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A Study of Thai Music for Career Skills Development in the Hospitality Industry

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Abstract

This research, "The Study of Thai Music for Developing Professional Skills for Musicians in the Service Industry," aims to: (1) select and analyze Thai compositions suitable for the hotel industry based on musicological principles, and (2) propose guidelines for professional skill development aligned with the contemporary service context. The study employed qualitative analysis focusing on two dimensions—musical instruments and repertoire—within standard-level hotels and restaurants.

Findings reveal a significant shift from traditional practices toward solo performances and small ensembles. There is a notable reduction in rhythmic percussion, such as cymbals and drums, to accommodate the service environment. The khim, ranat ek, and jakhe are the most preferred instruments due to their controllable volume and acoustic compatibility, allowing for musical aesthetics without disrupting business activities. Furthermore, flexible ensembles have emerged as a strategic adaptation to organizational branding and budget constraints. Regarding repertoire, compositions with concise structures and accessible melodies in double and single tempos—particularly those with foreign-influenced accents (Samniang)—demonstrate high commercial potential. These elements effectively enhance the guest experience. The study concludes that integrating traditional Thai musical expertise with business-oriented sensibilities is vital for enhancing professional competency and ensuring the career sustainability of Thai musicians within the modern creative industry.

Keywords: Thai music, career, musician

1. Introduction

Currently, the service and hotel industries are becoming increasingly competitive. In addition to raising the standards of excellent service, creating an esthetic experience through "auditory senses" or using music to create an atmosphere has become a crucial strategy for communicating brand identity, especially for establishments aiming to present a Thai cultural image. Therefore, Thai music serves not only as a performing art on stage but also plays a significant role as a "cultural product" that helps create added value, from the welcoming stage and creating relaxation in service areas to performances that enhance the guest experience.

However, preliminary observations indicate that the use of Thai music in the context of the hotel business has limitations and characteristics that are completely different from performances in ritualistic or academic settings. The playing style in such spaces often involves using only a few instruments to carry the melody, either as a solo performance or in a small ensemble that omits percussion instruments like cymbals and leather drums. Highly popular instruments include the zither, the xylophone, and the lute, as they have physical characteristics

that allow for dynamic control to avoid disturbing other activities in the service area while still preserving the uniqueness of the musical pieces and performance techniques that create good aesthetics. Additionally, free-form ensembles were observed, such as the zither playing with the saw or the flute, which varied depending on the occasion, image requirements, and budget constraints of the business owners.

In the realm of music, although Thai music theory encompasses a wide variety of song types, the songs popular in the service industry are often those with double or single tempos. This is because they have concise melodic structures and clearly convey emotions, whether in a sweet and melodious or joyful manner. This is especially true for songs with foreign language influences, such as Lao, Burmese, Chinese, and Western, as well as contemporary songs with simple, uncomplicated musical paths, which are considered accessible music. This differs from songs like the Thao or Thoyoy types, which are complex and have a high level of musical intensity, making them suitable for listeners with a background in Thai music, particularly in the form of art music.

Given these circumstances, the researcher recognizes the importance of studying and selecting suitable Thai songs for use in the hotel industry. This will serve as a guideline for preparing and developing the professional skills of young Thai musicians, enabling them to effectively adapt to the service industry. This study focuses on explaining the academic rationale based on the principles of Thai music theory that support commercial use. This will not only create career opportunities for Thai musicians as "service music professionals" but will also elevate undergraduate teaching and learning curricula to be truly modern and responsive to current labor market demand

1.1 Research Objective

1.1.1 To select and analyze Thai songs suitable for the hotel business based on music theory principles.

1.1.2 To propose guidelines for developing Thai music professional skills in line with the service industry.

2. Literature review

Developing comprehensive career skills for students before graduation is crucial for their post-graduation careers, helping them succeed in the workplace and adapt to their roles. Educational institutions can use various processes together to enhance students' career skills in areas such as role adaptation, interpersonal problem-solving, and positive creativity in the workplace (Musikapodok and Sakullertwattana, 2025)

Soft Skills are very important skills in today's work environment. It is a skill that society is in great demand. Musician or related work is one of many occupations that require Soft Skills for work a lot, in addition to ability of Hard Skills. Because of musician or related work clearly require emotional and social skill. Institution that educates student graduation into music professionals need to enhance their Soft Skills to student. By planning and determine how to develop Soft Skills that are essential and must be developed to truly meet the needs of student. From the study found that 3 Soft Skills that are essential for music student, Suansunandha Rajabhat University consists of 1) Time Management Skill 2) Communication Skill 3) Complex Problem-Solving Skill. These 3 skills are essential, and it is a skill that student should

be able to develop and build more for successful in their careers (Sirima Panapinun and Thassanai Phensit, 2021)

