

Research Article

ASEAN Studies: The Revival and Development of Lao Classical Music

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Abstract

ASEAN music education is important for learning the history, culture, beliefs, and identities of each member country, this research aims at studying the revival and development of Lao classical songs: ‘Oh Lao’ and ‘Platong’, no longer played. From the research results, the symposium of music teachers and experts including national artists was organized to exchange the idea to develop the melody played by alto xylophone and further developed by creating harmonies for performance by the string orchestra according to the principles of international music theory, composing and anthropological theories.

Keywords: Lao classical music, Revival and development, Cultural knowledge, ASEAN community

Introduction

The emergence of the ASEAN Social and Cultural Community (ASCC) leads to a learning and cultural exchange amidst diversity among its members. It is a process that can expand cooperation between ASEAN member sociocultural connection and is an important factor in the unification of ASEAN. The second ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council Meeting in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, Thailand in October 2009 leads to the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on Strengthening Cooperation in Education to Achieve a Caring and Sharing ASEAN Community for enhancing people's quality of life and sustainable regional development. It stipulates that the

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field of education is part of building a political and security, economic, social, and cultural community, leading to the educational reform approach of ASEAN Member Countries both in terms of quality education management and in terms of ASEAN Studies Curriculum of Schools according to the Guidelines for Learning Management for the ASEAN Community (Kedchapan Kamput, 2018).

In Thailand, since 2010, the Office of the Basic Education Commission has started the pilot schools to the ASEAN Community in primary and secondary educational institutions covering 40 educational territories across the country under the Spirit of ASEAN project (Kaewkumkong, 2018). There are 3 types: 1) 30 sister schools, which are schools that provide learning about the ASEAN community that focuses on teaching English, technology, and language of one ASEAN member country, along with multicultural knowledge; 2) 24 Buffer Schools, which are schools that provide learning about the ASEAN Community that focuses on teaching the languages of ASEAN Member 1 language, which is the language of neighboring countries that border schools such as Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia, along with multicultural knowledge and technology, as well as having an ASEAN Studies Center that is a learning center for schools and networked schools in Area; 3) 14 ASEAN Focus Schools, including more than 500 networked schools participating in the project in preparation for the ASEAN Community (Kedchapan Kamput, 2018). These schools have provided an ASEAN Studies course under the Guidelines for Learning Management for the ASEAN Community in secondary education of the Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2011, focusing on knowledge of the ASEAN region, language in neighboring countries, and multicultural knowledge with the foresight of importance to promoting better understanding with ASEAN neighbors (Kedchapan Kamput, 2018).

Learning music from other nations in the ASEAN community is very supportive to multicultural understanding as some local songs were composed to reflect history, culture, belief, identities, and way of life of people in each country (Ho, 1999; Laovanich & Chuppunnarat, 2016; Reyes & Navarro, 2016). In the digital age, multicultural music education is integrated in the public curricula with the aims to get students learn different cultures among ASEAN countries (Chandransu, 2019; Nicolas, 2019). In the Basic Education Core Curriculum of Thailand, music education is categorized in Learning Standard of Art with the aims to educate students to obtain an understanding of and ability in creative self-expression through music; analysis and criticism on the values of music; free conveyance of feelings and thoughts on music; appreciation and application of music in daily life (Standard AR2.1) and understanding of the relationship between

the music, the history, and the culture; appreciating the musical works that represent the cultural heritage, the local wisdom, and Thai and universal wisdom (Standard AR2.2) (Basic Education Commission, 2008). Besides this, in the previous studies, it has played an important role to successes of learners in society, school, intelligence and life (Goble, 2010; Lehr, 1998; Levinowitz, 1999; Petress, 2005; Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo, & Irwin, 2009). Since Thailand becomes a member of the ASEAN Community, students are encouraged to learn culture and art among ASEAN nations through music education (Choawanan Prapakdee, 2014; Piyawan Kanthong, 2019; Ratawan Pruksarajanukul, 2013). In order to make contribution to music education in Thailand, there are a number of studies focusing on music in ASEAN such as the studies of (Mitt Sapphut, 2019) on 'Khong Wong Yai' Melody in Lao, Krissada Sooksumnieng and Charoenchai Chonpairoj (2017) on Lao vocal music of the southern ethnic groups. In addition, some studies focused on communicative meaning (Sriphanaratnakul & Cansathitporn, 2016), contemporary composition (Thambutr & Yamprai, 2018), love songs (Saran Nakrob, Panupak Mokhasa, Jinnawat Mansa, Chattiya Khieti-navy, & Pawalai Tanchanpon, 2019) and so on. Also, in order to make contribution to the field of study and preserve ASEAN music, the researchers were interested to the processes of revival and development of Lao classical music. The study began with the revival of the songs and then development of the songs played by alto xylophone and the string orchestra according to the principles of international music theory, composing and anthropological theories.

Research Method

This study was carried out utilizing the qualitative research methodology. In this research, the data were collected from the field-work, interviews, participatory and non-participatory observation. The research methodology was as follows:

Phase 1: Collect and compile the original Lao music of the Lao PDR: 1.1) search the original Lao songs and melodies; 1.2) study the melodies of the songs for playing by musical instruments, particularly alto xylophone; 1.3) make the revival of the classical Lao melodies for a performance by the string orchestra.

