AN ANALYSIS OF SONGS THAT ARE POPULAR FOR SEUNG PERFORMANCES IN LANNA, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The research article titled “An Analysis of Songs That Are Popular for Seung Performances in Lanna, Thailand” is part of the research study titled “The Development of a Manual for Seung Instructions in Northern Thailand.” The study employing a qualitative research methodology aims to investigate songs that are popular for Lanna Seung performances. The informants, from purposive sampling, include 16 folk music experts in 8 provinces in Upper Northern Thailand (2 experts from each province), namely Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son. The research instrument is a structured interview form.

The results reveal that there are a total of 46 songs performed with Seung, and that there are 5 songs that are popular for Lanna Seung performances, namely 1) Poom Peng, 2) Long Mae Ping, 3) Reu Si Long Tham, 4) Prasart Wai, and 5) Sor Phama. These are songs with a unitary form and duple time. The basic melodic structures are in the Major Scale, the Minor Scale, the Pentatonic Scale, the Mixolydian Mode and the Dorian Mode.

Keywords: Poom Peng, Long Mae Ping, Reu Si Long Tham, Prasart Wai, Sor Phama

I. INTRODUCTION

Lanna is a term used to refer to 8 provinces in Northern Thailand, namely Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son (SaratsawadeeOngsakun, 2014: 37). The North of Thailand known as Lanna is an area with an ancient culture dated from both pre-historic and historic times (SrisakWanliphodom, 2002: 37). Lanna folk music culture in particular is a distinctive form of expression featuring the performance patterns, band formation, melodic aesthetics and unique identity of Lanna folk music (YongyutTheerasin and ThaweesakPinthong, 1992: 3) that have been passed on from the olden days and that showcase the cultural creativity and artistic and musical advances. This invaluable heritage of folk wisdom reflects the ways of living of the people and their feelings in musical sounds using the rhythm of long and short beats and the composition of high and low notes to convey the figuration of the composer’s imagination (ButsakornSamrongthong, 2009: 1). Lanna folk music today is performed variously according to personal and local preferences. It is, therefore, necessary to compile the data and identify popular songs for a systematic study and the preservation of Lanna folk music culture.

Seung is a string instrument for plucking that is characteristic of Lanna folk music culture and has been registered by Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture, as part of Thailand national intangible cultural heritage (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2014: 6). Seung is a Lanna folk musical instrument and is played and preserved by only the older members of the community. If the younger generations continue to be so partial to other types of music or to western music, Lanna music will likely be extinct in the future (PrasitLiewsiriphong, 2001: 78). This projection is in accordance with a study on the problems concerning Lanna music in the cultural area of Nan province conducted by AmnartBoonanon (2011: 176) which indicates that Lanna music in the study area is in danger of extinction, especially regarding the real essence of this folk wisdom, that the folk artists who are keeping the music alive are already advanced in age, and that the younger members in the community have no interest in their own musical heritage. Therefore, it is of utmost necessity that Lanna folk music be earnestly
promoted so that the younger generations of Thai people have an understanding and an awareness of the need to preserve it.

In order to help promote and preserve Lanna folk music culture, an invaluable intangible cultural heritage of Northern Thailand, the researchers conducted a study on the songs that were proved popular for Lanna Seung performances to provide useful information for the country’s youths as well as for the general public. The study focused on folk music experts in the 8 provinces of Upper Northern Thailand.

Research Objective
To study the songs that are popular for Lanna Seung performances.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Figure 1. The Map of Lanna Thailand


Lanna refers to a vast area of land in what is now the North of Thailand. The City of Chiang Mai has been the center of Lanna since its formative years. The name Lanna is often mentioned together with the name Lan Chang which refers to an area in the North of Laos, with Luang Prabang as its center (Srisak Wanliphodom, 2002: 9). According to Maneepayomyong (1985: 161), the ancient Lanna Kingdom covered the areas of 8 provinces in present-day Thailand, namely Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son, as well as several Mon provinces in the West.

Several musical instruments that are played in the North of Thailand today have been in existence for centuries, as evidenced in ancient literary works and inscriptions such as Nirat Hariphunchai Poem and Wat Chiang Man Inscription (Prasit Liewsiriphong, 1999: 25). Lanna music is the musical tradition of a Siamese ethnic group known as the Thai-Lao ethnic group. Laos Modes are characteristic of Lanna music, which is a cultural heritage of Lanna people. Lanna folk music, composed by folk music “composers,” is beautiful and a testament to the people’s folk wisdom. It expresses the patterns, temperament and ways of living of Lanna people. Lanna culture, to this day, displays every aspect of cultural richness and uniqueness – language, customs, traditions, arts, performing arts and music (Yongyut Theerasin and Thaweesak Pinthong, 1992: 3). Currently, the areas of Lanna arts and culture, customs and traditions, and folk music are divided by scholars into 3 main clusters based on geography and ethnic groups, namely 1) Cluster 1 comprising Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun and Lampang, with Chiang Mai as its center; 2) Cluster 2 comprising Nan, Phrae, Phayao and some parts of Chiang Rai, with Nan as its center; and 3) Cluster 3 comprising only Mae Hong Son (Theerayut Yuangsri, 1997: 47).
Figure 2. Parts of a Lanna Seung


From figure 2 show that; Seung consists of the following parts: 1) Body or Sound Hole, 2) Front Board, 3) Neck, 4) Frets, 5) Headstock, 6) Tuning Machines, 7) Strings, 8) Nut, 9) Saddle, 10) Bridge Pins, and 11) Pick.

