artistic skills including singing, playing music and masking to make their stories more attractive. The performances, accompanied by a number of the instruments, dancing gesturing, colourful and ornate costumes and decorations were influenced by Thai *likay* which lead to the development of *lamlueang* form.

### ***Yike***

*Yike* is a Cambodian popular-folk theatre performing the classical legends and myths in a witty mocking style. The new contemporary plots, which were presented later, are borrowed from the plots from other theatrical forms both locally and globally. While they perform in the same style of Thai *likay*, embracing songs, verses and spoken

dialogues in eloquent style, *yike* actors also need an improvisational skill as well as the singing and dancing of the classical dance method. However, Diamond (2003: 156) notes that *yike*'s dancing and movement is controlled by a drum beat which makes the hand gestures a rough approximation of Cambodian classical dance but more percussive. The main musical instruments of *yike* are *tro ou camhieng* (a two stringed fiddle made from a coconut shell) and the *yike* drum called *skor yike* (Aug San, 1995: 40). This kind of drum was probably derived from the Cham people, a Muslim group in Cambodia. The drum was accompanied by poetry and recitation (Diamond 2003, 155).

Originating in and derived from popular-folk forms, *likay*, *yike* and *lamlueang* have been developed their forms to the modern popular modes influenced by globalisation. The three forms borrow and adapt modern or foreign theatrical elements to suit their audiences' tastes.

The *Naga Wong* project used the common belief of the mythology of Naga, combined together the repertoires of those Cambodia's *yike*, Laos's *lamlueang* and Thai's *likay*. The original inspiration for the composition, which makes the cultural encounter more convincing and vigorous, is the commonality of the old shared myth among the three countries. A director Pradit Prasatthong noticed this in the program of a performance named '*Nak Chompujit*' (the Chompujit Naga) created by the Department of Fine Arts. This is a character in legend of *Phrasuthon-Manhora Siton jataka*, which is a legend common to all three nations. In the legend, Naga Chompujit plays an important role by granting a sacred rope to a hunter, Boon, to capture a *kinnari* (a half-bird half-female human being) named Manhora for a prince, Phrasuthon. This act of kindness reveals the rapport between men and Naga. This plot has been taken and developed into a play with a different context to each kingdom, so that the artists could perform in accordance with their own cultural arts. Additionally, there were some scenes they all had to perform together harmoniously in perfect union: these consisted of two performers and one musician from each nation, excepted Thailand which had two musicians. The two male performers from Laos and Cambodia also took roles as musicians. They had to play musical instruments when their characters were not appearing on the front stage. Unlike Thailand, the roles of actors and musicians were particularly separated.

Remarkably, their artistic styles such as dancing and music are to some degree similar to one another. It also was evident that Thai and Cambodian performance could be

connected through related movements and music, while Thai and Lao had some similarity in spoken languages. Cambodia presented *yike*, Laos demonstrated *lamlueang*, and Thailand showed *likay*. They coalesced together as a repertoire mosaic. Each performance helped make closer the relationship among them. This project was a cultural exchange and an approach to networking amongst people who believe in Naga and in traditional performance in contemporary society.

### **2.1.2 Collaborative Approach: The (inter) Creation of Cultural Exchange**

There exists a rich body of knowledge about intercultural performance which is characterised as a hybrid theatre form, interconnecting at least two cultures and two theatrical forms. As a result, the original forms are distinguished only with difficulty. One of the most popular manifestations of this broad conception is the theory of intercultural performance examined by Patrice Pavis (1996). He divides the practical perspective into two positions: 'Western' and 'non-Western' approaches, which Lo and Gilbert (2002: 32) called 'West' and 'the rest'. From this point of view, the theatrical practice on interculturalism is generally perceived in terms of the combination of the East and West in either form or content. The employment of Western performance techniques in Peter Brook's dramatisation and adaptation of Indian *kathakali* in the epic Mahabharata, or the re-reading of Faust for Japanese and Indian dancers by Barba are representative cases (Pavis, 1996: 1). On the other hand, the non-Western perspective can be exemplified by the Japanese artist director who creates new forms of Shakespeare or Greek tragedies by exploiting traditional Japanese performance techniques such as gesture, movement, and vocal practice (ibid). However, cultural exchanges in terms of 'interculturalism' taking place within regions have also been evident. There has been a history of performing arts exchanges within the East; for example, the exchanges between Japan, China and Korea in the Nara period (646-749) or the mixing of Indian and Persian musical instruments, or the derivation of Chinese's operatic stories from Buddhism in India (Brandon, 1990: 89 and Martin, 2004: 2). The so-called East-meets-West of theatrical interculturalism was only introduced in the twentieth century and became prominent in Western academic theorisation in the 1970s and 1980s (Knowles, 2010: 6). Since the East-meets-East cultural flow is the concern of this section, an intra-collaboration within the region is a key.

Pradit Prasatthong, a director and facilitator of the *Naga Wong* project claims that his attempt was not to proclaim Thai predominance over the others but to embrace their performing styles in the repertory (Interview, 2010). A body of work has emerged in a collaborative approach that corresponds to Lo and Gilbert's modes of conducting intercultural theatre (2002: 38-39); the collaborative mode maintains a balanced relationship between the collaborators, who search for both differences and similarities of cultural exchange for all parties. Equivalence between different cultures is the heart of collaborative work as intercultural theatre making. This point of view, along with other main ideas of theatre collaboration, can be applied to investigate the training and process of making such a collaborative performance through the *Naga Wong*.

Crossing cultural borders through the actors' work manifests a cultural overlap beyond the geographical territory. However, in working internationally on collaborative theatre, it is to some degree difficult to separate the language and affection of national cultures which play influential roles in shaping a performance form, as noted by Mathew Cohen and Laura Noszlopy (2010: 15). The *Naga Wong* performance, however, was not a case of this nature. The practitioners created the performance approach by means of collective structure with a central repertoire; however, each nation was allowed to create and select the motifs individually which respected the other aesthetic norms (Cohen and Noszlopy, 2010: 17), deploying and balancing them within the repertoire. In creating a collaborative product, dramaturgy is built up by performers' improvisation and the directors' design. Prasatthong asked actors to add some lines about their nation's belief in Naga in the devising process, expanding the story-line to clearly depict the whole message. Therefore, it was not necessary in the case to blend both content and form to produce a new form, embracing the source culture and the target culture as formulated in Pavis's hourglass model (1992), since these three theatre forms are traditional in style and already have a mutual relationship. Without being overpowered by any one form in particular, Pradit notes that the equality, trust, opportunity and friendliness are the most important starting point for creating collaborative work. All the artists should be able to feel the ties of friendship and freedom in the air, which lead to trust and openness to express their opinion and to cooperate in the highest degree. This safe environment is always a significant factor in Makhampom's work.



The *Naga Wong* project was developed in a collaborative workshop held from 14 to 29 November 2005. This was the first time that a theatrical exchange of folk arts had been offered with a short training period. It was a cultural exchange that relined on the reciprocal belief of the Naga legend performed in the traditional folk form. It offered the possibility to perform the repertoire and play the music together and link each separate scene. The short time for speaking together was not a problem for learning since the participants knew each other and were accustomed to the different theatrical forms. These two weeks of contributing such a remarkable project were, on all aspects, the process of sharing and creating the collaborative pieces. The first production called *Before-Naga Wong* was performed in the 4<sup>th</sup> Bangkok Theatre Festival on 20 November 2005. The *Naga Wong* project was subsequently presented at Siam Society Association on 29 November 2005. By means of the rehearsed process, there was no need to the different parties to totally understand each other in terms of interculturalism. Having used a collaborative approach in creating a piece from different theatrical materials, the *Naga Wong* project consists of parts of prepared repertoires from Thai *likay*, Cambodian *yike* and Lao *lamlueang* arranged together in the ordered scenes. The meeting, knowing, and practising of shared theatrical elements together in the minimum time provided before performing can, perhaps, be seen as a ‘theatrical barter’.

Barterers are about cultural meeting and touching in a quickly-learned way, but with a performatively and culturally equal exchange of performances. Watson (2002: 106) points out that barter “is less about the dialogue between cultures than it is about using its exchange of performance materials as a means of instigating contact.” In a short time period of working together, the artists from each country spent time teaching and practising each other’s artistic styles, which are to some degree similar. This workshop enabled them to roughly understand and remember songs, music, gestures, movements and languages of the other two countries. In this case, there was no need of long-term learning or deep understanding of another performance, since each country was performing through their original styles, but had to perform together and speak another language only in the encounter scenes. Additionally, the purpose of this project was far more concerned in promoting the shared mythical and artistic work in the process of collaboration among the three countries than presenting ‘a new piece’ out of a melting-pot of their theatrical motifs. Despite the fact that the practitioners partly learnt and rehearsed some new elements from one another, they have all deeply embodied codified disciplines of music, dance and theatre through their years of praxis.

### **2.1.3 *Before-Naga Wong*: Asian Folk Theatre Collaboration by Cambodian, Lao and Thai Artists**

The interchange and cooperative performance of *Before Naga Wong* contributed to the first stage of the project before the development of the major project, *Naga Wong*. On each day of the training and rehearsal period in the first week, thirty minutes were devoted to play-related warm ups before the actual play could begin. They were carried out in a relaxed way to encourage small talk, laughter and enthusiasm. During this time-frame, all activities were focused on getting to know each other by learning and exchanging experiences through each national folk art, namely *yike* (Cambodia), *lamlueang* (Laos) and *likay* (Thailand). These subsequently included participating in each other's plays and then performing at the Bangkok Theatre Festival on 20 November 2005. The purpose was to bring the folk plays of the three nations to the public and to demonstrate how powerful and effective collaborative work and cooperation between these nations could be.

The artists from each nation shared their performances by recounting the historical aspects, and by demonstrating performing methods such as gesture, positioning, singing, dancing and music to the other two countries. After that, all of them started practising another artistic style and contributing to the stories which were later became a selected scene for the demonstration-performances. Focusing on the stories and demonstrations, the artists explained the history of their own national folk plays and then followed that with some demonstrations and rehearsals; then they rehearsed and discussed the play again.

The collaborative work of three rehearsal days resulted in three final folk plays titled as follows: *likay* (Thailand): *Yuparach Nhee Rak* (The Prince Escaping from Love); *yike* (Cambodia): *Toom Tiew* (Mr. Toom and Ms. Tiew); *lam lueang* (Laos): *Khan Nee Tong Chamra* (The Revenge). *Yuparach Nhee Rak* depicts the romantic life of prince Fahpratan. He wants to marry his secret love, a village girl named Sarika, but his love story is obstructed since he has to be engaged to a disgraceful princess named Hongfah. The jealous scenes which manifest the character of Thai content were clearly shown in the melodramatic plot of *Yuparach Nee Rak* in the *likay* performance. *Toom Tiew*, the second demonstration performance, can be called as Cambodian version of *Romeo and Juliet* (Diamond, 2003: 158) in that it explores prohibited love. Tum is a handsome poor

man while Tiew is a beautiful woman from a well-to-do family. They have no chance to live happily ever after because Tiew has to marry the son of a ruler. While the two stories from Thailand and Cambodia portray stories of disappointed love, *Khan Nhee Tong Chamra* from Laos presents a story of a misbehaved prince who captures a beautiful girl to be his wife, but she is released after the king helps. In these three demonstration-performances, the leading roles of each story were taken by the story's owners and the other two nations' artists performed as supporting or minor characters. For example, Cho Da Pieag and Puthia, the Cambodian performers, took the Tum and Tiew characters respectively, while Thai artists, Sapakhun and Rotjanasuksomboon, and the other three Laotian artists performed as their families and friends. The roles were swapped in the same approach for Thai and Laos demonstrations. These three demonstration-performances which were formally named *Before Naga Wong: Asian Folk Collaboration by Cambodian, Lao and Thai artists* was honoured to be the closing show at BTF. This demonstration was developed into a collaborative piece called *Naga Wong* afterwards.

