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## **Buddhism and the Promotion of Thai Music Education**

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### **Abstract**

Historically, Buddhism in Thailand is largely followed by the most of the Thai people. Therefore, Buddhism has played a significant role in Thai culture and society as the main or the nationwide religion. To the Buddhist monastics, the monks obligated to conserve all the religious precepts which is 227 articles. In the seventh article which concerned the music, it stipulated that "The monk has to refrain from dancing, singing, wayfaring, musing or watching to foes that are enemies to his nobility. To relate or adorn the body with amount of fragrant flowers, dyes, utensils or a classified as dressing, are no worse." Therefore, the monastics do not allow the monks to adequate directly to the music, unlike some religions. Thai monks cannot endorsing any activities related to Thai music formally. But, in the past, Thai monastery has many musicians played on important parts in rituals, including the performances within or around the vicinity for the merit-making, funerals and celebrations, due to the greatness of the community which centered by the temple. In various temples, the customs of Thai Music is often instructed and came from the House of Thai Music training within their precincts, normally intentionally formed for the community activities. This research wants to present the influence and development of Thai Buddhism and temple services which are valuable and relevant to the study of Thai music from the past to the present.

*Keywords:* Thai music, education of Thai music, evolution of Thai Music, monk in Thai music

### **Introduction**

Thailand has Buddhism as its national religion. By Buddhism, the monks must observe all 227 Precepts. Article 7 stipulates that "Monks must refrain from dancing, singing fanfare, singing music, and watching foes that are enemies to glorification. Decorating or adorning the body with fragrant flowers, dyes, and baths, which are classified as dressings." As such, monks are not allowed to play music or sing songs, unlike Christians. Thai monks, therefore, perform their duties by educating the public. Originally, the temple is the first schooling system where the schools are located where the temples are.

King Chulalongkorn (better known as King Rama V), established many schools in various Buddhist temples. Since the Thai people in the past believed in this system of sending their children to learn according to the Thai customs and traditions. The first Buddhist temple school in this period was the Mahannop Param School. Buddhist monks were indirectly responsible for promoting and supporting activities related to music. Thai music has played an important role in the society, including performances in the temples such as merit making and funerals, as well as organizing the music events in the temple area for the community. In various communities, Buddhists were bringing music to engage in various activities in that time since the temple is a spacious place enough to organize the communal activities.

Groups of musicians who perform in these activities were coming from the music masters in the neighborhoods. Most of the monks affiliated with the ensembles, therefore, have a great connection with the Pi-Phat and group of performance troops. Because music is required in the various activities of the temple, the musicians and troops saw that the temple was an important source of income for the house. An important aspect is that these artists can call people to make an offering to the temple with their performances, a very clear characteristic of patronizing each other.

**Figure**

*The Musician from Noi Thong-you Temple*



During the reign of King Rama V, some monks encouraged their youth to learn Thai music, which Somphan Saeng is one of the most successful during that time. Somparn Saeng is the Abbot of "Noi Thong-you" Temple, and he had the idea of initiating its own communal Pi-Phat. He invited Choi Sunthornwatin to help in teaching music. Somparn Saeng built a house for Master Choi because he is old and blind. Those who come to study music are all children in the neighborhood and they have succeeded tremendously. Many of them have concentrated their services in the reign of King Rama VI with the highest ranks and noblest titles, such as Phra Padapduriyakit, Luang Banlenglerdler, Khun Ploenplaengprasert, etc.

After the monarchical ruling change to the democratic regime in 1932, the role of monks in the Thai music has not declined although more public schools have established themselves independently from Buddhist temples. All of the monks declined their support in the education and continued to do their study of the Tipitaka, while still teaching their theological principles. The ensembles continue to play in the temple activities, such as in mass and funeral ceremonies. Some monks help in Thai music competitions, such as the Pi-Phat competition held annually at the "Phra Phiren" Temple which is the most prolific music event of the year.

