


**From *Lakhon Rong* to *Lakhon Phleng*: The Development  
of Thai Musical Theatre Through The Lens of Aesthetic  
Cosmopolitanism**

**KAMOLNUN RUDDIT**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctoral of  
Philosophy  
Royal Holloway, University of London  
April 2022

**Declaration of Authorship**

I, Kamolnun Ruddit, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 20 April 2022

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible and the word cosmopolitanism would still be elusive jargon to me without the help and patience of my supervisor Dr Ashley Thorpe. The day you accepted my thesis proposal almost four years ago despite my lack of academic experience still feels surreal to me. Your foresight and belief in my potential was beyond my expectations, and your tireless attempts to push me outside of my comfort zone have been invaluable. As the Thai idiom goes, this was like *khen khrok kheun phukhao* (pushing a mortar up the hill), doing a task that required excessive strength and determination. I am aware of how heavy a mortar I was at the beginning of the process, but I hope that I became somewhat lighter towards the end. Thank you for your kind guidance and correction of my work and for putting up with my ambiguous writing structures and tenses. I still remember you said that you tried to shape me into an independent academic. Honestly, I am unsure if I am where you want me to be, but now I know what to strive for.

It is my utmost blessing to have been born into such a wonderful family. Words cannot describe how grateful I am for my parents who allowed me to pursue musical theatre, not fully knowing what it was and whether it could lead me anywhere at all. As the only and youngest daughter in the family, I could only imagine how difficult it was for you to let me fly away from home from a young age. Thank you for reminding me that there is nothing I cannot do once I set my mind firmly on it, and look where drama school has led me to! Thank you, P'Nine, P'Non, P'Milin, and my four most dramatic dogs, for listening to my venting and showing me that delicious meals and playing ball can solve all kinds of problems. I also wholeheartedly dedicate this thesis to my grandmother and grandfather, who sadly passed away during this research. His endless stories and support gave me strength during my most trying times. As promised, I finally did it, and I hope you will be proud.

This thesis would not have been possible as well without the many people involved in my research, who introduced me to Thai theatre practitioners and invaluable sources. I would like to thank everyone involved in Musical Lab for letting me be a part of this meaningful community and reminding me how much I love performing. My special thanks go to Toey, P'Mim, P'Potae, and Khun Ah Neud Nimit Phiphitkul for sacrificing their time to share their insights into the Thai theatre industry. Your knowledge and expertise helped me a great deal and gave me hope for the future of Thai theatre. Equally important, I thank those who have

contributed to my training in Thai performing arts and Western classical music back in Thailand and those who trained me at Lasalle College of The Arts and Guildford School of Acting. All of you have constituted my past, present, and future as an artist, and for that I am forever indebted to you.

Last not but least, I thank my incredible supporters who were there for me before and throughout my research. Thank you, Neale, for being with me from the day I wrote the proposal until the day I finished this thesis. Your support, listening ears, and treats have been my oasis. Thank you, my best friends, Aoey and Veny, for making me feel that I am never alone, and despite the physical distance, you guys are always a call away. How fortunate I am to be surrounded by such friends.

## **Dedication**

For those who leave home...  
to find their way back

## Abstract

This thesis examines the interplay of the local and global in *lakhon phleng*, also known as musical theatre, in Thailand through the lens of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. It constitutes the first systematic study on the contemporary scene of *lakhon phleng*, focusing on works from 1990 until 2021. In particular, this thesis argues that *lakhon phleng* is a product of an ongoing process of cultural hybridity, fusing elements from Thai aesthetics and decorum with those from external, largely Anglo-American, sources. As such, it has played an active role in the transnational flows of the musical theatre art form.

In doing so, it analyses two key contemporary practitioners in Thai commercial musical theatre, Patravadi Mejudhon and Takonkiet Virawan. The former's musicals (active in the early 1990s) were mostly adapted from Thai classical literature and created in collaboration with international artists. The latter's big-budget musicals from 1997 onwards were so commercially successful that they sparked national interest in the art form of *lakhon phleng* and growth in the number of musical productions, theatre companies, and training programmes in urban Thailand. Apart from these two practitioners, this thesis examines an artistic project titled *Musical Lab* organised by practitioners of small-scale musical theatre, in which the researcher was directly involved. This project brought to light the perspectives of musical theatre practitioners, both professional and amateurs, in the small-scale musical theatre as well as key social factors that enabled subjects' mobility in the musical theatre community in Thailand.

Despite the focus on recent history, this thesis also contextualises the present via a chronological discussion of *lakhon phleng* in Thailand from the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), examining the prototype of the art form known as *lakhon rong* and its early development by key practitioners such as Prince Narathip and Phran Bun who significantly shaped the art form's artistic styles and popularity.

Written by a Thai musical theatre performer trained in Thailand, Singapore, and Britain, the thesis offers unique insights into *lakhon phleng*. Personal experiences of training and performing facilitate a discussion of performative techniques, enabling the analysis of hybridity in terms of both performance form and approach. Formal and informal interviews, hitherto untranslated research materials written in Thai, and first-hand experiences derived

from witnessing performances and being involved with small-scale theatre in Thailand are incorporated into the analysis to offer unique insights into the ever-growing dialogues between local Thai and global musical theatre.

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Note on Translation and Transliteration</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>List of Illustrations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
Crossing The Threshold	
Research Methodology	16
Terminology of <i>Lakhon Phleng</i>	17
Recent Studies on <i>Lakhon Rong</i> and <i>Lakhon Phleng</i>	18
Research Contribution	31
Statement of Research Aims	33
Thesis Structure	34
<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>40</b>
Hybridity, Aesthetic and Aspirational Cosmopolitanism	
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>69</b>
Becoming <i>Lakhon Phleng</i> : The Emergence of <i>Lakhon Rong</i> , 1853-1960	
<b>Case Study One: Patravadi Mejudhon</b>	
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>98</b>
The ‘Classic’ <i>Lakhon Phleng</i> : The Development of Patravadi Mejudhon’s Contemporary Musicals, 1990s—present	
<b>Case study Two: Takonkiet Virawan</b>	
<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>126</b>
The Cosmopolitan Strategies in Takonkiet Virawan’s Musicals: The Development of Large-Scale Contemporary Musicals, 1997-present	
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>149</b>
The Original <i>Four Reigns</i>	



<b>Chapter Six</b>	<b>179</b>
Process of Adaptation	
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	<b>200</b>
Realisation	
<b>Case Study Three: <i>Bangkokian</i> The Concept Musical</b>	
<b>Chapter Eight</b>	<b>226</b>
Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in an Alternative Musical	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>274</b>
Appendix I: Chakri Dynasty	275
Appendix II: Reference clips for Chapter Three	276
Appendix III: Synopsis of <i>Four Reigns</i>	277
Appendix IV: Musical Numbers in <i>Four Reigns The Musical</i>	288
Appendix V: Original Vocal Score of “Mai Pen Rai”	286
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>291</b>

### Notes on translation and transliteration

All translations are mine unless otherwise stated. As has been the common case for the research field related to Thai terms, the romanisation of the Thai language remains inconsistent and significantly varies based on the system used in individual research. Consequently, readers often see the same letters and terms written differently in the roman alphabet. This issue is due to a lack of consensus between Thai scholars for a fixed system to romanise the Thai language (Wuttipong 32). Since this thesis contains a lot of transliterated terms and names, and in aiming to make it easier for general readers (non-Thai and Thai), I follow the every-day conventional English pronunciation of Thai terms and provide Thai spellings of key terms in the glossary section. In the musical notation excerpts and their analysis, I use spellings based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) system for the purposes of explicitly demonstrating the articulation and vocal lines in songs. Furthermore, for names and terms that have widely accepted romanised forms, I have retained these forms accordingly.