Phase 2: Restore the original Lao melody as a universal note: 2.1) organize Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to make the revival of the selected classical Lao melodies and save them as the universal notes.

Phase 3: Develop the original Lao melodies for the international string orchestra: 3.1) compose and develop the selected Lao classical music for the international string orchestra; 3.2) arrange the event for the performance.

Phase 4: Summarize, analyze and synthesize the body of knowledge of the above phases of research and create the guideline for ASEAN studies or music studies.

Results

Traditional Lao music refers to music in the royal court of Laos in the past even if currently there is a change in accordance with the socialist conceptual framework. Lao music was originally influenced by Khmer royal court music. Since the reign of Chao Fa Ngum (1896 – 1916), it has developed and merged with the music culture of the pre-existing ethnic groups, especially the music culture of Laos, such as bringing ‘Khaen (a kind of reed mouth organ in northeastern Thailand)’ to play in various types of bands. At present, the original Lao band exists in large cities such as Vientiane and Luang Prabang. In this study, the researchers have selected a fieldwork research area to restore and develop the original Lao melody at the Lao National School of Music, Vientiane, Lao PDR, which organizes music learning in various disciplines such as traditional Lao folk dances; folk, and tribal basic dances, traditional Lao music, international music (classical music) and so on. The development of the original Lao melody for the international string orchestra was cooperated and supported by music teachers of the National Art School Lao PDR in the field of folk music and international music (classical music) as mentioned in Table.1 below. So, that revival and development were successful because of their expertise in the field of study.

Table 1. List of Music Masters from Lao National School of Music

| No. | Name-Surname | Status |
|-----|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Bunthieng Sisakda | Music Master (Lao PDR) |
| 2 | Khamsaen Pilavong | Music Master |
| 3 | Bandit Sanasit | Music Master |
| 4 | Saengthong Butchadi | Music Master |
| 5 | Somchit Saiyasuwan (Dr.) | National Artist |

In relations to the search for the Lao classical songs and the original Lao melodies, there is a succession of 63 songs from the teaching courses in folk music for seven-year courses of students

learning ‘Pīphāt’, (Lao orchestra consisting of five groups of wood and percussion instruments or orchestra consisting chiefly of the gamelan). It was found that there were 7 songs: ‘Pleang Si Bot’, ‘Pleang Hok Bot’, ‘Pleand Pead Bot’, ‘Pla-thong’, ‘Soi-Mayura’, ‘Oh Lao’ and ‘Suta-Kan-Seang’ not in the succession in the National Art School. This corresponds to the interview data with music masters that participated in FGD and agreed that these songs are no more played in the current Laotian orchestra. Also, none of these songs were included in the curriculum of the National Art School for music students in the field of folk music of all 7-years learning programs. In the results of FGD, all participants reached the agreement that the songs ‘Oh Lao’ and ‘Pla Thong’ should be selected for the revival of the melody as they well represent the Lao identities. For the other songs, they were suggested for future research due to the limited research duration and complexity of research processes. The songs then were composed and further developed for the international string orchestra with the following techniques: solo exposition, counterpoint, Pizzcato and Arco, cannon, round, syncopation, slur, Pizzcato, and variation, as demonstrated in Figure 1-3.

Figure 1.: Solo exposition of ‘Oh Lao’



Figure 2.: Counterpoint of ‘Oh Lao’



Figure 3.: Syncopation of ‘Oh Lao’



Discussion

The research on the revival and development of the original Lao melody for the international string orchestra is a revival and development of Lao art and music to society before these melodies disappear from society. The research results support the ASEAN studies as the songs reflect history, culture, beliefs, identities, and the way of life of the Lao people in line with the policies of the Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards (2021) that mentions the improvement of the quality of the ASEAN Studies and regional cooperation in ASEAN education focuses on a more educational approach in terms of exploring customs, culture, and art. It not only increases the knowledge of peoples but also helps to create understanding between the different races, especially the new possibilities for exploring similarities and differences between the regional community. In addition, the Learning Standard of Art in the Basic Education Core Curriculum of Thailand focuses on teaching Thai students to obtain an understanding of and ability in creative self-expression through music; analysis and criticism on the values of music; free conveyance of feelings and thoughts on music; appreciation and application of music in daily life and understanding of the relationship between the music, the history, and the culture; appreciating the musical works that represent the cultural heritage, the local wisdom, and Thai and universal wisdom (Basic Education Commission, 2008). Besides, it is also the preservation of classic music in the region.

Figure 4.: Revival of Lao Classical Songs



Figure 5.: Lao Classical Song Performance in Lao PDR



Figure 6.: Performance of ‘Oh Loa’ and ‘Pla-Thong’



Recommendation

For future research, the five Lao classical songs: 'Pleang Si Bot', 'Pleang Hok Bot', 'Pleand Pead Bot', 'Soi-Mayura', and 'Suta-Kan-Seang' should be restored and developed as same as 'Oh Lao' and 'Pla-Thong'. The results of this research should be revised for supporting ASEAN or Music Studies based on the requirement of the Basic Education Core Curriculum of Thailand.

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