**The Role in the Education of Thai music**

A survey of schools under the Office of Basic Education (OBEC), found that the temple-supported schools nationwide totaling 21,125 - of which 20,907 for primary schools and 218 for higher secondary schools from 50,000 schools with Thai musical ensembles. Most of the temples still provide food and housing to musicians and their descendants, including free education in the temple-supported schools.

In the capital city as Bangkok, the role of the temples has been greatly reduced because of the social and economic conditions that have to be carried out according to the amount of time the people can spare. The rituals must be done in a hurry because people do not have time to participate in the ceremony for long. Sometimes large temples have to perform a lot of funeral rituals, and they have to perform the ceremony quickly, especially on weekends. There may be funerals waiting for cremation continuously from noon until dusk. Cutting this process to make it shorter can eliminate Thai music at funerals altogether, leaving only the part of the monks in these rituals. In Bangkok, it is difficult to find temples fully supporting ensembles compared in the past. Therefore, this learning system has affected the development of Thai music since any activity that is not related to Buddhist temple rituals depends on the satisfaction of the host.

The promotion of Thai music in the past was usually done by bringing children with poor support to practice Thai music. To finance their education, some temples may bring children who have enough skills to play Thai music to perform in various works including playing in the area as well as setting up their donors. Some temples have implemented policies by arranging Thai music lessons for interested young people to come to study without cost. Some still encourage the study of Thai music during the weekends in the temple.

However, although temples carry out the policy of promoting Thai music for the youth or those interested in learning music as a hobby, skills are still necessary to take an exam to study Thai music at the university level. A monk may be supportive, not by material only, but by encouraging children who are learning Thai music to become skilled by studying Thai music seriously. It is found that many young people who have passed Thai music lessons from temple activities on weekends, use it as a skill to enter the university entrance examination. Some of them have gone back to their temples as teachers to teach the younger students.

### **Figure**

*The Angklung Band form Wat Rai Khing School*



### **Important Problems that often Occur with the Promotion of Thai music.**

The material problem that will be used for carrying out this activity, especially the hiring of well-known teachers, which sometimes require compensation, and having small amount of time to attend the teaching job for the youth. Traveling to teach also cost money, although some teachers would like to teach free of charge to create one way of

merit. Therefore occasionally refusing to come to help is not the best solution for children. It is better for the temple to find a permanent teacher that may not have much experience but does not require much compensation. Some monks may have a vision for sustainable development but the temples themselves have other costs, hence they are not able to give full support. Monks who are involved can continue to work in this field and achieve success by soliciting donations from various agencies to raise funds and continually manage the Thai music program in the temple. When the school has a small budget Thai music teaching is therefore necessary to procure an inexpensive and most useful musical instrument such as Ankrung Band.

The monks are considered the ordained precepts and represent one of the important bodies of Thai Buddhism, namely the Buddha (the representation of Lord Buddha himself), Dharma (the teachings), monks (the followers), as well as the main Thai institutional agencies. Therefore it is considered that when monks do something for society, they usually receive full cooperation from the general public. Although Buddhist monks cannot own property, he still helps in raising the money from people who have faith in him for the cost of instruments and the provision Thai music teachers. For most Buddhists, all think that giving this supporting money would also create merit for themselves. Therefore, some temple schools can promote Thai music to succeed, producing many talented and dedicated young musicians.

### Summary

Every type of music from other countries has a role in the Thai society. This may be caused by Thai people who have their own choices of interest in other fields of music. But there are still many monks who help promote Thai music with funding from people who have faith in helping financially and providing teachers. Opening the temple area for Thai music, and for children who have a financial problem can receive scholarship to play Thai music. These things may be seen as the main mission, but for some of the monks working in music were bridging the youth education. Although it is maybe not possible to promote a child to be successful, children can be encouraged to learn Thai music to earn extra money, including accumulate enough Thai musical skills that can be used in their university studies. Therefore, Buddhism still has a role in promoting Thai music education.

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