### List of Illustrations

#### Figures

1	The cast of the musical production <i>Into The Woods</i>	14
2	Film poster of <i>Nangsao Maliwan</i>	102
3	The waterfall dance in <i>Khang Lang Phab The Musical</i>	142
4	The outdoor theatre at Lhong	150
5	The riverside view from Lhong	151
6	Photograph of young Kukrit Pramoj and his family	161
7	The <i>dok krathum</i> hairstyle in the Fifth Reign	175
8	Portrait of Phra Worakunya and King Vajiravudh Rama VI	176
9	Portrait of Phra Worakunya in her fashionable attire	176
10	Poster of <i>Four Reigns The Musical</i> in 2011	188
11	Poster of <i>Four Reigns The Legend Musical</i> in 2019	188
12	Photograph of adult Phloi in <i>Four Reigns The Musical</i>	195
13	The dance sequence in “Saranrom”	225
14	The scene in “Congratulations!”	232

**Tables**

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | Full list of musical numbers of <i>Four Reigns The Musical</i> (2011) |     |
|   | 289   |     |
| 2 | Full list of musical numbers of <i>Bangkokian</i>                     | 295 |

**Musical notation/score**

- |                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Example 1 from “Bahn Khong Chan”      |     |
| 218                                   |     |
| Example 2 from “Bahn Khong Chan”      |     |
| 218                                   |     |
| Example 3 from “Bahn Khong Chan”      |     |
| 219                                   |     |
| Example 4 from “Saranrom”             | 222 |
| Example 5 from “Phab”                 | 227 |
| Example 6 from “Phab”                 | 228 |
| Original vocal score of “Mai Pen Rai” | 297 |

## Introduction

### Crossing the Threshold

The idea for this research came to me through my training background and working experience as a theatre performer. Born and raised in Bangkok, Thailand, I grew up in a conservative Thai family in which only my mother and grandfather were into music; they liked listening to popular songs on the radio and loved singing karaoke at home. I was sent to study Thai traditional dance and music at a young age because it was a good time-consuming activity while waiting for my hard-working mother to pick me up after school. Having joined the *chomrom dontri thai* or the Thai musical club at school from grade one to grade eight, I was blessed with opportunities to try my hand at various types of Thai dance and musical instruments, focusing specifically on *khim*, a Thai dulcimer, and *soh duang*, a soprano two-stringed fiddle. Through this school club, I performed in many school events and participated in cultural exchange programmes with local schools in Japan and China, where I had the chance to perform traditional Thai arts and enjoy local cultural performances. These were among my first trips abroad and my very first performances in front of an international audience. Based on this, it can be said that my childhood centred upon traditional Thai arts, forming the foundation of my technical training.

When I joined the school choir in the seventh grade, I received some training in Western music, though I could not yet understand Western musical notation. During this time, I was exposed to foreign musical aesthetics and languages, since most songs we sang in the choir were in English and Latin. Similar to the Thai musical club, I got to perform with this choir in many school events and participated in several choir competitions, both nationally and internationally. My experience in the choir led to my pursuing additional lessons in piano and Western classical singing. This was when my cultural horizons gradually expanded and shifted towards Western music traditions.

To compare my life to Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey* in which he describes twelve stages found universally in myths, tales, and stories centred upon a protagonist<sup>1</sup>, I received my 'Call to Adventure,' at the age of seventeen when I saw the twenty-fifth-anniversary

---

<sup>1</sup> See Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

performance of *The Phantom of The Opera* broadcast in selected cinemas in Thailand. I spent all my pocket money watching it three times. This version of the musical had a substantial impact on my perception of performing arts because this was the first time that I realised that performers were exceptional singers and equally exceptional actors and dancers. Of course, such skills were evaluated on the criteria of Western classical and musical theatre styles, which were a new realm to me and became my main interest at the time. Part of the reason why I was so impressed by the performers' triple threat<sup>2</sup> was due to my background training in Thai music traditions where each skill tends to be executed by a different set of performers. It was as if a mysterious light bulb got turned on in my head, and all I knew was that this was what I wanted to do for a living. I started to acquire information regarding the art form of musical theatre and how to enter drama conservatoires. The problem was that there was no degree in musical theatre available in Thailand at the time, at least not nationally or internationally recognised ones. Once I realised I would have to apply to universities abroad, I worked hard to improve my skills in English, dancing (ballet, jazz, contemporary), and singing. After auditioning for several schools in several countries, I officially 'Crossed the Threshold'. My commitment to begin my journey by leaving 'The Ordinary World' and entering 'The Special World' of Western theatre came to fruition when I was accepted to the musical theatre programme at Lasalle College of The Arts in Singapore.

My intensive training at Lasalle shaped my identity as a versatile performer positioned between Asian and Western aesthetics. I was exposed to various styles of singing, dancing, and music as part of musical theatre training, all from Western theatre traditions. The high discipline and professional attitude necessary for the Western musical theatre industry were ingrained in me by practitioners from America, Australia, and the United Kingdom. For acting and voice classes, though, I was exposed to various performing arts traditions not limited to Western styles such as Balinese dance, Jingju, and Bollywood dance. Although I was trained to use multiple American accents, I was given the freedom to perform some pieces in my natural accent as well. The productions that I did as part of my training tended to be American musicals, but some were fused with Asian aesthetics or consisted of performative elements from Asian repertoires such as the musical production of *Into the Woods* set in a pan-Asian context (Figure 1). I was also encouraged to look back at my

---

<sup>2</sup> A triple threat refers to a performer or a sportsperson who excels at three important skills in their field. In musical theatre, the three important skills are singing, dancing, and acting.

cultural roots and create a musical performance using Thai aesthetics, leading to my final dissertation on musical theatre in Thailand. Therefore, my training at Lasalle enabled me to gain various sets of skills and some understanding regarding different disciplines of performing arts and hybrid performative styles. This was, of course, enhanced by the cosmopolitan cultural scene of Singapore and by my fellow Lasalle students who came from across the world.



Figure 1: The cast of the musical production *Into the Woods*, directed by Andrew Davidson in 2015, at The Creative Cube, Singapore (Lasalle College of the Arts – Musical Theatre 2015).

Later, further training in musical theatre at the Guildford School of Acting (GSA), England, enabled me to deepen my knowledge of and experience in performance training in the Western performing arts traditions. Having been trained at Lasalle, the singing and acting repertoires, dance techniques, and self-discipline required for the training were not unfamiliar to me. The main differences lay in the intensive training, the emphasis on several British accents and the working experience with professionals from the West End. Overall, the training at GSA moulded me for the Anglo-American musical theatre industry.

With the skill sets and mindset shaped by my training, I have become familiar with the ways of working in the Anglo-American musical theatre. However, the more I developed myself in the Western traditions, the more I became interested in the Eastern traditions. Perhaps this is due to my initial training in Thai traditional arts and the East-meet-West aesthetics that

Singapore exposed me to. As such, I have always been interested in performances that incorporate aesthetics from various traditions, particularly those that fuse Eastern and Western traditions. The art form of *lakhon phleng*, or Thai musical theatre, is one such performance.

Over the last few decades, musical theatre has become more popular in Thailand, evidenced by an increasing number of local musical productions, theatre venues, and courses related to musical theatre training in urban areas. As I gained more working experience in Singapore, England, and Thailand, and as the contemporary musical theatre in Thailand became more active, I reflected on my previous dissertation on the role of Thai musical theatre as an emblem of Thai cultural identity. I realised that its description as ‘the national pride of Thailand,’ explored in Chapters Three to Seven, was more complex than I imagined.

With my training base in traditional Thai and Western theatre traditions, I can see that Thai musical theatre is crafted by mixing Thai and Western performance traditions to target Thai audiences. As a performer trained in Western traditions, I initially perceived contemporary Thai musicals as rather ‘Thai’ because, in terms of technical training and performative skills, they are considerably different from Anglo-American musicals. Looking through the lens of Thai traditional arts and based on the local audience’s reception, however, Thai musicals are perceived as very ‘Western’. Scrutinising this further, I realised that Thai musicals are neither completely Thai nor Western, but they resonate with the two. Thai musical theatre is a highly hybridised art form that attempts to satisfy the local taste while simultaneously presenting itself as an international product. The two entities intertwine and interact with each other to varying degrees depending on the creators and performers. The potential of these entities to blend harmoniously or create clashes mirrors my own identity as a performer who constantly hovers between Eastern and Western traditions. I, too, face difficulty in allocating my position, finding myself aspiring to be an ‘international’ Thai performer. My ambiguous position enables me to recognise the hybrid characteristics upon which Thai musical theatre is constructed. As such, this research has been crafted out of my interest in the complex interplay of different performative elements and the long development of Thai musical theatre as well as my attempt to locate myself as a performer.

## Research methodology

My status as a practitioner gives me unique industry insights into contemporary Thai musical theatre, but utilising such research has methodological implications. The qualitative research for this thesis has been conducted using primarily ethnographic research methods, whereby I have drawn upon both primary and secondary sources. As Hammersley and Atkinson suggest, ethnography is better thought of as “a particular mode of looking, listening, and thinking about social phenomena” rather than a set of fixed methods (230). As such, ethnographic research entails a wide range of skills and a cross-section of different fields of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. My approaches are drawn from the fields of Thai performing arts and cultural studies, Western performing arts, and global studies. The employment of multidisciplinary fields provides me with an insightful lens for examining the development and the dynamics of Thai musical theatre as a naturalistic social phenomenon. By naturalistic, I refer to the research being conducted in non-manipulative or fixed settings such that the research objects are studied in their natural states or, in other words, as social phenomena (ibid 7, Gill *et al.* 194).