#### **2.1.4 *Naga Wong*: The Experimental and Collaborative Project of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand's Folk Play**

*Naga Wong* reflects changes in the Mekong River and human lives. Thais represented greedy people who are influenced by capitalism. They need to catch a Naga to free them from suffering from disaster. In this parody, the characters created an exhibition called 'Unseen Thailand' which was intended to gain more money from tourists. They try to catch the Naga by using an evil magic spell. By contrast, Lao performers took roles as people who always respect the Naga, while the Cambodians performed as the Naga and his wife.

Prince Fahnoi from Suwannakorn Kingdom (i.e. the Thai Kingdom) laid a plot to catch Naga by bewitching him. The Great Naga Malan from Malan Kingdom, a Naga empire (Cambodia) has a dream about an anonymous and callous man coming to kill him. In order to escape from such a cruel assassination, he must instantaneously leave his underwater kingdom by seeking help from a human being on the earth world. Phran Boon, a forest hunter and his fellow, Bak Maam were played by artists from Laos, as helpers for the Naga. As Prince Fahnoi was unsuccessful in his mission, his mother, Queen Sriprapha, provoked Jantia, the Naga's wife into believing that Naga Malan had

an affair with Princess Busadi of Sri Sattanaga Kingdom (Laos), resulting in the two women's fighting. Queen Sriprapha's intention was, by this lie, to make Lao people lose faith in Naga. Before the situation worsened, Phran Boon and Bak Maam were the heroes for solving the crisis by driving out Queen Sriprapha and his son from Laos. Naga Malan remained calm throughout this situation. At the end of the show, he blessed Phran Boon and Bak Maam and also wished every human being well whoever was faithful to the Naga.



**Photograph 27:** Naga Malan and his wife, Jantia, are asleep in *Naga Wong* (2005) at the Siam Association, Thailand. (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

*Naga Wong* were developed and rehearsed at the Moo Baan Dek (Children's Village) in Kanchanaburi province on 21-25 November, Makhampom Theatre Troupe on 27 November, and at the Siam Society on 28 November. The activities during the rehearsals in the Moo Bann Dek placed an emphasis on teamwork and relationship as well as the process of developing and rehearsing the play *Naga Wong*. In this locality, the artists could closely spend time living and working together throughout the day and night. The activities emphasise getting to know and revisiting each other's expectations towards the project by playing games. Having schematised the Naga-human relationship, Pradit came up with the complementary idea of sharing their beliefs in

Naga in *Naga Wong* repertoire so that the artists could put together their Naga's stories and prepare themselves in the singing parts. He assigned all artists the responsibility for creating the plot which tended to be in accordance with their own folk arts. Also, they had to include in the story the towns in which the story was taking place and create the characters' names and their manners. After that, each story from each country had to be combined. The director divided the artists into pairs; they have to practise singing and movement which they had learned the day before. Before going back to Bangkok they ran through the performance. The practice focused on details of both musical ensemble and acting parts.

The use of three languages in rehearsals and performances of *Naga Wong* was not a problem. Carlson (2006: 50) points out that language exchange in intercultural productions provides a learning model for intercultural communication and understanding. Such exchange has been evident in the collaborative performances of the International WOW company, which was founded in Thailand in 1966 but is fundamentally based in New York. Though the company uses English, its characters are allowed to speak their native languages<sup>146</sup> (ibid). Despite the presence of language barriers, performers endeavour to communicate with audiences and make themselves understood. There was no question about which language was to be used during performances of *Naga Wong*, because each performer spoke his/her own language. The most fascinating moments occurred when performers had to speak the languages of the other actors they encountered in scenes. For example, at one point, a Thai had to speak Cambodian, and a Cambodian had to speak Thai, and vice versa with Lao. The few difficulties that occurred were minor problems; for instance, Cambodian artists found it difficult to deliver Thai parts, while Thai artists sometimes became tongue-tied when speaking Lao dialects.<sup>147</sup> However, the cast of *Naga Wong* did not all see their language differences as barriers, due to the fact that the arts themselves, besides the translation provided by interpreters, are effective tools with which to communicate.

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<sup>146</sup> This international theatre company founded by artists from Thailand, Indonesia, Japan and the United States and later included performers from Australia, Canada, England, France, Pakistan, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, and Venezuela (please see Marvin Carlson. 2006. *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.)

<sup>147</sup> Thai and Lao languages derived from Tai language. They have similar words with some differences; however, Thai and Lao can easily understand each other when the two parties communicate each other on their own tongues. Lao accent is similar to Thai-Isan or North-eastern accent. Although Cambodian is the 'isolating language', similar to Lao and Thai, but its vocabularies are mainly different from the two other countries.

Please see DVD 2 clip 4 (duration: 6.54 minutes)  
 The performers from three nations speak the languages of  
 the other performers in encountered scenes.

The *Naga Wong* performance started at 8.00 pm at the Siamese Society. English and Thai scripts were provided for Thai and international audiences. The first three scenes functioned as the introductions of performers<sup>148</sup>, artistic forms and the stories of each nation which related to a Naga. Thai *likay* was presented in the first scene, introducing a plan of catching a Naga. In the second scene, Cambodian artists performed *yike* and recounted the story that Naga Malan had to go to the human world. Lao characters presented their faith in Naga and their intention to protect him. The conflict through the story line occurred after these introductions and artists from each nation were allowed to encounter and perform their scripts in these successive scenes. One of the Lao and Cambodian actors had to play their own musical instruments in the scene that the characters of their countries appeared and sang on a stage. In this case, Pradit designed well in each scene of the characters' appearance to prevent an overlapping and absence of musician of each country. Fortunately, Thai artists had no need to play the instruments since they have no skills and there were two Thai musicians provided. After success in the first performance, *Naga Wong* was further twice performed in Cambodia and the border line between Thailand and Laos in 2006.

### **2.1.5 *Naga Wong* Performed in Phnom Pen and Nong Khai**

The process of theatrical transformation began in the later projects with the absence of Lao and Cambodian artists. In Phnom Pen's 2006 production, Lao artists did not attend while the Mekong River show in the same year was without Cambodians because they lacked of subsidies. After the *Naga Wong* project performed in Bangkok in 2005, Makhampom was invited to perform this production again in May 2006 in the Thailand World-Expo Exhibition held in Phnom Pen, Cambodia. In this production Prasatthong performed as a King of Suwannakorn Kingdom. Pongjit Sappakhun who played Queen Sriprapha role was unavailable to perform this time so I was invited to perform as

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<sup>148</sup> Cambodian: Ms. Keo Puthea (actress), Mr. Cheang Cho Da Pieag (actor and musician) and, Mr. Meas Kim Han (actor and musician)  
 Lao: Mr. Inthanong Vongvilath, (actor and musician) Mr. Bounvath Velouvanalak (actor and musician) and Ms. Vongvilay Opimsakda (actress)  
 Thai: Ms. Pongjit Sappakhun (actress), Mr. Anukoon RotjanaSueksomboon (actor) , Mr. Khumpol Tadsuwan (musician) and Mr. Naratchai Imsut (musician)

Princess Fah-Charas, a younger sister of Prince Fahnoi who fabricated a lie, substituting Queen Sripapha role. This second show also had another adjustment. Thai actors substituted performing as Lao characters because Lao performers were unable to join. Nonetheless, the story and performing styles were the same as the first performance of *Naga Wong*. However, the size of concert-style stage and open-air circumstance created certain obstacles. We had to perform in a somewhat exaggerated style and made an effort to draw concentration from large audiences (more than 1000) whose attention might be distracted by the out-door movie and performances from other stages.



**Photograph 28:** The finale of *Naga Wong* in Phnom Pen, Cambodia (2006).  
(Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

We still employed the same technique of language interchange. Whenever the two nations met each other (Thai and Lao, Thai and Cambodian, Lao and Cambodian,) they had to speak the language of the other instead of their own in dialogues, which made the audience laugh and enjoy the show. When Boonporn, a Thai actress performing princess Busadi, a Lao princess and I spoke Cambodian in an encounter scene with princess Jantia, we received a big cheer, laughter and applause from the Cambodian audiences. Although English subtitles were provided for Cambodian audiences, the system failed because the white screen and the letter font were too small to be projected for a thousand spectators. Moreover, the very bright stage lighting caused the slides to blur.





**Photograph 29:** The white canvas screen is projected with English subtitles for the audience in *Naga Wong* in Phnom Pen, Cambodia (2006). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)



**Photograph 30:** Thai and Cambodian actors and musicians after the performance of *Naga Wong* in Phnom Pen, Cambodia (2006). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

Six months after this, we had to perform *Naga Wong* again in Nong Khai province, beside the frontier of Laos and Thailand, on the Mekong River Bank on the Thai side. This show was held as a celebration of the International Conference of Peaceful Management in Asia and also to bless as a blessing the *Loi krathong* Festival. Unfortunately, Cambodian actors could not participate this time; hence I had a chance to perform as Jantia, a Naga's wife replacing the Cambodian cast. Therefore, the technique of using the other language in the encounter scene was no more effective in performing at the Mekong River since Prasatthong and I took roles of the King Malan and his wife, Jantia, and we kept speaking and singing in Thai. Prasatthong translated the song lyrics from Cambodian to Thai and used the Cambodian melody for Cambodian characters,



excluding the *likay*'s *ranikloeng* song. Although we had to speak Lao when we met Lao characters and vice versa, Prasatthong's Lao's accent as well as mine was more similar to Isan dialect than Lao. Likewise, there was no surprise or shock when Lao characters spoke Thai because their accents are similar to Thai Isan. Moreover, Thai musical instruments as well as Thai musicians were the main musical accompaniment; *sor* (a two stringed fiddle made from a coconut shell) and *taphon* (a two-face flat drum) used in Cambodia's *yikay*, were played by Thai musicians. *Khan* (mouth reed-organ) was played by a Lao artist. Two years after success in the *Naga Wong* project in 2005 and in 2006, Makhampom Theatre Troupe presented the contemporary *likay* performance named *The Message* which was adopted and adapted from the content of the collaborative project to be performed in 2007 and 2008.



**Photograph 31:** The backdrop is decorated with a Naga model in *Naga Wong* in Nong Khai, Thailand (2006). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)



**Photograph 32:** The Lao characters, Phran Boon and Bak Maam, from *Naga Wong* in Nong Khai, Thailand (2006). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

## 2.2 *The Message*: Performing a Transformation of Collaborative Folk Arts into Contemporary *Likay*

Apart from employing different performance elements, *Naga Wong* and *The Message* treated different types of content. The cultural encounters in *The Message* were more convincing and motivating, combining old myths (such as that of the relationship between Naga and human beings) with enduring social concerns (human greed). Prasatthong noticeably changed some characters' actions to highlight the theme of human greed.

Unlike conventional *likay* performances that feature stock or one-dimensional characters, *The Message* featured multi-dimensional characters who showed the effects of power, greed, and selfishness on human beings. Whenever Naga Malan and his wife, Jantia, transformed into human beings, they became more aggressive. Likewise, Princess Busadi, who was otherwise modest and pleasant, looked wicked when she thought about the destruction of her country and her people by another king.<sup>149</sup> These contextual clues hinted at the message that when human beings are selfish and greedy, no one may, ultimately, be happy.