Lanna Seung is categorized as a string instrument for plucking and can be found in the 8 provinces of Upper Northern Thailand, namely Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son.

Lanna Seung is a creation of Lanna folk wisdom influenced by the musical cultures of neighboring countries and developed into the Lanna musical instrument of today. Lanna Seung has four strings – an upper pair and a lower pair. The body resembles a musical instrument of Thailand’s Northeast called Phin or Soong. In Nan province, this instrument is called Phin (pronounced in the Lanna way as Pin).

Seung-playing postures are as follows: 1) Standing and Walking while performing, and 2) Sitting down while performing.

In this study, the researcher will focus on analyzing popular songs played for this instrument (Seung) in the upper north of Thailand. Which will make us to know the music characteristic of the song.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Key Informants

This study employed the qualitative research methodology using mainly the data from the field study in the analysis. The results were presented in the descriptive analysis format. The key informants did not work within the educational system. They were folk music experts in the 8 provinces of Upper Northern Thailand. The criteria for the selection of the key informants for the study were as follows: 1) More than 10 years of experience in Seung performances of Lanna folk music, 2) More than 10 years of domicile in Upper Northern Thailand, and 3) More than 40 years of age. The 16 key informants were selected by the cultural offices in the 8 provinces (2 key informants for each province), namely Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son. The key informants are as: Chiang Mai; 1) Mr. Phanuthat Apichananathong, 2) Mr. Wisarnthat Rattanamonkonkasem, Lamphun; 1) Mr. Uthit Moonyong, 2) Mr. Wirat Phrommmuan, Lampang; 1) Mr. Worachet Srianongphan, 2) Mr. Boonpang Yoddee. Chiang Rai; 1) Mr. Sophin Phiansin, 2) Mr.
NakharinJaitham. Phayao; 1) Mr. JaranJaiyeun, 2) Mr. PhatthanaSukkasem. Phrae; 1) Mr. Arun Thippayawong, 2) Mr. JeerasakThanumart. Nan; 1) Mr. ArunsinDuangmoon, 2) Mr. InsuayMoontha. Mae Hong Son; 1) Mr. PrasertKerdmongkon, 2) Mr. BoonreungPuangkhamkhong

Scope of the Study

1. Scope of the Area: This study was conducted in 8 provinces in Upper Northern Thailand, namely Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son.

2. Scope of the Content: This study investigated songs that were popular with Lanna Seung performances in the 8 provinces of Upper Northern Thailand.

Data Collection

1. The researchers sent official letters to request for cooperation from the cultural offices in the 8 provinces for the selection of the key informants.

2. The researchers conducted a field study on the songs that were popular for Lanna Seung performances in the 8 Upper Northern provinces and analyzed the data according to the research objective.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

A Study of Songs That Are Popular for Lanna Seung Performances

During the interviews with the 16 folk wisdom experts from the provinces in Upper Northern Thailand, namely Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son (2 experts from each province), the experts were asked to list 10 songs for their respective Seung performances. The selected songs varied according to their personal preferences. The combined total of the selection was 46 songs as listed below:


The songs that were listed by the folk wisdom experts with the frequency of 65 percent and higher were then chosen for the analysis in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Frequency of Selection</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Poom Peng</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Long Mae Ping</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reu Si Long Tham</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prasart Wai</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sor Phama</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: The Frequency of the Selection of Songs by the Folk Wisdom Experts


1. Poom Peng

Poom Peng was selected by the folk wisdom experts with the highest frequency. It was listed by 14 experts – 2 from Chiang Mai, 2 from Lamphun, 1 from Lampang, 2 from Chiang Rai, 2 from Phayao, 2 from Phrae, 1 from Nan and 2 from Mae Hong Son. The song is unitary in form and has the basic melody in the C Major Scale. Poom Peng has 2 phrases. The first phrase contains the first 6 bars (bars 1-6) and is structured in the F Pentatonic Scale. The second phrase contains the last 6 bars (bars 7-12) and is structured in the C Pentatonic Scale.