Most of the data on *lakhon rong* or sung drama, the prototype of *lakhon phleng*, relies on historical and textual analyses of the art form, key practitioners, and the Thai theatre scene at the time. A great deal of this data is in the form of narrative historical writing, which, based on the conceptualisations of the historian Hayden White, “seeks to organise evidence imaginatively into a coherent story of the past” (Gill *et al.* 193). In this way, such data can be affected by the interpretation of individual writers and researchers, constructing the past in their imaginative ways (ibid). To the highest extent possible, I have critically engaged with the gathered data by evaluating it across different sources and by cross-referencing with the evidence of recordings of particular performances, performance descriptions found in key subjects’ personal letters, restaged performances of such styles, audio materials, and experts’ discussion of such styles, depending on availability. I have also validated my interpretations through informal and formal interviews with certain Thai theatre practitioners.

The sources employed to provide data on contemporary Thai musicals from the 1990s onwards are mostly primary. These include Thai theatre performances in which I was involved as a performer, a member of the audience (both in on-venue and online-streaming productions), and through in-situ participant observation. My interpretations derive, first and



foremost, from my training in Thai and Western performing arts, followed closely by conversations with practitioners, aspiring amateurs, musical theatre enthusiasts, and members of the audience in Thai musicals, as well as documentary research. These conversations were achieved through several methods including informal chats during rehearsals or before and after shows, formal interviews, and interviews via online platforms during the pandemic spread of COVID-19. As a native Thai, I acknowledge the challenge of being familiar with and taking for granted signs and behavioural patterns exhibited by the studied subjects, particularly when it comes to fellow practitioners of my generation. As Hammersley and Atkinson explain, this is the aspect of reflexivity embedded in ethnographic methods, where a researcher is a part of the familiar (imagined) community she studies and is bound to be shaped by the socio-historical context in that community (18). Notwithstanding this, within the set theoretical framework, I put effort into scrutinising what I perceived to be ordinary and unimportant; in other words, as Hammersley and Atkinson put it, I aimed to treat it as anthropologically strange (ibid 9). As stated earlier, my shuffling between Thai and international orientations has been tremendously beneficial in understanding Thai musical theatre from within and without. Linking back to the reflexive aspect, though, I have also been conscious to not overly lean towards the orientation engrained in me by Western-based training and work experience, striving to instead examine Thai musical theatre as a distinctive art form in its own right. To this end, I also subtly sounded out my interpretations and analyses with certain Thai practitioners to see how they resonated with their own opinions and examine what this brought to light in relation to Thai musical theatre development and practice.

### **The Terminology of *Lakhon Phleng***

Four interrelated terminologies are important throughout the investigation of the development of *lakhon phleng*. The first term is *lakhon rong*, which directly translates as ‘sung drama’. As shall be demonstrated in Chapters Two, this was the prototype for *lakhon phleng* and refers to the art form initiated by Prince Narathip which was active during the reigns of King Rama V to VII (1868-1935). During the rise of *lakhon rong* in the Seventh Reign (1925-1935), many *lakhon rong* troupes established their own theatrical venues for their performances, contributing to the commercial theatre in Bangkok.

Since such theatrical venues featured a prominent stage area, unlike prior forms of *lakhon* that tended to be performed on the ground level, the performance of *lakhon rong* became known as *lakhon weatee* (Phipitkul 2022). The term *lakhon weatee* directly translates as ‘stage drama’, denoting the type of *lakhon* that is performed on stage. Therefore, the term technically covers both *lakhon phut* or ‘spoken drama’ and *lakhon rong*. Up until now, this term is still commonly used amongst Thai theatre practitioners to refer to either a spoken play or a musical style performance (whether sung-through or semi-sung through), leading the term to carry an ambiguous meaning.

Such ambiguity led to the coining of another term, *lakhon phleng*, which directly translates as ‘musical drama’, to distinguish a type of performance that relies on music, songs, and acting as the main storytelling method. According to Nimit Phipitkul, a renowned Thai theatre practitioner and puppeteer, this term is simply a translation for Western-style musical theatre and is used to cover sung-through and semi-sung through musicals (2022). As such, the term *lakhon phleng* and the transliterated term, musical, are used interchangeably depending on the practitioners’ preference. This is why some practitioners who are more exposed to the Western performing arts such as Takonkiet Virawan refer to this art form as ‘musical’ or ‘musical theatre’. Recently, the transliterated term ‘musical’ has been more widely adopted amongst local practitioners and audiences mostly due to Virawan’s commercial musical productions that always contain the affix of ‘The Musical’ in his works (e.g., *Four Reigns The Musical*, *Lodlai Mungkorn The Musical*, and *Khang Lang Phab The Musical*). The popularity of Virawan’s musicals then set the trend for other musical productions that put the affix of ‘The Musical’ in their productions’ titles as well.

In this thesis, I mainly use the terms *lakhon phleng* or musical depending on the practitioner in question. For instance, Patravadi Mejudhon often referred to her productions formally as *lakhon phleng* while Virawan referred to his productions as ‘musicals’. In the small-scale theatre, the art form is mainly referred to as ‘musical’ as well. I decided to refrain from using the word *lakhon weatee* to avoid confusion regarding its ambiguous meaning.

### **Some Recent Studies on *Lakhon Rong* and *Lakhon Phleng***

The development from *lakhon rong* to contemporary *lakhon phleng* is a noticeably under-researched subject both in Thai and English. The existing studies only touch briefly

on *lakhon rong* as part of the modernisation of *lakhon* in the Fifth Reign of King Chulalongkorn or focus specifically on particular drama troupes in the Seventh Reign such as Chantarophat and Pakawalee troupes. In attempting to trace the chronological development from *lakhon rong* to *lakhon phleng* (until 2021) and analyse the shifts in its hybridised performative elements, I have gathered data from materials that are beyond the published academic works related to the art form. The following are the key studies and source materials on *lakhon phleng* which I have drawn upon or which are related to my research.

One of the most valuable studies regarding the development of *lakhon* in Thailand is *Dance, Drama & Theatre in Thailand: The Process of Development and Modernization* (2000) by Mattani Rutnin. Written as a part of The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, this book aptly provides the overall genealogy of Thai dance and drama from the pre-Sukhothai era (before A.D. 1257) to the contemporary period (2000), focusing on the modernisation period in the Fifth Reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). Rutnin elaborates on each form of drama, its components, successes and the nature of its evolution, and provides the developmental journey of each with reference to the historical and social contexts of the time in which each form flourished. The historical documents, personal letters, and interviews of those involved in the modernisation process of *lakhon* reveal the motivations, expectations, and objectives of key practitioners for their new artistic forms. These were often driven by the taste and intentions of the king and the elite as part of the policy to modernise Thailand. The historical records on the king's approval and patronage of certain art forms demonstrate strong causality between the support of the Thai monarchy and the popularity of theatre during each reign. This also shows the role of the Thai monarchy as a significant influencer and initiator of trends deemed appropriate to follow by their people. Therefore, this book is essential in understanding the chronology of Thai theatre and the historical context supporting it. This is very helpful as a starting point for the researcher to locate the timeline of each type of *lakhon* and see the transitions in styles and tastes during each reign. However, due to the extensive scope of the study, it does not provide much detail on particular genres of drama. For instance, it explores *lakhon rong* as part of the modernisation period of *lakhon*, demonstrating how it was initiated by Prince Narathip and became a popular art form during the Fifth and Six Reigns (1910-1925). However, it does not further trace the art form's development into other popular models of *lakhon rong* such as the Phran Bun's style (examined in Chapter Two). Moreover, due to the period when the research was conducted, it ended with the overall development of commercial theatre in Thailand in

the 1990s, focusing on dramatic arts within universities and spoken plays without exploring the rise of *lakhon phleng*. As such, this thesis intends to deepen and further the existing knowledge on *lakhon rong* (Chapter Two) and the rise of *lakhon phleng* until its current forms of large-scale and small-scale musicals (Chapters Three to Eight), focusing particularly on the shifts in aesthetics and performative elements in reaction to increasing global flows in urban Thailand.