Performing in *likay* limits the psychological view point of the actors, since the stylistic requirements of playing a *likay*-type character involve specific movement, dancing, and singing. However, personalisation of a character is used in *The Message*; the performers had to find the characters' objectives, and make the cameo roles more realistic. Prasatthong wanted to demonstrate an intolerable situation with the trapped people managing to survive only through self-interest. Each group hatches their own plan to steal the Naga to their country since the Naga is believed a good luck charm, bringing prosperousness to their land. As a result, the character types were usually performed with more human sensibility with acting dimension through the actors' expressions. For example, the aggression of the Naga Malan and his wife, Jantia, when they transformed into human beings, had to be clear and strong, reflected from their vocalic and eye communication. In the same manner, Princess Busadi, who was always modest and

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<sup>149</sup> In *Naga Wong*, princess Busadi represents Lao, who are faithful to the Naga and very peaceful. In *The Message*, this character wants to catch Naga to her country because she believes that Naga will protect her and her people from other powerful countries. Her aggression which was different from her passive characteristic in *Naga Wong* was a result of greedy which Prasatthong wanted to emphasise that when greedy controls human's thought, a good person can change to be an evil.

pleasant in a virtuous manner of a typical fairy tale princess, would look wicked when she thought about her country and her people who had been destroyed by another kingdom. Phunlamlert switched the 'performing' role to the 'acting' as a person, representing a real problem of undeveloped countries which was overwhelmed by those powerful countries. This acting approach together with the stylising approach of *likay* added more layers to the performance.

This performance theme was reflected a social issue, presented a real globally problematic issue, with the people being threatened as victims of industrialisation and economic development plans and illustrated a human greed and their self-interest. People have dramatically affected lives due to changes resulting from a dam project which causes water shortage in Mekong River. The majority of populations of these countries conspired to steal the Naga's territory. Prasatthong wanted to present an intolerable situation which trapped people survive because of only self-interest. Everyone conspires to abduct the Naga to their country since he is considered as a symbol of fertility. The Naga issued a warning to the world not to be deceived by the conspiracy by inscribing a message on the Mekong River's rocks, called to mind to human about an undesirable consequence of being avaricious and selfish. No one knew the meaning of the message, but this mystery provided a warning for everyone. *The Message* was performed at Makhampom Studio, Bangkok, in 2007; the Lido Multiplex Theatre, Bangkok, in 2008; and was also performed in Yokohama, Japan in 2008, which was provided with Japanese subtitles. It was held at BankART 1992 and Kazu Ohno Dance Studio which was sponsored by City of Yokohama and The Agency of Cultural Affairs of Japan. I had an opportunity to join *The Message* as an actress, taking the role of Jantia, wife of Naga Malan.

It is not a simple replication from *Naga Wong* in creating *The Message*. *The Message* was modified in a new piece but almost of the elements based on the previous production. Prasatthong has the opportunity to adopt and adapt the theatrical qualities from *Naga Wong*, transforming it to a Thai contemporary *likay* performance based on the previous collaborative production. By combining them in a *likay* style, the ancillary elements of Lao's *lamlueang* and Cambodia's *yike* such as music, instruments and characters' names are borrowed. Performing in Thai *likay* is fitting to Thai actors rather than attempting to mimic Cambodian and Lao's theatrical elements accurately. After seeing the *Naga Wong* performance, the actors employed their prior experiences in *likay*

combine with the new materials. Since Thai *likay* was intensified in this production, actors who performed Cambodian and Lao roles also changed their costumes<sup>150</sup> into Thai *likay* style, sang and danced in *likay* convention, and used Thai language in both recital and dialogue.

As a space limitation and a trial of experimenting design, a backdrop and props in *The Message*, performed at Makhampom Studio in 2007, were clearly seen as selective sets. A plain backdrop was replaced a decorated-wooden backdrop in order to project light, imagining effect, and English subtitles on it. Wooden steps painted the white colour were used as a throne bench and cliffs instead of a wooden stool which is always placed in the centre of a stage in traditional *likay*.



**Photograph 33:** The rehearsal of *The Message* at Makhampom Studio (2007)  
(Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

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<sup>150</sup> Lao's female character wore sarong with a shawl wrapping over one shoulder around her chest and back with ornate decorations, while male characters wore the same style of Thai *likay* costumes but very less ornate. Cambodian female character wore the same style costume of Lao's female character with a great amount of gold decorations, while one male character, played Naga role, wore ornate fabric T-shirt and loincloths with gold decorations. The other actor played a Naga disguised as a human being, wore loincloths and T-shirt without decorations.



**Photograph 34:** The rehearsal of the wedding scene in *The Message* at Makhampom Studio (2007). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)



**Photograph 35:** A character disguises herself by wearing sunglasses. A kettle is humorously used as a conch shell in the water blessing of a wedding ceremony scene in *The Message* at Makhampom Studio (2007). (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)



**Photograph 36:** *The Message* at Makhampom Studio (2007) (Photo courtesy of Makhampom Theatre Troupe)

Although a large space was available at the Lido Multiplex movie house in 2008, this contemporary design, which used only some indicative props of a *likay* performance, was continuously used in order to explore and nurture creativity through a ‘less-is-more’ design to both artists and the audience. The steps were replaced to a black-step platform, which was used as a backdrop, dividing the front and the back of the stage. The stage floor was black as well, so lighting and visual effects were necessarily employed in this almost darkish atmosphere. Prasatthong also shrewdly took benefit of a big movie-screen behind the stage by projecting the images, which related to the specific scene, on the back screen to abridge an action and quickly link to the following scene; for example, a throne hall shadow image was projected in a wedding scene to lessen a scale of stage-prop decoration, and provide the *likay* convention to the audience. Additionally, a leather shadow-puppet of Naga sketch was played with clear light, indicating appearance or disappearance of the Naga Malan in each scene.

<p>Please see DVD 2 clip 5 (duration: 18.38 minutes) A stage design of <i>The Message</i></p>
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### 2.2.1 *The Message* in Japan

To demonstrate Japanese perceptions to *likay*, I focus the production performed in Japan in 2008. *The Message begins* was the introduction of *The Message* which was shown on the first day of the 4-days performance. We performed on the floating stage near the bridge. Temporary seats were set like steps for more than 300 audience members. The Japanese producers' intention was to make a remarkable and stunning performance by which a random audience of passes by and those who had just left work would be persuaded to see *The Message*, which followed *The Message Begins* at BankART 1992 studio.<sup>151</sup>

Local myth and legend, conventional resources used in *likay*, derived from Laos, Cambodia and Thailand in the previous project *Naga Wong*, were adopted and adapted as bases for later development as a full narrative. Suwannakorn Kingdom faced the disaster of drought which created economic problems. The King of Suwannakorn sent the "Prince Fahnoi", disguised as a Brahman (Hermit priest) to steal the "Malan Naga" from Suwannaket Kingdom since they believe that the Naga, by bringing rain, will bring wealth to the Kingdom. The "Malan Naga" transforms himself into a young man who asks for help from "Phran Boon", the hunter, who always pays respect to the Naga at the lake. This narrative is different from Episode I of the *Naga Wong*, in which Naga forgave the human on their iniquity. This time he warns the human not to be so greedy, by angrily writing a message on rocks beside the Kong River. No one understood the exact meaning, but they realised the significance of the message.

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<sup>151</sup> The stage design was changed when *The Message* was performed at the BankART, Yokohama in 2008. At this time we had to perform on a floating stage in the river and used the scenery of Yokohama night as the biggest backdrop ever. However, Japanese stage crews had their fabulous and creative idea to use a boat as a small backdrop, dividing the boundary of the floating stage and the river, as well as providing an empty space in the boat as the changing room. Unfortunately, they could not reach their aim because a boat could not be used as a screen for projecting Japanese subtitles. Therefore, they built white steps with a white plain screen for projecting instead. These steps could be a throne and a cliff as well, and the little spared space behind this abrupt architecture as a back of the stage. However, all performers could not use this space as a changing room; it was provided on the bank behind the audience. We had to change the costumes very quickly and then ran on the temporary bridge to the floated stage. The slope of a bridge relied on a flood tide and an ebb tide. The second night, it was a very low tide, the bridge was extremely sloping, so we could walk and run with difficulty. Notwithstanding the unexpected circumstance, we simply handled these problems since improvisational and practice is the heart of performing *likay*. Lights and sounds effect were wholly employed in this show. A red light was used to indicate an appearance of a wicked character which was transformed from his or her previous decency. When the Naga was angry, a thunderclap of light and sound was applied.

The full *ok khaek* dance was introductorily presented before starting the actual play.<sup>152</sup> This introduction manifested a *likay* convention and also drew attention and prepared the Japanese audience, who knew quite little in *likay*'s convention, that *likay* is a percussive, flamboyant and flirtatious. Although maintained this *likay* identity, the modern dance and music was included in this show. Boonporn and I were dancing while Sarayuth was singing an English song, mixing between Thai folk music from *tareekipus*, a Muslim fan dance, and rap-beat style music along with the *piphat* musical ensemble. Boonporn and I danced in a mocking Indian style in the first part, then followed by a hip-hop dance style in the second part of the song, and came back to the Indian style again in the last part, in which the last sentence of song lyric was sung in traditional *likay* prelude style melody. The lyrics are:

(the first part, a <i>tareekipus</i> )	<p><i>Hi everybody, come to see likay</i></p> <p><i>We proudly present an entertainment for you today</i></p> <p><i>Please enjoy Thai folk opera</i></p> <p><i>Which is popular, and we call likay</i></p>
(the second part, a rap beat)	<p><i>Welcome everybody-it's time to see likay</i></p> <p><i>Likay is exciting-it's more than I can say</i></p> <p><i>You will be amazed-by the great likay</i></p> <p><i>Enjoy Thai songs Thai dance-Thai music and Thai play</i></p> <p><i>Live is too crazy-be happy anyway</i></p> <p><i>Forget your crazy life-leave it behind, throw it away</i></p>
(the third part, <i>tareekipus</i> and <i>likay</i> prelude)	<p><i>Follow me, let me share stories</i></p> <p><i>Take it easy-you will be OK.</i></p> <p><i>Whatever will be, let's see likay</i></p>

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<sup>152</sup> Language used in *The Message Begins* is English, but Thai language is used in *The Message* except the *ok khaek* song





**Photograph 37:** *Ok Khaek*, an India style dance, is presented as a prelude dance in *The Message*, Yokohama, Japan, October 2008. (Photo courtesy of Toshio Mizohata)

Apart from the *ok khaek* prelude dance, the brief narration is typically used in *likay* performance. The performer can brief the show by announcing or telling the story to the audience instead of performing every action by performers. It can be used as a synopsis after the *ok khaek* was finished or as a linking narration between each scene. Having taken role as a narrator in *The Message Begin*<sup>153</sup>, I recounted the synopsis to the audience in the following sample:

Narrator	Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to a <i>likay</i> show. Today we proudly present a story of a beautiful Princess Busadi of Suwannaket Kingdom looking for a good guy to be her husband to protect her Kingdom from disaster and war. Many Princes come to the competition. Guess who will be the winner?
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<sup>153</sup> *The Message begins* was the introduction of *The Message* which performed in the first day of the 4-days performance. We performed on the floating stage near the bridge. Temporary seats were set like steps for more than 300 audiences. The Japanese producers' intention was to make a remarkable and stunning a random audience of passes-by and just leaves work were persuaded to see *The Message*, which was the ending of *The Message Begins* in the following days at BankART 1992 studio.



**Photographs 38-39:** The atmosphere of the floating stage which has Yokohama city's night as its backdrop in *The Message Begins*, Yokohama, Japan, October 2008. (Photos courtesy of Toshio Mizohata)

Audience participation is one of the main elements of *likay* performance which is normally used in Makhampom's contemporary *likay*. In the same performance, I had to invite the audience to take part in my song, allowing interact between an actor and spectator. Firstly, I talked to them and explained how to join my song; for example, I would sing 2 lines and skip at the end of my space, and then the audience must say "Hai" like the sample below:

<i>Let's sing a song</i>	<i>let's sing along, alright?</i>
<i>Let's sing together</i>	<i>like a singer, don't be shy?</i>
<i>Sing with me, anyway</i>	<i>if you like likay just say...(Hai)</i>
<i>I come from Thailand</i>	<i>which is the land of smile</i>
<i>Hope you like Thai food</i>	<i>hope you all like Thai style</i>
<i>Do you like Thai chilly?</i>	<i>if it "oishi"<sup>154</sup> please say...(Hai)</i>

Another example of audience participation was seen in a comical scene in *The Message*, in which the clown named Oishi, performed by a cross-dressing actor, demonstrated to the audience how to mix a prescription in a very droll gesture. After finishing a demonstration, he asked for a volunteer among audience members to come on the stage to help him compound that medicine in the funny movement swaying hip gesture he shown, which offered the audience a sense of entertainment.