2. Long Mae Ping

Long Mae Ping was selected by 13 folk wisdom experts – 1 from Chiang Mai, 2 from Lamphun, 2 from Lampang, 2 from Chiang Rai, 2 from Phayao, 2 from Phrae, and 2 from Mae Hong Son. The song is unitary in form and has the basic melody in the C Pentatonic Scale. Long Mae Ping has 3 phrases. The first phrase contains the first 4 bars (bars 1-4), the second phrase contains the next 3 bars (bars 5-8), and the third phrase contains the last 3 bars (bars 9-12). The song begins and ends in G.

3. Reu Si Long Tham

Reu Si Long Tham was selected by 13 folk wisdom experts – 2 from Chiang Mai, 2 from Lamphun, 2 from Lampang, 1 from Chiang Rai, 2 from Phayao, 2 from Phrae, 1 from Nan and 1 from Mae Hong Son. The song is unitary in form and has the basic melody in the C Mixolydian Mode. Reu Si Long Tham has 2 phrases. The first phrase contains the first 6 bars (bars 1-6) and has leading notes in the first bar. The second phrase contains the last 6 bars (bars 7-12) and ends with the Final Note.

4. Prasart Wai

![Musical notation for Prasart Wai](source)

Prasart Wai was selected by 11 folk wisdom experts – 2 from Chiang Mai, 1 from Lamphun, 1 from Lampang, 2 from Chiang Rai, 1 from Phayao, 1 from Phrae, 1 from Nan and 2 from Mae Hong Son. The song is unitary in form, but it is often played in 3 other scales. It has the basic melody in the G Natural Minor Scale. The first transposition is from the G Natural Minor Scale to the A Natural Minor Scale. The second transposition is from the A Natural Minor Scale to the D Natural Minor Scale. The third transposition is from the D Natural Minor Scale to the E Natural Minor Scale.

5. Sor Phama

Sor Phama was selected by 11 folk wisdom experts—1 from Chiang Mai, 2 from Lamphun, 1 from Lampang, 2 from Chiang Rai, 1 from Phrae, 2 from Nan and 2 from Mae Hong Son. The song is unitary in form and has the basic melody in the G Dorian Mode. Sor Phama has 3 phrases. The first phrase contains the first 4 bars (bars 1-4), the second phrase contains the next 4 bars (bars 5-8), and the third phrase contains the last 6 bars (bars 9-14). The song ends with the Final Note.

V. DISCUSSION

A Study of Songs That Are Popular for Lanna Seung Performances

The combined total of the songs listed by the folk wisdom experts in this study was 46 songs. The selection featured Lanna folk songs, Thai classical songs, Isan (Northeastern Thailand) folk songs and songs composed by the experts themselves (Kai Doo Nok, Pak). The song listed with the highest frequency by the experts (14 experts) was Poom Peng, followed by Long Mae Ping (13 experts), Reu Si Long Tham (13 experts), Prasart Wai (11 experts), and Sor Phama (11 experts). These 5 songs were the subjects of the analysis in this study. This finding corresponded to the finding in the study by ThaemKlinfoong (2005: 64) which indicated that the Lanna folk songs frequently picked by school teachers for music lessons and for their students to perform with folk musical instruments such as Salor, Sor and Seung were Long Mae Ping, Prasart Wai, Reu Si Long Tham, Poom Peng, Ue, Kulab Chiang Mai, Tiao Dong, Sor Phama, and Moo Hao Jao Neu. The 5 Lanna folk songs in this study—Poom Peng, Long Mae Ping, Reu Si Long Tham, Prasart Wai and Sor Phama—are of duple time and medium tempo. They are songs that are popular for Lanna Seung performances.

Poom Peng was selected by 14 folk wisdom experts (87.5 %) from all the 8 provinces. It contains 2 phrases in different scales. This creates excitement in the melodic progress and attracts the attention of the audience.

Long Mae Ping was selected by 13 folk wisdom experts (81.25 %). It was not selected by either expert from Phayao province. The song is unitary in form and sweet in its melodic progression. Its basic melody is in the C Pentatonic Scale. Since it begins and ends in G, it gives a sense of an unfinished business at the end of the song. This enables reprises and invites a song with a similar melody, such as Soy WiangPhing, to be played in a consecutive order.

Rue Si Long Tham was selected by 13 folk wisdom experts (81.25 %) from all the 8 provinces. The song is unitary in form. Its basic melody is in the C Mixolydian Mode, which is the 5th mode of the F Major Scale. This creates a sorrowful and tender melody.

Prasart Wai was selected by 11 folk wisdom experts (68.75 %) from all the 8 provinces. The song is unitary in form, but it is often played in 3 other scales. An interview with PhanuthatAphichanathong (Interview, 9 October 2016) reveals that Seung performers sometimes make 6 transpositions (thus totaling 7 scales including the first one) while performing this song in order to showcase their Seung-playing skills.

Sor Phama was selected by 11 folk wisdom experts (68.75 %). It was not selected by either expert from Phayao province. The song is unitary in form. Its basic melody is in the G Dorian Mode, which is the 2nd mode of the F Major Scale. This creates a bright and joyful melody.
REFERENCES