Another important study is *The Transpositional of Traditional Thai Literature into Modern Stage Drama: The Current Development of Thai Theatre*, a PhD thesis by Kittisak Kerdarunsuksri (2001). The thesis employs Rutnin's study on the overall development of Thai theatre as the historical context and further investigates the popularity of *lakhon rong* after the heyday of Prince Narathip's *lakhon rong* works. It examines the role of Phran Bun and his troupe, *Chantarophat*, demonstrating how he initiated the employment of Western instruments in his *lakhon rong* productions, thereby initiating a popular model adopted by other troupes at the time. This research area helps illuminate the significance and active development of *lakhon rong*. Furthermore, it enables a better understanding of the aesthetic shifts between Prince Narathip's and Phran Bun's models of *lakhon rong* as well as popular trends in Thai theatre of the time. Apart from the study's contribution to the popular period of *lakhon rong*, its contribution also extends to the contemporary period of the 1990s when several Thai theatre practitioners turned to Thai traditional materials as their source texts. Kerdarunsuksri focuses on key theatrical productions, which are a mix of spoken plays and musicals, that adapted the classical Thai literature such as *Phra Lo*, *Inao*, and *Singhakraiphob*. Amongst these productions are the works of Patravadi Mejudhon (examined in Chapter Three), who popularised the trend of turning Thai stories into stage performances in the early 1990s. Kerdarunsuksri's research on Mejudhon's background and her intention in staging such performances is a beneficial point of departure for the researcher in understanding the overall characteristics of Mejudhon's works and the significance of her performances in urban Thailand which were propelled by the national campaign to promote Thai culture.

While Kerdarunsuksri extensively examines the socio-political context involved in her works, his analyses mainly focus on the narrative and script construction process concerning the transposition of Thai classical texts to stage plays as well as the practitioners' strategies in revising the texts to make them relatable to contemporary Thai audiences. Through the

perspective of a musical theatre practitioner, this thesis approaches Mejudhon's works via the lens of hybridity and cosmopolitanism, deconstructing the complex integration of traditional Thai and foreign performing arts and the key factors that enable her to create such hybrid performances. Instead of focusing on adapted narratives like in Kerdarunsuksri's study, this thesis analyses Mejudhon's dialogue with international artists and examines how her cosmopolitan experience enabled her to subvert the dominant power in the field musical theatre. Furthermore, since Kerdarunsuksri conducted his research, Mejudhon has created a YouTube channel dedicated to showcasing recent works from her students and has archived her past works in the documentary discussed below. As such, the case study on Mejudhon in this thesis helps update the developmental journey of her artistic career and brings new insights into her past productions.

In support of Kerdarunsuksri's analyses of Patravadi Mejudhon's musicals, the documentary series titled *Khui Kab Khru (Lek)* (2020 – present) on YouTube by Patravadi Hua Hin Channel helps provide insights into Mejudhon's creative processes and her significance in the Thai entertainment industry, particularly during the 1980s – 1990s. This series was initiated by Mejudhon herself to archive her theatrical works and artistic styles in the hope of providing education for those interested. In this series, Mejudhon talks in detail about each project in her artistic career: her training in dramatic arts, her career as a film actress and television writer, her career as a musical director and performer, and her performing arts school. As of January 2022, the series contains thirty-seven episodes in total, each lasting between approximately forty minutes and an hour. In relation to this thesis, the series provides valuable and detailed data on the early rise of contemporary *lakhon phleng* during the 1990s and the transitions in Thai entertainment culture at the time. Furthermore, it also features full length recorded performances of each production. This includes the live performances of her Broadway-style one-woman show in 1983 and her musicals in the early 1990s, which were not broadcast anywhere prior to this series. Therefore, her reflections on these musicals and their live performances facilitate a greater understanding of her artistic visions and how they are realised on stage through hybridised performative elements. They also bring to light her collaboration with international artists and her determination to integrate multiple performance aesthetics with respect and care. While most of Mejudhon's reflections aim at elaborating on her inspirations, visions, and the creative processes of each project, they do not focus on the performative elements on stage from a technical point of view—the aspect that this thesis aims to fill in. In this way, I unmask key social factors and

Mejudhon's role as a significant mediator of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in urban Thailand despite her claim of bringing traditional Thai culture to the modern stage and her alignment with the decolonising theatre movement at the time. This is not to say that the traditional Thai aesthetics featured in her works are false or that her musicals fail to represent Thai aesthetics. Rather, the analysis aims to deconstruct the complex interweaving of cultural entities in her creation of Thainess on stage, and to scrutinise how she harnesses Western theatre aesthetics to challenge the dominance of Western-imported artists and performances of the time.

The source material that serves to extend the development of contemporary Thai musical theatre that Rutnin's study and Kerdarunsuksri's thesis above are missing is a biography of Takonkiet Virawan titled *Boy Story: 20 Phee Reak Nai Cheewit Kan Tam Ngan Khong Boy Takonkiet* (2013) written by Anna Lim *et al.* As would be expected in a biography of a public figure, this biography relates the story of Takonkiet Virawan, revered as "*chao poh haeng wongkarn lakhon weatee* (the father of stage drama industry)," from his childhood to his career in the Thai television industry to his successful large-scale musicals up until 2016. Based on Virawan's and his colleagues' perspectives, the biography highlights significant factors that drove him to create musical theatre in Thailand and present it in his unique style.

Virawan's interviews also reflect his thinking processes, musical inspirations, and strategies to promote Thai musical theatre as a global product. This sheds light on his stance on aesthetic cosmopolitanism and his aspiration to present Thai musical theatre in dialogue with Anglo-American musical theatre. His discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of his musical productions also highlight the challenges in targeting mass audiences in Thailand and the underlying factors that contribute to the popularity of his musicals amongst local audiences. Although this material focuses solely on Virawan's artistic works in the television and theatre in Thailand, the data provides insights into the development of contemporary commercial and big-budget theatre and possible future directions as examined in this thesis (in Chapters Four to Seven). It also shows the characteristics of large-scale musicals that are popular with local audiences and explains why other mass musical productions tend to feature such characteristics.

Precisely because the data here is not approached from an analytical point of view and tends to be presented in a commemorative manner as would be expected in a biography, it glosses over the globalisation effect of a musical theatre industry dominated by Anglo-American

megamusicals and how Virawan's artistic aspirations have been strongly moulded by them. Such musicals provided significant sources of inspiration for him, so much so that they sometimes drove him to evaluate his works based on the criteria of Western megamusicals or musical directors and composers on Broadway and the West End. Also, most of his works, at least the ones documented here, targeted local Thai audiences by employing their association with Anglo-American musical theatre. As such, in this thesis, I seek to further investigate the relationship between Anglo-American musicals and large-scale commercial musical theatre in Thailand, analysing how the former affects the latter in terms of popular musical styles, marketing strategies, and appreciation of musical theatre amongst mass contemporary audiences in Thailand. In particular, I attempt to bring to light the components of Virawan's musicals that gear his productions towards commercial success amongst the Thai audience and his decision to present his work as a disruption of his predecessors.

Another recent study on contemporary musical theatre in Thailand is found in the article "Authenticity and Contemporary Musical Theatre in Thailand" by Wankwan Polachan, published as part of *Performing Southeast Asia: Performance, Politics and the Contemporary* (2020). So far, this is the only study on contemporary musical theatre in Thailand that focuses on the musical productions of Takonkiet Virawan within the last decade. This article helps provide a brief understanding of the large-scale musicals created by Virawan and points out that despite its Westernised outlook, Thai musical theatre contains Thai idiosyncrasies. Thus, it is a hybrid art form that resonates with Thai authenticity. Although I agree with Polachan's work that Thai musical theatre is a hybrid, her work only discusses how musical theatre in Thailand occurs from the globalisation of Thailand and does not further demonstrate how it is hybridised and why it is realised in this way. Whilst she perceives Thai musicals, particularly those staged by Virawan, to be 'authentic Thai' via their dramaturgical aspects (e.g., their stories, characters, spectacles, storytelling methods, and the feeling of *rasa*<sup>3</sup>), I contend that large-scale Thai musicals should not be deemed as authentic Thai simply because they are delivered through a constant interplay of local (i.e., Thai) and global (i.e., Anglo-American megamusical) aesthetics. As shall be demonstrated in Chapters Four to Seven, the Thai stories and characters are part of local aesthetics and the creative

---

<sup>3</sup> The concept of *rasa* emerged from the complex theory of traditional Indian aesthetics, and its definition tends to vary depending on its employment. Generally, however, the term involves provoking certain emotions in an audience via particular performative modes in a performance (Polachan 289-291). Refer to "*Rasa*" as *Aesthetic Experience* by G.B. Mohan Thampi (1965) for a further reading on the concept.

team's branding strategies for making the musicals accessible to as wide a range of Thai audiences as possible. Furthermore, these are integrated and enhanced by aesthetics and aspirations shaped by Anglo-American megamusicals, resulting in hybridised performative elements on stage. This is not to say that Thai musical theatre is just an assimilation of a Western art form and does not contain any uniqueness as it does contain strong Thai ethno-national uniqueness. However, the Thai elements are crafted by aesthetics from the wider shore and are usually not delivered in their original form; that is, such elements are transformed through their encounter and negotiation with the foreign aesthetics in question, resulting in amalgamations that constantly shift through such aesthetics. Therefore, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that to practice and create the art form of Thai musical theatre requires an understanding of its hybridised nature and branding strategies in delivering an art form deemed to be simultaneously 'Thai' and 'global'.