### 2.2.2 Lessons from Japanese Audiences

No sharp dividing line exists between actors and audiences in *likay* performances; performers always encourage audience participation. In the context of Thai folk-popular theatre, audiences do not need to be theatre connoisseurs but, to some degree, should participate in shows by laughing, shouting, talking, exclaiming, or clapping, which can invigorate their own viewing experiences and performers' acting. Japanese audiences often stay quiet, because they do not want to break performers' concentration, but their calm reactions are actually undesirable for *likay* shows.

The necessity for audience participation in *likay* productions was underscored on the opening night of *The Message*. The audience kept silent, neither laughing nor responding when asked. At first, we thought our performance was not good enough. Only after did we realise that Japanese viewing culture requires that audiences remain quiet. This helped us learn to cope with intercultural audiences. We adjusted our performance by adding a short section in Japanese to our dialogue on the second night, bridging the gap between performers and audience. I, playing Jantia, enlisted the audience's assistance when looking for my husband, Naga Malan. First, I asked them in English, "Do you see my husband?" No one laughed or reacted. When I asked them the

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<sup>154</sup> *Oishi* means delicious in Japanese.

same thing in Japanese, “*Watashino danna sang mite’ ma sang ga?*,” most of the audience either smiled or giggled and understood my actions and intentions.



**Photograph 40:** Japanese subtitles are projected on the wooden backdrop  
Japanese subtitles are projected on the wooden backdrop in *The Message*,  
Yokohama, Japan, October 2008. (Photo courtesy of Toshio Mizohata)

We also encouraged more participation by audience members by inviting some onto the stage, to join a funny scene, and having Boonporn, an actress who had lived in Japan for six months, explain in basic English, as well as easy Japanese, what they were supposed to do. The mood of the performance very much changed at our last two performances, when some Thai residents of Yokohama came to see us and took a chance on participating in the performance by presenting us with garlands and flowers and cheerfully yelling and clapping throughout the performance, which encouraged the Japanese audience to follow suit. This boosted our energy as performers.

### **2.3 *Likay Akaoni* Red Demon: Performing Japanese Play with Thai Contemporary *Likay* Form**

This performance focuses on the process of cultural exchange and how Thai practitioners learn and adapt a Japanese play-script their work as well as how Japanese audiences experience a Thai traditional-popular theatre form, adapted from their own contemporary script and stage-play. In other words, the director Pradit Prasatthong wants to make a contribution to intercultural communication and to produce a performance which can be appreciated by both Thai and Japanese audiences.

Principally, this product is the result of an encounter followed by a process of exchange between equals with no consideration of colonial and orientalist positions. The production was created based on cross-cultural negotiation at the dramaturgical and aesthetic levels. Prasatthong maintains *Likay* form and its essential elements but he combines them with universal social issues in which his *Likay* productions can present contemporary content through a popular-traditional form.

### **2.3.1 Theatrical Exchange: Contemporary Japanese Text Performed in Thai *Likay* Form**

Originally scripted and directed by Japanese playwright Hideki Noda, *Akaoni*<sup>155</sup> was first staged in 1996<sup>156</sup> in Japan with Japanese players alongside a British actor playing the character of the Red Demon. It was re-staged in 1998 with Thai cast members and Noda himself playing the demon's role. In 2003, Noda directed and staged an English-language version of his *Akaoni* in London using British cast members. To celebrate the Mekong-Japan Exchange Year 2009, Makhampom Theatre troupe performed *Likay Akaoni* (The Red Demon or *Yak Tua Daeng*) at Jim Thompson Art Centre, Bangkok (2009); Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space (2009); and Esplanade's Theatre Studio in Singapore (2010) as part of the Mekong Festival 2009 in Tokyo, held by Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre (TMT). Discussion mainly focuses on the Tokyo production, performed between 19 and 23 November 2009, where I joined a production as a staff member of documentation.

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<sup>155</sup> *Akaoni* deals with racism and the difficulties of intercultural communication; discrimination towards people from outside Japanese culture is clearly seen. When villagers on an unknown island meet an odd-looking creature who is washed ashore, speaking an unfamiliar language that nobody can understand, they view him as a monster and fear him. Called Akaoni (Red Demon) by the locals, he is then exiled from the village. The villagers decide to kill him, but the heroine, referred to in the play as "that woman", tries to help him, and then undergoes terrible consequences (Ayako, 1999). When performed in the Setagaya theatre, Japan, the production used Thai cast members and Thai language with Japanese narration via headsets for Japanese audiences.

<sup>156</sup> The project was initiated in 1996 as a NODA MAP production. The following year the Japan Foundation's Asian Performing Arts Exchange and Research Program was launched with the purpose of bringing together Asian and Japanese theatre people to create joint productions. In 1997, Hideki Noda held a workshop with Thai actors from Bangkok and to create and perform a Thai version of *Akaoni*. After that this Thai version was performed in Bangkok in 1998 and re-produced in Tokyo in 1999 (Sentoku, 2009: 1).

*Likay Akaoni* is a tradition-based contemporary performance performed in Thai *Likay* style, presenting a plot of cultural differentiation and communication breakdown. Prasatthong explained that the two crucial aspects considered are how to reinterpret the story and how to present it in a new form as a cultural transformation. For the first point, Prasatthong rethinks the old version which emphasised the equality among human being in the world. The story shows the conflict between the local people (who can be presumed to be Asian, Japanese or Thai people) and Europeans, for instance, in the aftermath of World War II. Although this theme is still up to date, Prasatthong, as the Thai artist, is interested in finding some more specific idea which effectively reflects the Southeast Asian and Thai situation according to the given theme. The second aspect was about how to use *Likay* form to fit well with this content.

### 2.3.2 Adapting texts

Based on the play *Akaoni*, *Likay Akaoni* told the tale of the inhabitants of an unknown island who doggedly believe that there is no land on the other side of the ocean. The play features four main characters: three humans and one demon. The human characters' names are Thai: Kmuki, Kini, and Paglan.<sup>157</sup> Kmuki means 'fierce male giant', Kini means 'female giant', and Paglan means 'strong, big-bodied male giant'. A 'Red Demon', who plays the role of stranger, is named Kasi, the Arabic word for 'giant', used by many Muslims. Prasatthong (Interview, 2010) points out that this Muslim name refers to the religious conflict between Buddhist and Muslim in the three southern frontier provinces of Thailand.

Kmuki, a dimwitted man; Kini, his sister (whom the villagers call "that woman" and whom Kmuki calls "you" - she symbolises a nameless woman subject to the lust of men); and their friend Paglan, Kini's seducer and liar, meet Kasi, and they all try to be good friends. However, their attempt at friendship fails, because the villagers disapprove and try to drive Kasi away. This is because they cannot communicate with Kasi and assume that Kasi, whose appearance is different from their own, is a monster and a cannibal and will eat them. Since Kini wants to help Kasi, Paglan has to help Kini, because he has fallen in love with her. Hence, after being banished, Paglan, Kini,

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<sup>157</sup> In the Japanese version, names of characters are: Tombi, Mizukane, and 'That Woman' for Kmuki, Paglan, and Kini in Makhampon's *Likay* performance. Additionally, *Aka Oni* was named as Kasi in the latter version.



Kasi, and Kmuki leave the village by boat. On their journey across the sea, Kini loses consciousness, due to malnutrition. She comes to after eating a shark fin soup provided by Kmuki and Paglan but finds out later that the soup is not a shark fin after the disappearance of Kasi. Kini runs away and commits suicide by jumping off a cliff after realising that she has eaten Kasi.

In *Likay Akaoni*, Prasatthong focused on universally-relevant social concerns about discrimination and miscommunication among different nationalities. The original text of *Akaoni* relates the images and stories of homeless people, refugees, and those banished from their hometowns across the world. Reinterpreting this text, in which “different traditions and contexts are found in a new context and situation” (Preez, 2011: 159), Prasatthong refocused it on the continual political and religious turmoil in the three southern frontier provinces of Thailand. *Likay Akaoni* can be also seen as highlighting the way in which “the original meanings of the different traditions in their original contexts ... [have been] now ... supplanted by different meanings” (ibid). In Thailand, Buddhists and Muslims look at one another as enemies. This is largely due to ignorance, as Prasatthong has explained: “[We] consider our people as strangers. Anyone who talks or thinks differently will be the opposite side” (Yi-Sheng, 2010). In addition, “the pain here belongs not only to the victims of discrimination, but also to those who benefit from others’ ignorance and those who remain ignorant” (Amranand, 2009c: 8). In this sense, Prasatthong has pointed out that

if this world were a *likay* theatre, we could distinguish performers from audience members. In particular, we live in a world in which ‘otherness’ is basically imposed on strangers. So, demons can exist everywhere, not only in *likay* theatre. I want [*Likay Akaoni*] to remind audiences of this point and encourage them to look at their neighbours, strangers, and other people as friends, not demons.

(Chaipanha, 2009, author’s translation)

Moreover, in *Likay Akaoni*, Kasi can be seen as either good or evil. While he sends messages in bottles to his friends at sea, these messages are inaccessible. No one knows how good or bad Kasi and his friends are, but they all represent otherness; it is unnecessary to present a demon as a furious or fierce character, because it will always be looked on as an alien, no matter its manner. Accordingly, Prasatthong emphasised, in *Likay Akaoni*, the notion that giants and demons are not always dangerous and should not always be avoided. Sometimes, human beings are more dangerous than these

characters. Reflecting this idea, Kini recites a very important line to Kmuki, Paglan, and the villagers at the end of the performance. Before running away, she asks her brother and the villagers if it is not the truth that they ate the Kasi's (demon) flesh to survive, rather than the demon eating them.

Prasatthong started drafting his version of *Likay Akaoni* by reading the original script again and again and dividing it into a series of main sequences. Since the version performed in Japan had to conclude within one hour, it was crucial that Prasatthong make cuts to the original version. Thus, he selected parts of *Likay Akaoni* that maintained the original ideas of *Akaoni*. The new version of *Akaoni* extended original themes and sub-themes, to allow for the inclusion of contemporary content.

Prasatthong also added music, rhyme, verse, and other *likay* elements to the original *Akaoni*. To shorten the play to under one hour, he cut some songs and some depressing scenes where Paglan laments his unrequited love to Kini, thus presenting the real heartbreak of an egotistic man who loses his love to an uprooted man, Kasi, the Red Demon. While this kind of sad love scene is, to some degree, favoured by Thai audiences, Prasatthong perceived that it might cause Japanese audiences to feel apathetic, because it is quite slow and delicate. The Paglan-Kini scene, for instance, would have added thirty minutes to the performance.







**Photographs 41-42:** *Piphat*, or a musical ensemble band, is positioned at the back of the stage in *Akaoni* (2009) in Tokyo, Japan. (Photos: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Despite having to reduce the performance's length, Prasatthong kept a stylised *likay* scene in which Kasi has painted a cave's walls with a paradisiacal landscape that reflects his search for a celestial land and in which his ship has left, assuming that Kasi is dead. In this scene, Kini and Kasi perform a classical Thai dance, accompanied by beautiful instrumental music, performed by the troupe's musical ensemble, and a choral performance given by the other performers offstage. To audiences, this scene suggested Kini and Kasi's close, perhaps even romantic, relationship. In his version of *Akaoni*, the play's original author, Noda, did not clarify the nature of the two characters' relationship. Prasatthong developed it further, adding new elements and presenting them in a contemporary *Likay* style.