The creation of a basic Thai zither playing training curriculum for Thai music club students at Kanjanapisek College Chaiyaphum. The sample used for the creation was Thai music club students at Kanjanapisek College Chaiyaphum. The research tools used were the basic Thai zither playing training curriculum, which consisted of 5 exercises. The research tools were checked by presenting them to experts to verify their consistency with the research objectives. It was found that the tools were consistent with the research objectives, with the process and outcomes of the basic Thai zither playing training curriculum for Thai music club students at Kanjanapisek College Chaiyaphum being 74.6/87.4 effective. The learning achievement using the basic Thai zither playing training curriculum for Thai music club students at Kanjanapisek College Chaiyaphum, the average score from pre-test and post-test, showed a statistically significant difference at the .05 level. Before training, the average score was 71 points, and after training, the average score was 87.4 points (Ratchapon Yangyingsab and Supatra Vilailuck, 2022).

Based on observational data collected from students who completed all three units of the instructional package, the findings indicate a clear improvement in students' foundational knowledge and understanding of the guitar. Specifically, students demonstrated the ability to: (1) distinguish between different types of guitars; (2) adopt correct and appropriate playing posture in various contexts; (3) use the right hand effectively for guitar plucking; and (4) perform notes in the first position on the guitar, focusing on the first three strings. The results of this sub-study were derived from interviews and field data collection conducted at Ban Praek Nam Daeng School and Ban Khlong Sombun School. The findings revealed that, following the implementation of the developed guitar instructional media, students showed increased knowledge and improved guitar-playing skills. (Patommavat Thammachard et al., 2023)

3. Methodology

This research is qualitative research. Its objectives are to study the patterns of using Thai musical instruments and songs in the hotel industry and to analyze ways to develop the professional skills of Thai musicians to align with the contemporary service industry.

3.1 Data Sources and Providers

The resources include:

1. Documents and research related to Thai music, music for service, and the service industry.
2. Data from observations of Thai music performances in hotels and Thai restaurants.
3. The main informants are Thai musicians working in the hotel industry, music performance entrepreneurs or managers, and experts in Thai music and music for service.

3.2 Research Tools

The research tools used include:

1. Analysis of the patterns of Thai musical instrument usage, considering instrument types, ensemble arrangements, and volume control.

2. Analysis of Thai songs based on Thai music theory principles, including tempo, melodic structure, and musical style.

3. Observation record of behavior and context of performance in the service area.

All instruments were content validated by experts in Thai music and qualitative research.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted thru literature review combined with field observation and gathering information from key informants in the real-world context of the hotel business, in order to obtain data that reflects the use of Thai music in actual working conditions.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis used content analysis methods, categorizing data by musical instrument and song dimensions. The data was then interpreted and synthesized, linking it to the concepts of music for service and professional skills development.

3.5 Verification of Research Reliability

The reliability of the research results was verified using the triangulation method, which includes checking data from multiple sources, using various types of research instruments, and verification by experts, to increase the accuracy and reliability of the study findings.

4. Results

The results of this qualitative study are presented according to the two primary analytical dimensions: (1) musical instrument usage and ensemble configuration, and (2) repertoire selection and musical characteristics within the hotel and service industry context.

4.1 Musical Instrument Usage and Ensemble Configuration

The findings indicate a clear transformation in the application of Thai music within hotels and service-oriented establishments, diverging from traditional ensemble conventions. The most prominent pattern observed is the preference for solo performances and small-scale ensembles, rather than full traditional Thai ensembles.

Percussion instruments, particularly cymbals and leather drums, are largely excluded from service performances due to their strong rhythmic intensity and potential to disrupt the ambient atmosphere required in hospitality settings. Instead, melodic instruments with high dynamic controllability are favored. The khim (hammered dulcimer), ranat ek (xylophone), and jakhe (plucked zither) were consistently identified as the most commonly used instruments. Their acoustic properties allow performers to regulate volume levels while maintaining musical clarity and aesthetic quality.

Additionally, the study reveals the emergence of flexible ensemble formats, such as duet or trio combinations (e.g., khim with saw duang or flute accompaniment). These ensembles are not standardized but are adapted according to contextual factors, including venue size, brand identity, performance occasion, and budget constraints. Such flexibility reflects the professional adaptability of Thai musicians responding to the operational demands of the service industry.

4.2 Repertoire Selection and Musical Characteristics

In terms of repertoire, the results demonstrate that not all Thai musical compositions are suitable for hospitality environments. The most frequently selected pieces are those with single-layer or double-layer tempos, as they feature concise melodic structures and are easily perceived by general audiences.