Since little has been written on the subject of *lakhon phleng*, particularly the dynamics of the last two decades, looking at a wider range of contemporary theatre in Southeast Asia provides helpful assistance. One common feature inherent to contemporary theatre in the Southeast Asian region is cross-cultural borrowings between neighbouring countries and their ethnic communities in other regions (e.g., Chinese and Indian communities across Southeast Asia that still have active dialogues with their motherlands) and from the Western countries that previously colonised them. Although Thailand is the exception in this case as it has never been colonised, it has also been affected by the power of Western imperialism as much as other Southeast Asian countries, if not more. As shall be demonstrated in Chapter Two, this is mainly due to Thailand's policy of opening up the country and embracing westernisation which was initiated by King Rama IV (1851-1868), the legacies of which are still felt today. In terms of theatre, influences from Western performing arts have had a tremendous impact on traditional theatre in many Southeast Asian countries, resulting in the modernisation and transformation of traditional forms. As such, the general characteristics and cultural politics explored in the literature on contemporary Southeast Asian theatre serve as a valuable reflection on the hybridisation process that occurred in Thai musical theatre as well as its current dynamics and possible future directions.

The most recent and comprehensive literature on contemporary performance in Southeast Asia is *Performing Southeast Asia: Performance, Politics and the Contemporary*, edited by Marcus Cheng Chye Tan and Charlene Rajendram (2020). This book investigates current



dynamics in contemporary theatre performance (i.e., performances associated with traditional theatre forms that have evolved in response to internal and external forces) and theatre performance in the contemporary (i.e., performances that are not necessarily linked to cultural heritage or traditional forms but “engage overtly with theatre and performance in the contemporary”) across particular nation-states in Southeast Asia (Tan and Rajendram 29). It aptly illustrates the overall shifts in cultural identity, national heritage, and politics, which are reflected by the examined performances. Although most of these performances are not entirely created as political theatre, they bring to light how the current political landscape and globalisation inform the contemporary life of a particular nation, driving the practitioners to produce such work as a response to socio-political contexts. Usefully for this thesis, this book demonstrates a similar trend of theatre performances influenced by Western aesthetics in other Southeast Asian nations. However, the authors in this volume contend that such performances are not simply a sign of Western neo-imperialism but contain hybridised elements from local particularities and the global context. The global elements here derive from Western cultural products and those from other Asian cultures. In this way, the book is helpful in demonstrating that, owing to its high diversity and overlapping identities, the imagined community of Southeast Asia is “a site of intersection” (ibid 30) constructed upon local particularities from various cultural entities and shared global concerns. Furthermore, many performances seek to re-imagine and re-appropriate traditional performances and, thus, post challenges for the fixed identity and cultural heritage imposed by the national authority. This thesis, therefore, seeks to extend the idea of intersectionality by analysing the characteristics of Thai musicals, which tend to construct the Thai identity by incorporating various performance aesthetics that are not necessarily fixed in the past. In particular, the case study of Patravadi Mejudhon’s musicals (examined in Chapter Three) and the *Musical Lab* project (examined in Chapter Eight) indicate Thai practitioners’ attempts to challenge classical Thai literature and beliefs deemed nationally precious by re-interpreting and revising them with foreign aesthetics in order to preserve their relevance in the contemporary context, thus pushing the boundaries of a fixed and untouchable holistic past.

Another important work on contemporary performance in Southeast Asia is *Contemporary Southeast Asian Performance: Transnational Perspectives*, edited by Matthew Isaac Cohen and Laura Noszlopy (2010). Although the case studies examined here focus solely on Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore, the dynamic shifts in the contemporary theatre scene resonate across Southeast Asia, particularly the urban centres of Thailand. Arguing that most

contemporary performances in Southeast Asia should be described as “post-traditional” rather than “post-modern,” Cohen and Noszlopy seek to demonstrate the ever-growing transnational perspectives shared by theatre practitioners in Southeast Asia. Such contemporary performance is post-traditional in the sense that the traditions and cultural memory are not eradicated or concealed. Instead, they are confounded and transformed by interweaving “different cultural traditions in a specific contact zone” (Cohen and Noszlopy 17). This supports the findings in the literature discussed above regarding the complex cross-cultural exchange taking place between Southeast Asian nations, resulting in distinctive styles of performance. The case studies included in their study also underline how such distinctive styles created by fluid transactions and transformations amongst Southeast Asian practitioners enable them to create work that is meaningful at their ethno-local level but is still recognised beyond local boundaries. This argument is extremely relevant for the modern forms of *lakhon* I discuss in this thesis, in which Thai practitioners draw from different cultural traditions, both within Asia and beyond, to experiment with traditional forms of *lakhon*. Although such modern forms of *lakhon* aim to make it more relevant in the globalised context, the traditional forms of Thai performing arts and aesthetics are still present which demonstrates that Thai performance can transcend local cultural boundaries. As such, this thesis serves to expand the transnational perspectives of local practitioners in the context of Thailand, and show how such perspectives affect local reception.

Another helpful work on the dynamic exchange in theatre performance within Asia is *Asian City Crossings*, edited by Rossella Ferrari and Ashley Thorpe (2021). Although not centred specifically on the theatre scene in Southeast Asia but rather those of Hong Kong and Singapore, the book illustrates the cross-cultural exchange and collaborations between the two cities and other cities along their route from an Asian perspective. In parallel with the literature above, the contributors to this volume acknowledge the legacy of Western (European) colonialism and its influence on the performing arts in Asia, particularly in global hubs like Hong Kong and Singapore. However, they also recognise the specificities produced by the mixture of global cultural flows and local social relations. Therefore, they move beyond the binary of East meets West by focusing on inter-Asian collaborations that seek to create dialogic space between cities in Asia and beyond. By employing city-states rather than nation-states as infrastructure, the chapters bring to light how the collaborative projects construct an identity of Asian theatre that negotiates national and cultural boundaries, leading to horizontal transnational exchanges and fostering of conviviality across urban centres of

Asia. Nevertheless, the contributors also recognise that, in practice, such non-hierarchical transnational exchanges and the ideal theatre scene are underpinned by several factors, including the socio-political context of each place and how well the practitioners in question are aware of it, economic disparities, lack of funding and government support, and the language used. Although my research is grounded in the context of Thailand and practitioners' crossing of national boundaries, mainly between Thai and Western cultural aesthetics, the understanding of the dynamics of contemporary theatre in the urban centres in Asia is a useful lens for analysing the alternative theatre in Bangkok, which tends to steer away from the nationally-driven policies and campaigns (examined in Chapter Eight). As such, this thesis extends this avenue of study by exploring transnational exchanges in the context of Thai musical theatre in a cosmopolitan Bangkok, where several alternative Thai theatre practitioners have sought to collaborate with international artists to present works that do not merely articulate ethno-national aesthetics and narrative but portray local specificities of the city itself.

As Thai musical theatre has been created by fusing Thai and foreign cultural aesthetics, with the latter being dominated by Anglo-American musical theatre, it is vital to understand the context of Western musical theatre and its direct and indirect relationship with theatre scenes across the globe. Notwithstanding the long and thriving development of Anglo-American musical theatre, its global dominance is facilitated by Western colonisation which leads to the high status of Western cultural capitals as well global capitalism dominated by First World countries.

One of the most useful studies of globalisation and its effects on theatre is *Theatre & Globalization* by Dan Rebellato (2009). Arguing that globalisation should be regarded as an economic phenomenon, the opposition of which is not localisation but cosmopolitanism, the book provides the fundamental scope of globalisation, which is strongly linked with global capitalism, and examines how this has driven theatre in terms of scriptwriting styles, the social issues underlying characters and narratives, marketing strategies, and decisions in selecting theatre pieces. It also addresses how certain theatre productions are strongly influenced by globalisation in making monetisation a priority. This often leads to a dehumanising effect; that is, the actors and artistic visions of current artists are of lesser importance, as all decisions have been made and fixed by their predecessors.