### 2.3.3 Finding a Form

Prasatthong chose to perform a *likay* version of *Akaoni*, because the Mekong project's organiser was impressed by *The Message*, another contemporary *Likay* performance put on by Makhampom in 2008, and asked Prasatthong to draft another *likay* production in Japanese. Prasatthong himself also wanted to present a *likay* version of Noda's *Akaoni*:

*Likay* is an art form that has developed along with Thai society, it is one of the few arts that has maintained traditional aspects but also kept relevance to contemporary life, so it does not become outdated. When Mr. Takahagi made me the offer of directing a Noda play, I immediately thought that if I were to direct it myself I would do it in the *Likay* style. *Likay* is originally a Malay art form, which means it emerged from Islamic culture. Therefore, I thought to set

the play in southern Thailand where many people of Malay descent live. So, I thought that it should be set in a seaside village in southern Thailand and use music that sounds exotic to the Thai ear (Sentoku, 2009: 7).

Additionally, Prasatthong was informed by Thai audiences who had seen the contemporary stage play version of *Akaoni* in 1998 that, although the performance was admirable, they could not follow it well, due to its swift dialogue and quick pace. Prasatthong (Interview, 2009a) has affirmed that *Akaoni*'s text is excellent but has added that the addition of *likay* elements, such as song, rhyme, and verse, to *Akaoni*'s repertoire, might enhance audiences' appreciation of the story. Therefore, very swift spoken dialogue was replaced by song and dance that was designed to cover the entire conversation of the contemporary stage play version. *Likay Akaoni* also had the potential to open up the worlds of audience members who did not care much for traditional art forms and to impart a sense of the contemporary, through the use of a 'different' kind of (performing) language.

Furthermore, Japanese audiences were invited to compare *likay* to the traditionally popular Japanese theatre genres of *kabuki* and *tai shu eng keki*. *Tai shu eng keki* means 'theatre for the people or the masses' and is also called 'working-class *kabuki*'. Noda has pointed out that *kabuki* and *tai shu eng keki* are examples of popular local Japanese performance styles, consisting of simple stories that can make audiences cry and laugh (Interview, 2009). Briefly looking into the definition of *likay*, I found that many interesting theatrical motifs can be attributed to popular Asian theatre. Thailand's *likay* and other kinds of traditional-popular performances in Southeast Asia, such as Laos' *lamlueang*, Cambodia's *yikay*, Malaysia's *mayong*, and Indonesia's *ludruk*, can be seen as common performance genres within a region whose countries have similar attributes and cultural sensibilities.

#### **2.3.4 Staging and Presentation**

Takigichi (2010), who watched a performance of Noda's version of *Akaoni* with a Thai cast in Tokyo, has wondered how Prasatthong replaced Noda's set, costumes, and lighting, which were filled with white and set on a very "flat" and "odourless" stage, with the colourful and culturally-specific settings of *likay*. I describe Prasatthong's methods of using *likay* form in presenting *Akaoni* as follows.



**Photograph 43:** Lighting and block marking in a dress-rehearsal *Akaoni* (2009) in Tokyo, Japan. (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

*Likay* performance consists of several crucial elements. Protagonists and antagonists usually introduce themselves directly to the audience. In each scene, a character or characters will sing a *ranikloeng* song or another Thai classical tune while performing a monologue or dialogue that presents their objectives and what they will do next. Although adjusting *Akaoni* to a variety of the *likay* performing style, Prasatthong maintained essential *likay* elements, employing an adapted conventional approach in his reinterpretation of the original *Akaoni* text. Starting with *ok khaek*, the opening scene in traditional *likay*, two female characters and one male character sang the Thai tune *mari suekariya*, used in *ronggeng* performances. A rapper, singing in English, joined them. While dancing and singing, the three performers ask the audience to clap their hands with the drum beat.

<p>Please see DVD 2 clip 6 (duration: 3.03 minutes)  <i>ok khaek</i>, an opening scene in <i>Akaoni</i></p>
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After this dance revue, which prepared the audience to see *likay*, Kmuki, a foolish character who is able to communicate both to other characters and to the audience, introduces himself and a story:

Hello ladies and gentlemen, my name is Kmuki, I am an idiot. I have never asked my parents why they named me Kmuki, because I have not seen them since I was born. Never mind. Today, I will tell you a funny story about a shark fin. Yes, it is about a delicious shark fin soup that you all love eating. But the shark fin in this story is top secret; it would have been kept a secret forever, if only there had been no storm that night.

(Author's translator)

Fictitious supposition or imaginative exercising is a *likay* convention that is agreeable both to audiences and performers. In *Likay Akaoni*, an empty bottle that served as a hand prop was also an important symbol of the other side of the sea. It was used not only as a fictitious prop, but as a mock microphone, by Kmuki, who spoke through it to the audience. An echo coming from the bottle represented Kmuki's belief that the microphone was alive. When Kmuki's sister died, however, the bottle had no more echo. The lack of echo reflected Kmuki's hopelessness about life and people, although he kept saying to the audience that he was fine:

I don't know much about this world. That's why I can continue to live. Sometimes I think of my sister and Red Demon laughing together in the boat. At that time, I thought she was laughing, but perhaps she was despairing. Whenever that image comes to my mind, little by little, I begin to understand the meaning of despair (Amranand, 2009c: 8).

The trust stage was used both in Thailand and Japan. The audience sat in the U-shaped space surrounding the performance area. The musical ensemble was placed at the back of the stage and hidden with lighting techniques, except for at the opening and the end of the performance. However, the Thai team spent three days rehearsing this production in Japan, since the stage there was larger and higher than the stage in Thailand, which consisted of a 2x4 metre box-like platform. Moreover, the troupe had to run through all-new cues, due to the up-to-the minute light and sound technology in the Japanese theatre. Actors had to commit to memory new blocking, so that they could communicate and interact with the whole audience.



**Photograph 44:** A thrust stage surrounded by the audience on all three sides, projecting Japanese subtitles in *Akaoni* (2009) in Tokyo, Japan. (Photo: Sukanya Sompiboon)

Prasatthong departed from conventional *likay* staging in this production. The typical *likay* symbol of a bench, used to represent the highest throne in a throne hall, was not used in *Akaoni*. Prasatthong focused more on *mise-en-scène*. It was unnecessary for the characters to use traditional entrances and exit. Instead, they could enter at any spot on the stage. Villagers performed dance suites, while main characters performed traditional *likay* dances. With no bench centre-stage, the opening scene featured a dance suite, in which the villagers danced around the stage, while Kasi made his first appearance in conventional *likay* style, sporting a glittering red costume and a giant mask; his slow and delicate hand actions and body posture represented classical Thai theatre movements and also indicated his major role in the performance.

Prasatthong skilfully translated and adjusted the original (prose) text of *Akaoni* to the unsophisticated verse and song of *likay*. The revised text fit the melodramatic and comedic style of *likay*, such that “the adaptation of the rhythm of the source text to the target language would allow the original rhythm to survive the translation process” (Baines and Dalmasso, 2011: 50). It is worth noting that *likay* performance can do justice to the content of the original version of *Akaoni*, allowing performers to appropriately link the written to the spoken word and rhythmic, physical, emotional, and symbolic stylisations to one another. Apart from employing *ranikloeng* songs and other types of *likay* music, such as *hongthong* and *songmai*, *Likay Akaoni* employed Thai classical tunes with Javanese tones and Malayan ethnic melodies. Furthermore, musical genres influenced by the Dutch and related to the Java and Malaya music cultures, such as *batavia*, were adopted, as were Muslim tunes from the southern parts of Thailand and Malaysia.

Prasatthong’s production of *Likay Akaoni* principally relied on a full-script and rehearsal process. Prasatthong allowed his performers to improvise some minor lines, occasionally in Japanese, which contributed to the hilarity of the play. The sole use of improvisation might have rendered the content of the production inappropriate and led to loss of control over the play’s running time. Moreover, it would likely have confused the Japanese member of the crew who managed the Japanese subtitles, although she was able to communicate in Thai.

Since Prasatthong wanted to concentrate on the problems faced by the three southern frontier provinces of Thailand in *Likay Akaoni*, he employed Javanese images and

costumes in the play. Male characters wore Javanese-style glittering silver jackets with loincloths, decorated with *sabu*, the hanging ornate fabric along their waists, as well as Malayan-style cloth wrappings around their heads and long-haired wigs. Female characters wore glittering silver gowns in slightly different designs and decorated their hair with glittering ornaments and artificial flowers.

### 2.3.5 Audience Perceptions

According to Royce (2004: 156), audiences of different cultures or nationalities may have different expectations of performances; Royce points out that “American audiences want to know what is happening at very short intervals, while French audiences can let almost an entire number be presented before they need to have some closure.” Similarly, Thai and Japanese audiences’ perceptions and demands of *Likay Akaoni* may have differed. Thai audiences may have liked seeing how Prasatthong used the *likay* form to present Noda’s masterpiece, while Japanese audiences may have been curious to know what would happen when Noda’s play was presented in a Thai form. However, the distinctions of language and theatrical style drawn by artists and audiences alike allowed all to fully experience the cultural encounters and exchanges in the play.

When *Likay Akaoni* was performed at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, sub-titles were displayed on screens on both the right- and left-hand sides of the stage. Before each performance, the audience was shown a short video on how to watch *likay*. The video asked audiences to express their emotions during the performance, including by interrupting it with shouted suggestions on what the actors should do in scenes. This guide on how to watch *likay* was offered because the troupe had unpleasant experiences performing *likay* in Yokohama, Japan in 2008. In Yokohama, audiences did not want to interrupt performances, due to their perception that audiences should be well-behaved. Thus, they were restrained in their emotions and interactions, holding back on laughing and talking while watching our performances. What is more, they did not respond to characters when asked to. Since *likay* requires audience interaction, this made our performances tedious.

It is probably true that the arts speak a universal language, and, accordingly, our use of the Thai language in *Likay Akaoni* was not an obstacle to audiences’ appreciation of our

performances. The main points of feedback given by Japanese audiences<sup>158</sup> concerned their comprehension and appreciation of the play. Around sixty percent said that their understanding depended on the facial expressions, emotions, and interactions of the actors, rather than on spoken dialogue. However, a large proportion also considered familiarity with the original story before seeing the production necessary. They expressed such opinions as:

Facial expressions and gestures help the audience understand the story. Subtitles were very helpful in understanding the story in detail.

There are many expressions in this performance that do not rely on spoken language. I could understand the performance, even though I could not see the subtitles from my seat.

According to our Japanese audiences, the most impressive motifs in *Likay Akaoni* were live music, singing, and acting talent. Surprisingly, the beautiful stylised dresses, together with the fake but splendid diamond earrings, necklaces, and decorative headdresses, were regarded as unimportant.

Providentially, two talks were given after each show by Japanese theatre practitioners and scholars whose comments were very useful. They opened by noting that some of the Japanese sub-titles were inaccurate. For instance, most of the characters in *Likay Akaoni* spoke the word “hopeless”, or *sinwang* in Thai. The Japanese translator chose for *sinwang* the Japanese word for “desperate”, which, as one of the theatre critics commented, is inappropriate because “hopeless” is more precisely than “desperate” in this context. Furthermore, the scholars who spoke after the show added that the audience’s understanding relied on their beliefs, religions, and experiences. More to the point, Prasatthong intended to add Japanese words, articulated in Thai accents, to the dialogue in the performance, to demonstrate the effort made by the characters in *Likay Akaoni* to communicate with Japanese audiences and to enhance the play’s hilarity. However, this was disallowed by the Japanese project’s art director, who did not believe that the use of out-of-tone Japanese language would be necessary to create comedy. In fact, he really thought that Japanese audiences preferred to listen to the entirely beautiful and harmonious Thai language.