Songs with foreign-influenced accents (Samniang)—including Lao, Myanmar, Chinese, Indian, and Western styles—are particularly favored. These compositions are perceived as culturally distinctive yet accessible, enabling listeners with limited exposure to Thai music to engage comfortably with the performance. The melodic simplicity and moderate tempo of such pieces contribute to creating a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere that enhances the guest experience.

Conversely, complex compositions characterized by dense melodic layers or high rhythmic intensity—such as highly elaborate classical Thai forms—are rarely selected for service performances. These pieces are considered more appropriate for academic or ceremonial contexts rather than functional music environments.

Overall, the repertoire selection process reflects a shift from traditional performance-oriented criteria toward functional and experiential considerations, aligning musical choices with the objectives of ambiance creation, customer comfort, and commercial suitability.

5. Conclusion

Currently, Thai music still plays a significant role in the service industry, particularly in the hotel and Thai restaurant sectors. Thai music is used as an element to create sonic esthetics and enhance the atmosphere for service users. However, preliminary observations indicate that the performance style in these areas often involves using only a few instruments to carry the melody, such as the zither, the crocodile zither, or the xylophone, either as solo performances or in small ensembles. This does not strictly adhere to the standard forms of traditional Thai music ensembles or to musicological principles.

Based on the emergence of these performance patterns, the researcher can categorize the key issues affecting the performance and careers of Thai musicians in the service industry into two main dimensions:

2.1 Instrument Issues: This section studies the selection of musical instruments whose sound characteristics are suitable for the service area (Acoustic Suitability), the improvement of small ensemble formats that emphasize flexibility while maintaining beauty, and the ability to control volume levels to suit the hotel environment.

The most common presentation format is solo performance, excluding percussion instruments like cymbals and leather drums, which differs from standard ensemble traditions. Highly popular instruments include the zither, the ranat ek (a xylophone-like instrument), and the jakhe (a plucked string instrument), as they have physical characteristics that allow for controlling the volume (dynamics) to avoid disturbing other activities in the service area, while still preserving the uniqueness of the music and performance techniques that create excellent esthetics.

Additionally, free-form ensembles of two or more instruments were also found, such as the joint performance of a zither and a two-stringed fiddle, or the singing of a bamboo flute

accompanied by other melodic instruments. The choice of instruments and ensemble format varied depending on environmental factors, including the specific characteristics of the occasion, the client's image requirements, and budget constraints for the performance. This reflects the adaptation of Thai music within the current economic context and the conditions of the service industry.

2.2 Song Selection: Study the selection and arrangement of Thai songs to ensure appropriate length, tempo, and melody for creating atmosphere. This requires adapting from standard performance songs to functional music that meets the needs of service users and businesses.

In the realm of music, although Thai music theory encompasses a wide variety of song types, studies have shown that the songs most popular for performance in hotels and restaurants are often limited to those with double or single tempos. This is because they have concise melodic structures that clearly convey emotions, whether beautiful, sweet, or joyful, especially songs in foreign dialects such as Lao, Burmese, Chinese, Indian, and Western, as well as contemporary songs with simple, uncomplicated melodies. Single-layer Tempo

Table 1 showing details of popular songs used for performance

Nam Song	Time Signature	Samniang
Ton Worachet	Double-layer Tempo	Thai
Khangkhao Kin Kluai	Single-layer Tempo	Thai
Khluen Krathop Fang	Double-layer Tempo	Thai
Phama Khwae	Single-layer Tempo	Myanmar
Phama Thung Le	Single-layer Tempo	Myanmar
Phama Klong Yao	Single-layer Tempo	Myanmar
Lao Choi	Double-layer Tempo	Laos
Lao Siang Thian	Double-layer Tempo	Laos
Toei Khong	Single-layer Tempo	Laos
Lao Kra Sae	Double-layer Tempo	Laos
Lao Long Nan	Double-layer Tempo	Laos
Fon Ngiao	Double-layer Tempo	Laos
Lao Duang Duean	Double-layer Tempo	Laos

Nam Song	Time Signature	Samniang
Chin Chai Yo	Double-layer Tempo	China
Chin Ram Phat	Double-layer Tempo	China
Khaek Sum	Single-layer Tempo	Indians
Khaek Ying Nok	Single-layer Tempo	Indians
Bu Sen Dok	Single-layer Tempo	Indians
Yawa	Single-layer Tempo	Indians
Farang Yi Hem	Single-layer Tempo	Westerners
Yo Salam	Single-layer Tempo	Westerners

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