Particularly relevant for this thesis, Rebellato discusses McTheatre, also known as megamusicals, which prioritises brands, high-budget sets and technological effects. Towards the end, he also suggests that “theatre formal modes tend towards cosmopolitanism,” as theatre can generate a sense of autonomy and being one with a wider community at the same time (72-74). In extending Rebellato’s argument, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the dynamics of commercial musical theatre in Thailand are also facilitated by global capitalism evidenced in the features and branding strategies of Thai large-scale musicals and imported Western musicals. As shall be demonstrated in Chapters Four to Seven, I argue that Takonkiet Virawan employs Western megamusicals as a model for his musical productions, as evidenced by their high-budget and mass productions, the residence theatre for his musicals, the employment of active marketing strategies, and his welcoming international tours of popular Western musicals. What is interesting for Thai musical theatre is that while Western megamusicals seek to create franchises following the same artistic decisions and view their actors and crew as always being replaceable, Virawan’s musicals employ all-celebrity casts and tend to go for the same group of celebrities as well as non-celebrity ensemble. This also applies to the staff in the creative team. It can be said that in order to maintain standards and theatrical aesthetics, he forms an exclusive group of performers and creative artists that can secure the popularity and monetisation of his productions. Furthermore, Virawan’s large-scale musical productions also illustrate Rebellato’s argument that localisation is not the opposite of globalisation, for Virawan’s determination to create a Thai version of Western megamusicals for a Thai audience, in fact, thrives on the musicals’ globalised outlook and marketing strategies which emphasise them as ‘world-class’ products.

The book *Musical Theatre: A History* by John Kenrick (2008) illustrates the development of the Western musical theatre art form from its beginnings in ancient Greece to the comic operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, right up to the rise of American musicals in the twentieth century, also referred to as ‘the golden era’, and ending with jukebox musicals in the twenty-first century. Throughout such long development in Europe and America, Kenrick touches on the sociological circumstances that shape the artistic visions of creative individuals and the taste of the audience, determining the popular styles of musical productions in each era. Kenrick also demonstrates that the popular musical styles and musicals in Europe, particularly England, travelled across to the United States and initiated similar trends there as well as inspiring the local artists to further their artistic visions. The musical styles created by artists in the American region then travelled back to Europe and

became popular as well. In this way, his findings indicate an active dialogue between the musical theatre industry in North America, especially Broadway, and Western Europe, particularly in England, which helped to achieve the international popularity of the musical theatre art form and the dominance of these regions. In other words, transnational flow has been an integral part of musical theatre in which communications across national boundaries are inherent throughout the art form's history in Western Europe and North America. This thesis seeks to position Asia, specifically Thailand, within this transnational flow shaped by globalisation. Although Thailand did not have any significant dialogue with the musical theatre in these regions during the period covered by the book's scope, Thai theatre was noticeably affected by them, leading to new styles of drama performances emerging from the reign of King Rama V onwards. As shall be demonstrated throughout the thesis, key Thai theatre practitioners such as Prince Narathip, Phran Bun, King Vajiravudh, Patravadi Mejudhon, and Takonkiet Virawan, exhibit distinctive styles of musical performances. Such styles are a hybrid between Thai and, largely Anglo-American, foreign musical aesthetics. The foreign aesthetics employed by these individuals tended to be in parallel with the popular styles of musicals in the Anglo-American regions. For instance, King Vajiravudh was inspired by operettas, especially those of Gilbert and Sullivan, while Virawan leaned towards American pop musicals. Therefore, the aesthetic shifts in the development of Western musical theatre across Western Europe and America also had an impact on the wider communities of theatre practitioners, at least in Thailand. This highlights the dominance of Anglo-American musical theatre, which shapes the globalised aesthetics and techniques in the art form of musical theatre. As such, this thesis provides a counter aspect of musical theatre development in the non-dominant region, which progresses in parallel, though not at the same pace, with the dominant regions, leading to the idiosyncratic fusion of the art form.

The recent study titled *Western Theatre in Global Contexts: Directing and Teaching Culturally Inclusive Drama around the World*, edited by Jillian Campana and Yasmine Marie Jahanmir (2021) further explores how Western Theatre, defined as theatrical practices rooted in Western narratives and philosophies, has had a dominant role in global contemporary theatre (Campana and Jahanmir 3). This is not because of the superiority of Western theatre in terms of its techniques and scripts, but due to the limited reproduction and distribution of non-Western theatrical arts and the political force arising from the Western world (ibid 5). Drawing from the insights of theatre practitioners and educators who are trained in the Western-theatre tradition and apply such techniques in non-Western locations, their works

bring to light how Western theatre scripts and techniques are perceived as attractive for local participants, yet are understood and utilised differently from their original context due to cultural differences and participants' lack of connection with Western philosophy and cultural politics. In other words, this book indicates how Western theatre techniques and pedagogies are transformed and shifted across the globe and reveals ways in which they can benefit local participants while respecting and stimulating the host culture and the local theatre scene.

This thesis, especially Chapter Eight on the *Musical Lab* project, compliments this field by demonstrating how performative techniques derived from Western theatre tradition can serve as one's cultural capital in better accessing musical theatre materials and globalised technical training as well as her navigation amongst local musical theatre practitioners in Thailand. At the same time, such globalised technical training also serves as a barrier distinguishing those who are more accomplished and is closely linked with the notion that being international arises from being Western-minded. Particularly in the practice of musical theatre, accessing such globalised training leads to a chain of social factors, including fluency in English and exposure to Anglo-American musicals, all of which point towards one's economic position within the middle-class social milieu or higher. This seems to underline the status of Western theatre training amongst local practitioners as being a product of the middle and upper class. Moreover, although certain groups of local students and practitioners are trained through Western musical theatre curricula, local markets that can accommodate their training are relatively limited. This is similar to my first-hand observations of musical theatre-trained professionals in Singapore, where the working market for local musicals does not quite match the skill sets and mindsets ingrained in such performers from their Western-based conservatoires. As such, this thesis extends the study in this volume by exploring how local performers who are trained in Western theatre techniques seek to create their own work, within a still very limited market, in order to maximise their Western-based training. This also enables one to predict the possible directions of the Western musical theatre pedagogies currently taught in Thailand, which are starting to shift in a way that can stimulate and correspond with the local market as well.

## Research Contribution

This thesis contributes to the fields of theatre and cultural studies on three levels: Thai theatre studies, Southeast Asian theatre studies, and global musical theatre. In the field of Thai theatre and cultural studies, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the modern theatre in Thailand has been shaped by ongoing cross-cultural performative aesthetics and techniques which aim to modernise existing traditional forms to appeal to local Thai audiences. Such modernisation, however, has been strongly tied to the process of westernisation which began in the reign of King Rama V and which reflects the tensions between the Thai and foreign - largely Western European and American - aesthetics situated at the core of *lakhon phleng*. The varying degrees of cultural hybridisation manifested in each era of *lakhon phleng* also indicate the rise of the cosmopolitan sphere in urban Thailand, particularly in Bangkok, resulting in different styles of the art form. In this sense, the process of cultural hybridity underlying *lakhon phleng* not only provides insightful understanding of the art form's artistic components and the technical skills involved but also serves as a useful reflection of urban Thai societies undergoing the tides of globalisation and their subsequent attempts at localisation.

As mentioned in the literature review section, most existing literature on the subject of Thai theatre focuses on the traditional forms (e.g., *khon* and traditional Thai dance) or modernised forms of *lakhon* (e.g., *lakhon phan thang*, *lakhon duekdamban*, *lakhon rong* and *likay*) that are now formulated as part of traditional Thai performing arts. The existing literature that touches on contemporary theatre only explores specific drama troupes in particular periods and does not cover the last decade (except for Polachan's article discussed above). My thesis, therefore, aims to fill this knowledge gap on the development of large-scale and small-scale contemporary musical theatre and their possible direction based on the case studies. In addition, it also aims to demonstrate that, despite its label as brand-new and modern, the musical theatre art form has a long history of development in Thailand since the reign of King Rama V. In practice, it aims to help theatre practitioners better understand how the interplay of performative elements from different performance traditions shifted throughout the development of *lakhon phleng* and how this affects the reception of the local audience. The analyses of the hybridised performative elements shed light on the construction of *lakhon phleng* and the styles palatable for different types of Thai audiences.