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<sup>158</sup> The feedbacks were collected from the 40 questionnaires.

## 2.4 Makhampom's Intercultural *Likay*

Makhampom's intercultural *likay* productions integrate the performance elements of different cultures into a form that aims to retain the cultural integrity of the specific materials used in forging new texts and theatre practices (Lo and Gilbert, 2002: 5). This type of cultural exchange can be seen as "the transmission of theatrical troupes and gags between actors and playwrights; the exchanges of actors, playwrights, and theatrical culture...the representation of foreign identity...that communicated across national and regional boundaries, and allowed for both material and symbolic exchange" (Henke and Nicholson, 2008: 1).

*Naga Wong* exhibits a combination of the performance styles of three nations - Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, on an equal footing. Moreover, it demonstrates the importance of process, particularly in the intermingling of shared beliefs and artistic forms and the invention of performance genres. *The Message*, a contemporary *likay* performance, illustrates performing techniques and aesthetic transformation. Prasatthong used an intercultural approach to theatrical transformation, borrowing elements of Cambodian *yike* and Lao *lamlueang* and engaging these with Thai *likay*. He also constructed a meeting of localisation and globalisation, exploiting a form of Thai popular theatre to expose the universal applicability of themes of human greed and leave audiences in capitalist societies thinking about their own perceptions and convictions.

In the theatrical exchange seen in *Likay Akaoni*, Prasatthong used a collaborative approach to the adaptation of theatrical elements from a Japanese play text that he then performed in the Thai *likay* style, illustrating the transformation of performing techniques and aesthetics. The significance of *Likay Akaoni* lay not only in the value of its creators, but in the collaborative process in which the contributors from Japan and Thailand engaged. While the production was performed only by Thai artists, scripts were subtitled during dress rehearsals, and performers had to work with Japanese crews. Therefore, knowing and understanding different working cultures was crucial to ensuring the smooth exchange of traditions from two different cultures (Barucha, 1993: 241 in Daugherty, 2005: 66).



The type of cultural exchange between Thai, Lao, Cambodian, seen in *Naga Wong* and Thai and Japanese cultures in *Likay Akaoni* raise further questions about the role of intercultural theatre in East-meets-East cultural exchange. This phenomenon continues to take hold in the wide and complicated arena of interculturalism and is particularly of interest in dialogues that aim to address “the pervasive phenomena of cultural hybridity and cross-cultural exchange” (Henke and Nicholson, 2008: 9). Makhampom’s performances of *The Message* and *Likay Akaoni* for Japanese audiences, whose viewing culture was, to some degree, dissimilar to that of Thai viewing culture, which was more accustomed to *likay*, should be remembered by Thai practitioners who intend to contribute to intercultural and international performance pieces.

## Conclusion

As an eclectic theatre form, Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* is located at the intersection of serious art and recreation. Pure entertainment, it appeals to various types of audiences but, at the same time, embodies a serious message. It has narratives that audiences can follow effortlessly and music, make-up, costumes, and decorations that seize audiences’ attention. Correspondingly, Mechudhon states that contemporary *likay* performances unequivocally entertain, while embedding hidden didactic accounts and subversive philosophies, to a certain degree, in their repertoires (Interview, 2010). If audiences cannot decode the hidden messages, they, at least, can enjoy themselves and may experience good dreams after the show. *Likay* artist Pongsak Suansri (Interview, 2010) notes that Makhampom’s style which is ‘unauthentic’ *likay* is not important, because the troupe contributes to the development of a contemporary *likay* style for a new audience; nonetheless, Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* works on essential *likay* elements with a deep understanding of what *likay* is. Furthermore, the troupe’s enthusiasm in searching for and using great numbers of traditional and classical Thai songs in its *likay* performances demonstrates its commitment to developing its *likay* skills.

The paradoxical combination of a recreational form and serious content is the main characteristic of Makhampom’s contemporary *likay*. Makhampom uses the wit and hilarity of *likay* to communicate social issues to all of society via a hybridised approach.

Bharucha (2000: 12) suggests that “values are imbedded in and inseparable from practice in terms of cultural practice.” Hence, Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* can be seen as promoting ‘new’ or ‘alternative’ values and thereby attempting to bridge an invisible gap between aesthetic judgement in Thai theatre.

## Conclusion

“The Reinvention of Thai Traditional-Popular Theatre: Contemporary *Likay* Praxis” reflects on the contributions of contemporary *likay* productions, a new phenomenon in traditional-popular theatre reinvention. The research demonstrates a popular theatre informed by Thai culture, where *likay* is stigmatised as a performance for working-class people and viewed as inferior to court theatre and later Western-style performance. As I mentioned in the introduction, to be a fan of a *likay* performance is somewhat embarrassing, since this kind of popular entertainment is mainly received negatively or looked down on by a majority of the upper class and intellectuals. However, the new style of *likay*, created by contemporary artists called ‘contemporary *likay* performance,’ appeal to the middle-class or *khon chan klang* audiences because it embraces social issues, political satire, and philosophy, and it performs a combination of popular theatre and modern elements, and this social relevance captures their attention. Other than viewing contemporary *likay* for entertainment and fulfilment of social status, audiences attend performances to increase their cultural awareness of both localisation and globalisation. Summary details and discussions of the thesis as well as further research suggestions are provided in the following sections.

Chapter 1 mainly focuses on the duality of court and popular forms. These two genres clearly demonstrate their relationships of both discrepancy and affinity, which exemplify the aesthetic dichotomies between them. This binary leads to the discernment of aesthetic differentiation in terms of social-class favoritism. However, as a living popular theatre that is not only an entertaining and straightforward form, *likay*, a non-court performance, is also a progressive entertainment form for common audiences. *Likay* has developed since the nineteenth century. If *lakon* (*nai*, *panthang*, and *dukdamban*) is referred to as the definition of Thai classical theatre, it can be said that *likay* describes actual Thai popular theatre. This is because *likay* is a vigorous popular form, and has been modified to suit both its audiences’ tastes and the Thai entertainment climate, drawing on both traditional and non-traditional styles. It stays alive by way of commercial theatre; troupes receive no government subsidies and are exclusively reliant on ticket sales.

*Likay* is continually developing, modifying, and adapting. The commentaries and critiques of performers are highlighted via improvisation, stylisation, and exaggeration, as well as by an aesthetic of interruption and fictitious supposition. Allusions to television, current events, and social issues are regularly used to illustrate *likay*'s modernisation. It is worth noting that people who say *likay* is dying are not the audience for this genre. *Likay* is the main popular Thai theatre, following the ebb and flow of social change, and thus is not dying but adapting and changing in the modernising state. It is regularly emulated by other popular forms such as melodramatic and comedic films, and it is consistently adapted into television soap operas. This is because *likay* contains numerous motifs in the frame of 'Thai taste,' as mentioned in Chapter 2.

I provide the socio-political context for Thailand's 'modernisation period' and the effects of this context on Thai theatre's development in Chapter 3. While Chapter 1 presents the duality and aesthetic dichotomies of court and popular performance, Chapter 3 distinguishes between 'modern-based contemporary performance' and 'tradition-based contemporary performance,' both of which are principal attributes of contemporary Thai performance today. The formation of contemporary Thai theatre, in the broadest sense, can be referred to as the emergence of a new performance style and a fusion of art forms that resulted from this modernisation. The modern theatre preferred by and performed in elite circles from the late nineteenth century until the beginning of the 1930s manifested the prestige of the royal court and the values of the upper-class. From the 1930s to the 1950s, it was gradually replaced by more patriotic theatre forms. During this period, Western theatrical elements were used to modernise classical Thai theatre and to propagate nationalism. The modern theatre that was permanently established in Thailand in the 1960s was influenced by globalisation. The main types of theatre that emerged during this phase were modern-based contemporary and tradition-based contemporary. The latter can be identified as a form of hybrid theatre, as an intercultural theatrical approach is the underlying principle of its theatre-making processes. When contemporary artists reinvented plays in tradition-based contemporary styles, classical dramatic texts and techniques were more frequently exploited than those of popular folk repertoires. However, *likay*, as a popular form, has been reinvented because it is the most popular and well known dramatic popular form amongst Thais.

Typically, the genre 'contemporary Thai theatre' includes modern performances performed in Thailand or overseas by Thai theatre practitioners. Performances can

employ imported forms of avant-garde theatre, physical theatre, and physical dance or theatre forms that employ Thai theatrical structures or content in various contemporary ways. This definition can be seen as “modern-based contemporary performance”, which suggests the influence of Western theatre on the formation of modern Thai theatre, and which uses modern methods to treat Western and original contemporary Thai texts. Modern-based contemporary theatre, in this context, refers to Thai stage theatre that employs or adapts Western elements in its repertoire and is mainly performed in the spoken-drama style. This kind of theatre supposedly began when dramatic arts and theatre were introduced as academic subjects in Thai universities in the 1960s.

“Tradition-based contemporary performance”, which demonstrates an attempt to embrace folk and classical Thai theatrical elements in a contemporary style, is considered new irrespective of whether it embodies traditional elements, performs in the present period, or relates to a contemporary context. In this regard, it may be clearly distinguished from the ‘purer’ remnants of classical or traditional Thai theatre, whose main motifs are traditional Thai music, dance, and text and poem recitation. Examples and analysis of tradition-based contemporary performances in Thailand during 1990s reflect intra- and intercultural approaches, feministic perspectives, and theatre for development. This kind of tradition-based contemporary performance has been cultivated and carried on among Thai theatre practitioners who perform this theatre style domestically and globally.

*Likay* itself, as the most entertaining popular stage genre, allows contemporary artists to employ their artistic experiences and adeptness to accommodate *likay* in contemporary pieces, and is thus an attractive art form. Contemporary *likay* is the experimental work of contemporary troupes who are interested in making tradition-based contemporary performances. Both Thai literary works and foreign play scripts are reinterpreted to suit current situations or dramaturgical aims. By employing a mix of *likay* forms and inspiration from the West, and assembling montages of different working styles, succeeding generations of Thai contemporary dramatists have also made new *likay* of their own. Contemporary *likay* combines themes of morality and enlightenment with socially-conscious messages, hilarity, and merriment. Contemporary *likay* productions reflect both new perspectives on theatre making and Thai aesthetics that challenge Thai socio-cultural traditions and contemporary Thai society. Contemporary *likay* has become part of the reinvention of Thai tradition.

The discussion of contemporary *likay* performance reflects the analysis of the ‘discourse’ and ‘practice’ of the reinvention of traditional-popular theatre, considering the questions of why *likay* is still popular at the present time, and why it has been chosen for reinvention in contemporary theatre. Two main principles that seem to attract contemporary artists to reinvent *likay* are the “flexibility” of the *likay* form as a hybrid theatre, and the “nostalgia” of dramatists as self-syncretic practitioners.

One assumption is that *likay* is a flexible traditional theatre, easily adjustable thanks to its genre as a traditional popular theatre, distinct from the strictness of a classical form such as *khon* and *lakon*, which were conserved as the royal version. Furthermore, *likay* is indirectly associated with the sacred ritual. *Likay* performance originated in central Thailand, so the central dialect of its dialogues and singing-parts can serve all audiences in Thailand, unlike other regional, popular performances, such as the southern *nang talung*, north-eastern *molam*, and northern *lakon sor*, which traditionally use their local dialects for dialogues and song lyrics. This dialect differentiation seems to limit accessibility both for dramatists and their audiences.

Nostalgia has also been demonstrated by Thai dramatists who have combined elements of foreign theatre with traditional Thai elements in their own productions by means of self-syncretism. Contemporary Thai playwrights and practitioners of hybrid theatre have experienced both the modern and traditional worlds of theatre-making. Instead of exploiting Western theatrical motifs, both in the physical and the imaginative realms, many have sought alternative ways of creating theatre by returning to traditional performing styles. Indeed, the use of old Thai theatrical forms and content, together with contemporary motifs, is regarded as progressive. These dramatists play key roles in creating contemporary *likay* performances, including other tradition-based contemporary theatre performances.