The process of cultural hybridisation found in *lakhon phleng* corresponds with the active intra-Asian and international cultural transactions and transformations found in the performance history of Southeast Asia as observed in the several works of Southeast Asian-related literature discussed above. In particular, in the 1990s, the movement of decolonising theatre in Southeast Asia encouraged countries in the region to create performances for their local audiences by engaging with their cultural roots, regardless of whether such roots were invented or not (Kerdarunsuksri 129). In the case of Thailand, such a movement propelled many theatre practitioners of the time to turn to Thai traditional sources instead of using Western European and American sources. My thesis argues that the contemporary *lakhon phleng* aptly reflects this movement by attempting to situate their Thai cultural identities—strongly associated with national heritage and ancient traditions—through westernised forms of performative elements. Such attempts result in complex hybridised performances that were sometimes deployed as representations of national culture. At the same time, such ‘national’ performances attract local audiences via their international appearance. As such, this thesis shows that such transnational dynamics in contemporary Thai musical theatre are in alignment with those in other parts of Southeast Asia including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Furthermore, this thesis illuminates the impact of globalisation on the contemporary theatre in Southeast Asia, which underscores that the modern theatrical performances in this region, to a certain extent, tend to be shaped by global aesthetics influenced by the Anglo-American cultural industry.

The impact of these two levels underlines the dominance and thriving influence of Anglo-American musical theatre, which continues to shape, directly and indirectly, contemporary musical theatre in many parts of urban Southeast Asia. This can be seen in the aspects of performance scale, musical styles, performative modes, technical training, and appreciation of the art form. Indeed, new trends and popular musical productions from Anglo-American musical theatre affect the artistic visions of Thai theatre practitioners as well as the criteria for evaluating the art form of musical theatre. The dominance of Anglo-American musical theatre also shapes the globalised technical training amongst local musical theatre practitioners by instilling standard repertoires, technical skills, and working disciplines as practiced in the professional world there. Put simply, local practitioners who are professionally trained in musical theatre are direct or indirect products of a globalised form of musical theatre training. On the one hand, this identifies the art form of *lakhon phleng* as a product of cultural imperialism. On the other hand, together with attempts to rely on Thai



sources, the globalised training enables Thai practitioners to participate in a more active dialogue with these dominant geographical areas, situating their local performances in parallel with the global level. This can potentially lead to more collaboration with practitioners in Anglo-American regions as well as those in other regions which are shaped by the former. Ideally, this can strengthen aesthetic cosmopolitanism, cross-cultural exchange, and artistic conviviality in the field of musical theatre as a whole. As such, this thesis presents a counter-narrative of Western-inspired musical theatre art form as developed and practiced by Thai practitioners.

### **Statement of Research Aims**

The development from *lakhon rong* to *lakhon phleng* in this thesis is predominantly analysed from a practitioner's point of view and in relation to the different contexts at play, such as the role of the monarchy in patronising performing arts and distributing ideologies amongst Thai subjects, the transformation of aesthetics arising from the expansion of the cosmopolitan sphere in Thailand, and the cultural capital involved in appreciating and practising *lakhon phleng*. Looking through the lens of aesthetic cosmopolitanism and cultural hybridity, this thesis constitutes the first systematic study on contemporary *lakhon phleng*, focusing on musical works from 1990 until 2021. It also analyses the aesthetic shifts in the art form from its emergence in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) until the current reign of King Vajiralongkorn Rama X (2016 – present), tracing the evolution of the art form in response to the increasing global flows in urban Thailand.

In particular, this thesis aims to understand key factors influencing the emergence of *lakhon rong* and its continuous development as contemporary *lakhon phleng* in relation to the interplay of local and global levels. By analysing the different styles and technical performative elements of *lakhon rong* and *lakhon phleng* in each era, it attempts to deconstruct the hybridisation processes involved as well as the role of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism underlying key practitioners' artistic visions and the audience's reception of their works.

### **Thesis Structure**

The thesis is divided into eight chapters, which include three case studies. The first chapter—Hybridity, Aesthetic and Aspirational Cosmopolitanism—provides the theoretical framework for the research. The concept of cultural hybridity is essential for understanding *lakhon phleng* because, from its early form as *lakhon rong* until the present day (around 1860 to 2021), the art form has been created from the integration of Thai and Western performance aesthetics and has continued to be shaped by the interplay between the two to varying degrees. This is not to say that Thai musicals should not be regarded as a part of contemporary Thai performing arts because most of them do carry strong Thai ethno-national uniqueness. Hence, they are not just an assimilation of Western musical theatre, though the latter often functions as both inspiration and aspiration. As shall be demonstrated throughout the thesis, Thai musical theatre is a hybrid form, constantly moving between cultural borderlines. It would be naïve to perceive or practice the art form of musical theatre in Thailand without paying close attention to its highly hybridised nature in terms of performative techniques, performance aesthetics, and forms. As such, to fully understand the characteristics of Thai musical theatre in each period requires a close examination of the hybridisation process involved in its creation and development.

Since the art form derives from the ongoing interplay of local and global aesthetics inherent to the modernisation period of Thailand from the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868), the aesthetic and aspirational dimensions of cosmopolitanism bring to light how local practitioners and theatre enthusiasts participate in a dialogic relation of Self, Other and World. That is, local agents (i.e., the Self) encounter aesthetics from outside of their local borderline (i.e., the Other), which, in turn, reflexively transform their aesthetics. The relation of Self and Other is largely determined by universalistic values (i.e., the World), which are influenced by global flows. Therefore, the concept of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism provides a comprehensive scope for capturing the dynamics of global and local flows, which are strongly manifested in *lakhon rong* and *lakhon phleng*. Such interplays are present in the performative elements on stage and in the creative team's cultural competencies and aspirations, which in turn affect the reception of the Thai audience. To put it simply, aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism is an important concept in understanding how modern types of *lakhon*, particularly *lakhon rong* and *lakhon phleng*, were developed as hybridised art forms and why this might be the case.

Chapter Two—Becoming *Lakhon Phleng*—examines the rise and fall of *lakhon rong* during 1868-1935. *Lakhon rong* is the prototype of the contemporary *lakhon phleng* in the present. In Western Europe and North America, this period coincided with the popularity of operetta, musical comedy, revues, and towards the end, American musical films. This chapter seeks to analyse the manifestations of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism amongst Thai practitioners, which leads to the hybridisation of performative elements in their modernisation of *lakhon*. It also focuses on the chronological development of *lakhon phleng*, demonstrating how the art form has existed since the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) which goes against the (mis)conception that Western-influenced *lakhon phleng* is a relatively new form of performing arts in urban Thailand strongly associated with contemporary productions from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This chronological development will be investigated against the backdrop of socio-political events and the impact of increased global flows during each reign, which propelled Thai subjects to engage with those beyond their local borders and understand their place within world relations.

Chapter Three—The ‘Classic’ *Lakhon Phleng* —continues to trace the chronological development of *lakhon phleng*, beginning when the art form made a comeback into contemporary Thai theatre as *lakhon phleng* in the 1990s. This chapter extends Kerdarunsuksri’s thesis discussed above and serves as the first case study. It investigates the musical productions of Patravadi Mejudhon, which marked a significant beginning of musical theatre based on Thai classical literature in Thailand. Focusing on her productions titled *Inao Choraka* and *Phra Lo*, I analyse how performative elements from traditional Thai and foreign aesthetics encounter and entangle with each other more deeply than in *lakhon rong* without an imposed hierarchy. I also examine Mejudhon’s initiation of a Broadway-style musical concert titled *An Evening with Patravadi*, which marked the official beginning of a full-scale Broadway-style performance by local talent. Her musical productions were also amongst the first to turn classical Thai literature into a full-scale musical with original scores and choreography and featuring a variety of art forms from both Thai and foreign traditions. Such productions were also amongst the first to establish connections with international artists, leading to even more interactive dialogues between the local and beyond.

Chapters Four to Seven serve as the second case study. Takonkiet Virawan is another significant figure in contemporary Thai musical theatre from the mid-1990s until the present day. Revered as *chao poh haeng wongkarn lakhon weatee* (the father of stage drama

industry) in Thailand, Virawan's large-scale musical productions sparked national interest in the art form of musical theatre in Thailand and set the standard for later contemporary large-scale musicals in Thailand.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of his musicals has led to the increasing growth in local musical productions, musical theatre troupes, and programmes related to the art form. This case study seeks to further my argument that the development of *lakhon phleng* has been strongly influenced by aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism by investigating Virawan's creative and branding strategies for his musicals, focusing specifically on his longest-running musical, namely, *Four Reigns The Musical* (known in Thai as *Si Phaengin The Musical*).

This case study is divided into four chapters due to the complexity of creating and branding the musical as a part of the national pride of Thailand. Separating the material into steps is helpful in bringing to light the hybridised performative elements and globalised marketing strategies. In combination, these four chapters will demonstrate how every step in this musical production is infused with elements shaped by aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism enhanced by Virawan's marketing strategies. Such elements function as an essential core of *Four Reigns The Musical*, from its source material to the final performance product. I argue that the alignment of cosmopolitan elements found in the four steps discussed below is one of the main factors that made *Four Reigns* a commercial success amongst local audiences, especially when marketed as a contemporary Thai musical.