It is important to explain that contemporary creators of *likay* are likely to unintentionally produce another version of conventional *likay* style, but in doing so they invent a hybrid work envisaging the tradition-based contemporary theatre. I would like to suggest here that a contemporary *likay* production is by no means a copy or a ‘re-creation’ of various theatrical motifs but rather a ‘co-creation’ of various theatrical motifs and interpretations. Correspondingly, there are some distinctive approaches of training, practising, and performing *likay* between conventional *likay* troupes and

contemporary *likay* troupes. I would suggest that the distinction between conventional *likay* and contemporary *likay* is the different approach in praxis. The conventional *likay* artists are often ‘*likay* by blood’ and are trained in a life-long training seen as a ‘*likay* home school’, using improvisation as the main tool and performing *likay* successively, while contemporary *likay* actors mainly rely on scripts and the rehearsal process and perform *likay* occasionally.

However, I would also suggest that adapting *likay* into a contemporary style is not as simple and easy as one may think. The process of conducting such a production is by no means simply posting contemporary content in the *likay* repertoire, nor a fortuitous mixture of local and global artistic motifs, but a way of researching within practice and praxis. For example, Makhampom *likay* actors under Pradit Prasatthong’s direction have made efforts to comprehend and acquaint themselves with traditional styles of *likay* performance using ‘insider perspective’ before adjusting and contemporising a form, while processes of other contemporary troupes are, to a certain degree, centred on the principle of expertness (in contemporary theatre), then linked with *likay* motifs.

*Likay Faust* (2002) by Moradok Mai Theatre Group, *Chalawan: The Likay Musical* (2006) by Patravadi Theatre Group, *Likay Française: The Island of Slaves* (2007), a classic comedy of French theatre, by Kriengsak Silakong, a well-known Thai film festival director, and *Sudsakorn* (2010) by Jitti Chompee, a renowned contemporary dance choreographer, are all examples of contemporary *likay* performances which are discussed in Chapter 4. These four contemporary *likay* productions demonstrate the purposes of contemporary theatre troupes and dramatists that they are concerned less in engaging in contemporary *likay* praxis than employing *likay* form to produce reinvented and experimental theatre forms.

In Makhampom *likay* praxis, as shown in Chapter 5, performers develop their *likay* skills in three stages: First, they start observing professional *likay* performance as audiences. Subsequently, they ask permission to practice with these professional troupes, and then start performing as minor roles and extras. Finally, after spending time in occasional or ad hoc performances, the artists create experimentally and contribute their own styles and intentions to *likay* productions, bringing to public audiences a contemporary performance style. This process can be seen as “cultural praxis,” not just “cultural exoticism”, a term that has only superficial appeal. The troupe’s six major

productions from 2001-2010, presented in Chapter 6, are (1) Socio-political-based productions include *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001); *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003-2004); and *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006). (2) Intercultural-Based Productions embrace *Naga Wong* (2005-2006); *The Message* (2007-2008); and *Likay Akaoni* (2009-2010). These productions clearly reflect the objectives, dramaturgies, rehearsals, and intra- and intercultural theatrical techniques of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* contributions.

Makhampom Troupe is relatively prominent in contributing contemporary *likay*. Not only are the previous tradition-based contemporary productions discussed in Chapter 3, the troupe's signature and characteristics of 'neo-traditionalism' and a 'culture of fun,' they are also characteristics of the troupe's contemporary *likay* contributions. Contemporary *likay* has become recognised as the Makhampom troupe's trademark. The contemporarisation of *likay* practice reflects Makhampom's use of a popular and populist theatrical form to present a progressive theme and to challenge a neo-traditional trend and new middle class audiences and culturists. This ideological idea and practice is further advanced by the troupe members' various ways of regarding dramaturgical aims and artistic adeptness.

Makhampom's contemporary *likay*, which lies between the two realms of 'great' and 'little' traditions, can perhaps be called the 'glitter' tradition. I have coined a word glitter by compounding two words between the 'little' and 'great' theatrical traditions, referring to the folk-popular and classical Thai-Western theatrical elements respectively. Glitter in this sense can be applied to the combination of theatrical elements which are selected by Makhampom's contemporary *likay*, reflecting in the explicit visual image of glittering costumes and decorations, and the implicit contemporary vision of a living-theatre form in the present time.

Although combined by various theatre motifs, the form clearly presents *likay* backbones<sup>159</sup>, but featuring other theatrical elements and performed by contemporary practitioners who have experience in conventional *likay* form. To be precise, Makhampom contemporary *likay* is clearly seen as '*likay* with some contemporary elements', not 'a contemporary performance featured by some *likay* elements'. This

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<sup>159</sup> such as *naphat* (scene presentation) *ranikloeng*, *ok khaek*, type characters, *piphat* musical ensemble, and ornate costumes and decorations



concept is particularly strong in relation to script creation, and the combining of various theatrical elements to create a hybrid form (Amranand, Interview 2011).

A great number of Makhampom's founders were involved with the political movement of the 1970s in which social change in Thailand emerged as the inevitable result of the bloody crackdown on democracy. They joined forces with students from various universities demonstrated against the return of the former dictators. Marxist ideologies as well as socialist and leftist contents were used to oppose against a dictatorship and provoke a democracy for *chaobaan* or grass-roots people. However, Makhampom troupe adapts the hierarchical hegemony and dominance of feudalism but in a satiric way in its *likay* repertoire, seen as an entertainment with subversive message. Therefore, a wide range of the grass-root popular audiences, bourgeoisie, educators, and aristocrats are able to understand and appreciate a Makhampom's contemporary *likay* productions.

I would suggest that Makhampom's contemporary *likay* productions are hybrid performances that feature narratives and methods that bridge the gap between different theatre genres, as well as diverse class-tastes, and move beyond the boundaries of the aesthetic realm. The paradoxical combination of a recreational form and serious content is the main characteristic of Makhampom's contemporary *likay*. Correspondingly, Bharucha (2000: 12) suggests that "values are imbedded in and inseparable from practice in terms of cultural practice," so Makhampom's contemporary *likay* can be an example of a 'new' or 'alternative' value which is contributed and implanted in a *likay* performance and Thai cultural value, reflecting continuous process of a gap bridging in an invisible line of aesthetic judgement in Thai theatre.

The value of this thesis lies not only in the contribution of new and critical material on contemporary *likay* study, but it also offers other important areas of further research and practices into tradition-based contemporary theatre and intercultural theatre.

Cross-cultural exchange and cultural hybridity among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) merits further research. Since ASEAN demonstrates its awareness as "one vision, one identity, one community" and it will become the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, I suggest that it is insufficient to cooperate only the socio-economic-political aspects, languages, and religions among the members of the ASEAN; it is also crucial that the arts and performing arts are also known and

exchanged in this region. This will raise further understanding about the role of intercultural theatre in East-meets-East cultural exchange and collaboration. This phenomenon continues to take hold in the wide and complicated arena of interculturalism. More to the point, it can be seen as the comparative study of regional popular theatre forms that share the same motifs as Thai *likay*. I have offered the collaborative work between Cambodian *yikay*, Lao *lamlueang*, and Thai *likay* in Chapter 6, but I have found that Malaysian *jikay* and Indonesian *ludruk* also have mutual essential elements to *likay* which merit further exploration.

One should not only focus on the mutuality of traditional-popular theatre in the ASEAN, but also other traditional and popular theatre in other countries such as Japanese *tai shu eng keki*, Taiwanese opera, and British Pantomime, which have various similarities to Thai *likay*. Additionally, Makhampom's lessons from performing contemporary *likay* abroad, in Japan and Singapore for example, indicate cultural distinction in audience reception, which I suggest warrants further research. The process and results of intra- and intercultural performances, locally and globally, will help dramatists and practitioners learn, understand, and negotiate between similarities and differences of world's theatre.

## **Appendices**

## Appendix 1: Makhampom *Likay* Performers

### Makhampom Permanent Volunteers

#### Pradit Prasatthong (b.1960)

The most senior member who started joining Makhampom in 1982, he was a director since 1985. He took up to the Secretary-General and Performance Programme Director positions in 2005. He was awarded by the Ministry of Culture as Thailand's leading national contemporary performing arts (Silapathorn Award) in 2004. His reputation is focused on a contemporary *likay* production in which he takes multiple roles as playwright, director and actor. Pradit Prasatthong resigned from those troupe's positions in 2010 and work as independent artist.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Likay Apiwat*: *Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001), *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003 and 2004), *Mahachanok* (2005), *Phra Tong- Nang Nak* (2005), *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006), *Naga Wong* (2005 and 2006) *The Message* (2007 and 2008), and *Akaoni* (2009 and 2010)

#### Pongjit Sapakhun (b.1967)

A key person of Makhampom *likay* performance has been a volunteer and staff member since 1989. Her theatrical experiences are combined between her childhood upbringings in Chantaburi province. She educated from humanities at Ramkhamhaeng University Bangkok and the John Bolton Theatre School in Melbourne Australia. Based on Makhampom Chiang-Dao centre, Chiang Mai, she is currently a co-managing Makhampom's Living Theatre and has the position of Community Program Director.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Likay Apiwat*: *Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001), *Naga Wong* (2005) and *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006)

**Yada Kriangkraiwuttikul (b.1965)**

She is a senior member of Makhampom Theatre Troupe who joined a group since 1992. After graduated from Ramkhamhaeng University, she has taken responsibility in Makhampom as an actor and account administrator. Born in Nonthaburi, a province adjacent to Bangkok, Yada has had opportunities to see *likay* as a ‘real’ fan and she also performs *likay* with Makhampom troupe.

**Attendance of Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* major productions: *Suek***

*Mueang Prae* (2003 and 2004) and *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006)

**Duangkhae Buaprakhon (b.1972)**

She is originated in Buriram in a north-eastern part of Thailand but was raised in Nakhornsawan province, an important source of *likay* artists. She graduated from Education Faculty from Chulalongkorn University, with a particular interest in many kinds of Thai popular theatre including *likay*. She trained and performed *likay* with Makhampom. She is now a director and producer of TV programme.

**Attendance of Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* major productions: *Likay***

*Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001)

**Neelacha Fuangfookiat (b.1974)**

She has been a Makhampom volunteer since 1992 seen as an actor, singer, dancer, and MC. Based in Bangkok, she is currently pursuing her MA in music ethnography, particular, *likay* music and melodies at Mahidol University.

**Attendance of Makhampom’s contemporary *likay* major productions: *Likay***

*Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001), *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006), and *Akaoni* (2009 and 2010)

**Duangjai Hirunsri (b.1974)**

She joined Makhampom whilst completing her theatre studies at Thammasat University in 1992. She maintains a strong performance and facilitation role in Makhampom, committing to a central role in both *likay* performer and facilitator of International Programme.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001), *Mahachanok* (2005), and *Phra Tong-Nang Nak* (2005)

**Saowanee Wongjinda** (b. 1974)

She started her career as an actress of Makhampom Troupe since she was 15 years old. Saowanee's first achievement is her international tour of *Daeng Between Two World* in 1993. She later joined *likay* performance, presenting her talented in singing and dancing. Not only performing in a major production, Saowanee is a key figure of Makhampom Likay Academy School.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006) and *Akaoni* (2009-2010)

**Boonsueb Phanprasert** (b.1974)

He works as a medical technologist in Saraburi province and also a main actor in Makhampom *likay* productions. Boonsueb is a co-initiator and founder of Makhampom Likay Academy School. He currently takes a leading role of the school and a coordinator in a minor project performance.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001), *Phra Tong-Nang Nak* (2005), *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006), and *Akaoni* or (2009-2010)

**Bhumin Dhanaketpisarn** (b.1964)

He is an electric engineer at The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand who is passionate in *likay* performance. Born in Suphanburi province, a hometown of many legendary *lukthung* singers, Bhumin has attended Makhampom *likay* production since 2001. He is the other founder of Makhampom Likay Academy School who is seen as Boonsueb buddy. He still performs *likay* in various minor productions.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001), *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003 and 2004), *Phra Tong Nang Nak* (2005), and *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006)

**Boonporn Phunlamlert (b.1979)**

Boonporn graduated from Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University Bangkok. She started being Makhampom's volunteer during her study time and had an opportunity to perform the major productions of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* in 2005.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Phra Tong Nang Nak* (2005), *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006), *Naga Wong* (2006), *The Message* (2007 and 2008), and *Akaoni* (2009 and 2010)

**Makhampom Academic Volunteers****Anukoon Rotjanasuksomboon (b.1975)**

He was born in Chainat province in a central part of Thailand and this province also known as a hometown of many famous *likay* artists. Anukoon studied Thai classical dance from his first degree until he has achieved a PhD in the Department of Fine Arts, Chulalongkorn University and he is now an assistant professor in this faculty. He always takes a hero role, showing refined classical dancing and singing skills in Makhampom *likay*.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001), *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003 and 2004), *Phra Tong Nang Nak* (2005), *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006), *Naga Wong* (2005 and 2006), *The Message* (2007 and 2008), and *Akaoni* (2009 and 2010)

**Kittisak Kerdarunsuksri (b.1970)**

He was trained in Thai classical dance drama in his high-school period. Kittisak graduated his BA and MA in Thai studies from Chulalongkorn University, and achieved his PhD in School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 2001. He is currently an assistant professor in Faculty of Humanities in the University Of The Thai Chamber Of Commerce, and also continually performs in Makhampom *likay* production.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001) and *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003)

**Sukanya Sompiboon** (b.1977)

She was born in Bangkok but folk popular performance is her favourite entertainment. She has become involved as an audience member of a Makhampom *likay* production in 2001 and started performed with a troupe in 2003 until now. Sukanya has obtained a bachelor degree in Radio and Television Broadcasting from Thammasat University and Master of Arts in Speech Communication and Performing Arts, Chulalongkorn University. She is currently an assistant professor at Chulalongkorn University and conducting this thesis for her PhD in Drama Research, The University of Exeter.

**Attendance of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* major productions:** *Suek Mueang Prae* (2003 and 2004), *Mueang Ho Mok* (2006), *Naga Wong* (2006), and *The Message* (2007 and 2008).



## Appendix 2

### Consent Form for Interview

#### University of Exeter, School of Arts, Languages and Literature

#### Information and Consent Form for Research Projects

##### Title of Research Project

The Reinvention of Thai Traditional-Popular Theatre: Contemporary *Likay* Praxis

##### Name and Title of Researcher, and details of projects:

I am Sukanya Sompiboon, a PhD student in the Department of Drama, University of Exeter, United Kingdom. I currently am doing research on the contemporary reinvention of Thai theatre which focuses on traditional *likay* and non-traditional *likay* (contemporary *likay*).

The purpose of this doctoral project is to investigate a contemporary *likay* performance. I will principally scrutinise the background development, transformation, theatrical techniques, training process, as well as the current state position of it. I propose to investigate the contemporary *likay* productions which utilise the intra-cultural, inter-cultural theatrical aspects, the format of hybridisation and globalisation of Thai performing arts and the relevance of Western artistic to Thai theatre, specially, Makhampom's contemporary *likay* productions.

The timeframe of this project is from January 2009 to January 2013.

##### Research Questions

1. What are the significant elements in Thai performances and the key issues influencing their development, from cultural formation to contemporary construction?
2. What is the relationship between traditional Thai performance and contemporary Thai performance, and how do they influence each other?
3. Why does *likay* remain one of Thailand's most popular theatrical forms, and how has *likay* had such a strong influence upon Thai drama?
4. What are hybrid formats for contemporary *likay* dramaturgy and performance, and what, if any, are the underlying assumptions for such productions?
5. Who make up the audiences of contemporary *likay* performance and why do they choose to see these performances?

##### Thesis organisation

Chapter 1 Thai Theatre of Duality: Court and Popular Form

Chapter 2 Thailand's *Likay*: Review of *Likay* through the Popular History

Chapter 3	The Development of Modernised and Contemporary Thai Theatre: An Intercultural Approach to Theatrical Hybridity
Chapter 4	Contemporary <i>Likay</i> : Tradition-Based Contemporary Theatre Contributions
Chapter 5	Makhampom's Contemporary <i>Likay</i> Praxis
Chapter 6	Makhampom's Contemporary <i>Likay</i> Praxis and Major Productions

### **Definition of invited participants**

Since you are an expert in drama and theatre study (scholars) or a professional artist (artists) or are involved in *likay* performance another capacity, I would like to invite you to join this research study as a key informant. I will ask questions about your knowledge, expertise and experience of traditional theatre. In the end, it is hoped that the data will provide valuable insights into my research.

### **Data or information to be collected, and the use that will be made of it**

This interview is being conducted as part of a PhD research project through the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom.

This interview will take about an hour of your time and the information verbally given is recorded on tape. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop that topic and move to the next question. The focus group discussion may be conducted and its procedure will be mentioned. If you feel uncomfortable with the content of the discussion during the procedure, you will not give any answers unwillingly. You are also free to terminate participation.

In agreeing to this interview, please be aware that your direct quotes including your name and date and time of an interview will be mentioned in any publications arising from the research. Similarly, clips from video, photography or aural recording may be reproduced and used in publication. If you do object to that, you will refuse to be interviewed at all anyway.

### **How will the information supplied by participants be stored?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. The University of Exeter is a data collector and registered with the Office of the information Commissioner as required under the Data Protection Act 1998.

The information collected here is required for the purposes outlined above. Your personal data will only be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. No answer will be sold or used for work other than the state purpose. The full recordings of the interviews provided by you will

remain in the possession of the researcher. Given permission, the quotations, your identity may be revealed in research publications.

**Contact for further questions:**

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures or to request a hard copy of the transcription, you may contact

Sukanya Sompiboon

(The personal contact has been removed by the author of this thesis for privacy reasons.)

**Contact in the case of complaint or unsatisfactory response from the above named:**

Professor Graham Ley  
SALL Ethics Officer

(The personal contact has been removed by the author of this thesis for privacy reasons.)

**Consent:**

I voluntarily agree to participate, and agree to the use of my data for the purposes specified above. I can withdraw consent at any time by contacting the interviewer.

Note: Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data

Printed name of participant: .....

Signature of participant: .....

Preferred contact - email or telephone: .....

Signature of researcher: .....

One signed copy to be retained by the researcher, and one by the participant.

### Appendix 3

#### Permission from the Copyright Holder<sup>160</sup>

Dear Mr. Pradit Prasatthong,

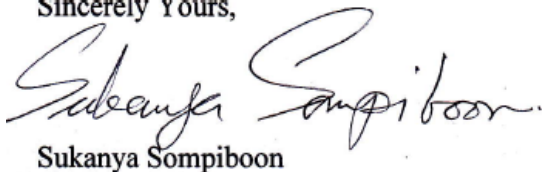
I am writing to ask permission to include some photographs and Video clips of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* performances in my thesis entitled "The Reinvention of Thai Traditional-Popular Theatre: Contemporary Likay Praxis".

The materials from Makhampom's contemporary *likay* performances will be available on my thesis and will be publicly accessed for educational purpose.

If you have questions or require any additional information you may contact me at the address, email and number above. I would greatly appreciate your permission for this use.

If you agree with the terms as described above, please sign the letter where indicated below.

Sincerely Yours,

  
Sukanya Sompiboon

Permission is hereby granted:

I permit Sukanya Sompiboon to use photographs and video clips of Makhampom's contemporary *likay* performances in her thesis. I certify that I am authorised to grant such permission

Printed name: PRADIT PRASATTHONG

Signature: P. Prasatthong Date: 10 April 2012

<sup>160</sup> I have removed my personal contact and Mr. Pradit Prasatthong's email address from this page for privacy reasons.

## Appendix 4: Questionnaire for Japanese Audiences

### Japanese language

本日は私達の演劇「赤鬼」（RED DEMON）をご鑑賞いただきありがとうございます。最後に今後の参考の為、アンケートにご協力頂きたいです。よろしくお願いします。

性別： ☐ 男 ☐ 女

年齢： \_\_\_\_\_才

ご職業： ☐ 学生 ☐ 演劇関係者 ☐ 会社員

☐ その他（ご職業ご記入願います：\_\_\_\_\_）

どのくらいの頻度で演劇をご鑑賞になりますか？

☐ 約一週間に一度 ☐ 約一ヶ月に一度 ☐ 約三ヶ月に一度

☐ その他（頻度をご記入願います：\_\_\_\_\_）

私達のパフォーマンスをどのように評価しますか？

☐ 最高に素晴らしい ☐ 素晴らしい ☐ 大体良い

☐ 良い ☐ まあまあ ☐ あまり良くない

私達のパフォーマンスで見ごたえのあった部分をお聞かせください。

---

---

もし日本語の字幕や通訳が無かった場合、私達のパフォーマンスを理解できますか？

☐ 理解できる（理由をお聞かせください：\_\_\_\_\_）

☐ 理解できない（理由をお聞かせください：\_\_\_\_\_）

「赤鬼」（AKAONI）の日本語版をご覧になったことはございますか？

☐ ある ☐ 無い

日本語版をご覧になられたことがある方のみお答え下さい。日本語版とタイLikay版の違いで気づいた点をお聞かせ下さい。

---

---

日本語の演劇と比べて特に評価される点をお聞かせ下さい。

---

---

ご協力ありがとうございました。

## English translation

### AKAONI (RED DEMON)

Thank you very much for watching our performance today. Please kindly give your opinions and comments for our future progress.

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male     | <input type="checkbox"/> Female                      |
| Age .....                         |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student  | <input type="checkbox"/> Performance practitioner    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Officers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)..... |
- 

How often do you see a play?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> About Once a Week       | <input type="checkbox"/> About Once a Month          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> About Once three months | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)..... |

How do you think about the performance?

- |                                 |                                    |                                       |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Superb | <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Great        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good   | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair      | <input type="checkbox"/> Not so Great |

What, in your opinion, is the main worth of this performance?

.....  
.....

Will you understand the performance if it is not Japanese subtitle provided, and why?

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I understand.      | .....<br>..... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't understand | .....<br>..... |

Have you seen AKAONI in Japanese version before?

- |                              |
|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No  |

If yes, what are different aspects from Japanese version to Thai *likay* version?

.....  
.....

Please identify specific values that are different from Japanese theatre?

.....  
.....

Thank you very much

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## **Programme**

*Sahatsadecha* (1997)

*Chalawan: The Likay Musical* (2006)

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## **Unpublished Scripts**

*Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001)

*Suek Mueang Prae* (2003-2004)

*Naga Wong* (2005-2006)

*Chan Rak Thoe Samoe Ma Took Natee* (2006)

*Mueang Ho Mok* (2006)

*The Winner* (2007)

*The Message* (2007-2008)

*Likay Akaoni* (2009)

## **Videotapes**

### **Tradition-Based Contemporary Performances**

*Pitsathan Oei* (1992)

*Busaba-Unakan* (1994)

*Chao Lo Lo Lam* (1994)

*Kaki* (1994)  
*Pimpilalai* (1995)  
*Chanthakorop Cho Before Time* (1995)  
*Malai Mongkol* (1996)

**Contemporary *Likay***

*Likay Apiwat: Changing the Sky, Changing the Earth* (2001)  
*Suek Mueang Prae* (2004)  
*Naga Wong* (2005-2006)  
*Chalawan: The Likay Musical* (2006)  
*Mueang Ho Mok* (2006)  
*The Message* (2007-2008)  
*Likay Akaoni* (2009)  
*Sudsakorn* (2010)