Chapter Four—Cosmopolitan Strategies in Takonkiet Virawan's Musical—examines the development of large-scale and commercial musicals staged by Takonkiet Virawan. This chapter investigates the aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism associated with his musical works and himself as a public figure. This will be investigated from two perspectives: that of the creative process and that of the audience. For the former, I will focus on Virawan's disposition and experience in the entertainment industry, which determines his artistic choices and goals. For the latter, I will focus on the audience of Virawan's musical productions, and their aspiration in seeing the shows, including the branding strategies—the figure of Virawan, the performance venue and transliterated name, the source material, and star power—that help define their aspirations. This investigation will also shed light on why

---

<sup>4</sup> As explained in the terminology section, the term *lakhon weatee* covers both *lakhon phut*, or spoken plays, and *lakhon phleng*, or musicals. In the case of Virawan, it is generally understood amongst Thai audiences that the term refers to musicals. This is because almost all Virawan's stage productions are in the form of musical theatre, making the recognition of his musical outshine his spoken plays.

he might position his musicals so differently from the musical productions that preceded them, presenting them as a new type of art form that had never been done before in Thailand. The materials examined in this chapter serve as the foundational context for subsequent chapters in this case study (Chapters Five to Seven), which will further analyse the creative process and hybridisation of performative elements involved in Virawan's productions of *Four Reigns The Musical*.

Chapter Five—Original *Four Reigns*—focuses on the musical's source text of the same name written by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj. This chapter aims to demonstrate the novel's significance and influence on Thai society, particularly in terms of distributing certain ideologies and Thai historical knowledge shaped by such ideologies. I will also analyse how the author's stance on aesthetic cosmopolitanism comes into play in his work via the novel's narrative, characters, and language. Combining these aspects, it ultimately seeks to show how the source text of *Four Reigns* forms a pre-cosmopolitan condition for its musical adaptation and is imbued with the cultural power to support dominant ideologies and the cosmopolitan imaginary amongst Thai subjects.

Chapter Six—Process of Adaptation—examines how the serial novel is adapted to fit the demands of musical theatre, focusing specifically on the productions of *Four Reigns The Musical* in 2011 and 2019. Through investigating the selected narrative and characters, the decisions in turning selected moments into songs and dance, the multifunctional role of Phloi, and the stereotypical portrayal of lead characters, I attempt to show the creative team's objective in staging the musical production and the more intense ideological transaction throughout the musical, empowering it as a political response to contemporary socio-political situations in Thailand. I will also analyse how the creative team developed the score and choreography for the musical using the pre-cosmopolitan condition previously set up by the source text and how they further developed such elements due to their stance of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism shaped by Anglo-American megamusicals.

Chapter Seven—Realisation—further investigates how the score and choreography in the musical, which are produced through aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism as examined in the previous chapter, are realised in the form of hybridised performative elements and how such elements are hybridised. Focusing on four selected moments (three of which are previously examined in Chapter Five), I will show how they are realised on stage with the

influence of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism shaped by Anglo-American megamusicals. I will also demonstrate how the performative elements in *Four Reigns*, particularly the vocal production, derive from the interplay of local (i.e., Thai music traditions) and global aesthetics (i.e., Western musical theatre and pop) and resonate simultaneously with both aesthetics.

Chapter Eight—Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in an Alternative Musical—serves as the last case study. It examines an artistic project titled *Musical Lab* organised by FahFun Production and its resulting self-devised musical named *Bangkokian* in 2021, in which the researcher was directly involved. As a counterpoint to *Four Reigns The Musical*, this case study seeks to better understand the role of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in creating this community specialising in small-scale musicals, the technical training involved, and the self-devised musical produced by the community. It also investigates some key individuals' cosmopolitan imaginaries and social factors that impact their entry points into and their navigation within the community of musical theatre in Thailand. By examining the entire creative process and the musical performance of the project, I will attempt to show that aesthetic cosmopolitanism and the consumption of foreign musical products, largely Anglo-American musicals, form a transaesthetic that influences the aspirational standards of Thai musical theatre. Furthermore, the knowledge regarding the Anglo-American musical theatre repertoires functions as cultural capital amongst this community of musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts.

Cumulatively, these chapters argue that the art form of *lakhon phleng* has been created and shaped by the interplay of global and local levels since its emergence in the reign of King Rama V, resulting in its highly hybridised characteristics. Such characteristics are continuously shaped by fluid cultural transactions between Thai aesthetics and go beyond dependence on the individual practitioner's interests and preferences, which are tied to the socio-political contexts and power of the cultural capital of the time. The selected foreign aesthetics often derive from Western European and, later, Anglo-American sources, denoting their global dominance and impact on Thai musical theatre. Particularly, within the last two decades, the influence of Anglo-American musical theatre has strengthened amongst local Thai musical theatre practitioners, whether in the forms of popular musical styles, globalised technical training, and the appreciation of the art form. Instead of attempting to assimilate Western musical theatre, Thai musical theatre employs such globalised elements as a springboard to find their idiosyncrasies that are palatable to local audiences and, at the same

time, have the capacity to participate in a creative dialogue with the international musical theatre community.

## Chapter 1: Hybridity, Aesthetic and Aspirational Cosmopolitanism

Contemporary *lakhon phleng* is an art form that developed from modern forms of *lakhon* (drama), specifically *lakhon rong* (sung drama). The modern forms of *lakhon* emerged during the reign of King Chulalongkorn Rama V (1868-1910), significantly due to the king's policy of modernising traditional *lakhon* to present Thailand as a modern country, yet rich in cultural heritage. These modern forms of *lakhon*, particularly *lakhon rong*, were created by incorporating Western performative elements with the existing elements and aesthetics of traditional *lakhon*. As Thai practitioners became more exposed to Western performing arts, they further experimented with mixing elements from Thai and Western aesthetics, leading to the continuous development of *lakhon rong* right up until *lakhon phleng* in the present time. As shall be demonstrated throughout this thesis, this type of *lakhon*, from its early forms until today, is a hybrid that often dwells in between Thai and Western performance aesthetics. The art form gradually developed towards the Western musical theatre tradition in each era, not because Thai practitioners and audiences perceived Thai aesthetics as inferior, but rather because they actively participated in global cultural flows; thus, they came to consider Anglo-American musical theatre as aspirational and the global standard for practising and appreciating musical theatre. Two concepts are essential in understanding and analysing the development from *lakhon rong* to *lakhon phleng*, particularly its dynamic in the contemporary era. These concepts are hybridity and cosmopolitanism, specifically its aesthetic and aspirational dimensions. This chapter seeks to examine the two concepts, which will provide the theoretical framework for the subsequent chapters in this thesis.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one explores the concept of cultural hybridity, specifically the usage of the term and its significance for the current and subsequent chapters in this thesis. My focus is on grounding cultural hybridity as a helpful approach to understanding and analysing the continuous evolution of *lakhon phleng* in Thailand. Therefore, my examination of cultural hybridity specifically aims to provide an overview of the concept, the process of entanglement prior to articulating a cultural surplus, and how I define cultural entities as discussed in this thesis.

Section two outlines some of the normative principles grounding the concept of cosmopolitanism, particularly the notions of universalism and one's membership of two communities – the native community (i.e., local) and the community of humankind (i.e.,



global) – which leads to an extension of inclusivity. Although my focus is on the concept of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, these principles form the core of cosmopolitanism and, subsequently, function as the basis upon which the aesthetic and aspirational dimensions are constructed. This demonstrates the capacity of the concept to account for self-reflexive transformation and the powerful agencies (e.g., world dependency, cultural imperialism) that often accompany cosmopolitan thoughts.

By acknowledging that there are agencies behind a cosmopolitan project or the reflexive transformation of a subject, it is important to note that, for this thesis, I am not interested in proposing an alternative cosmopolitan framework that will overcome or weaken these agencies.<sup>5</sup> Rather, my focus lies in the exploration of the reflexive transformation of local agents through contact with foreign cultures either virtually (e.g., through film, television programmes, books) or mediated (e.g., through direct contact with foreigners or living abroad), and how such transformation shapes the dynamics of *lakhon phleng*. Its manifestations in each form of *lakhon phleng* underscore the encounter of local and global forces, leading to the re-evaluation and transformation of local artistic practices, and the constitution of cosmopolitan signs and the imaginary amongst local agents. In this sense, such transformations of modern *lakhon* do not occur solely from external agents, but more from the local agents' participation in the interaction between those beyond their horizons under the influence of global relations.

Section three examines the aesthetic and aspirational dimensions of cosmopolitanism, which are produced through the interplay of local and global agents examined above. Drawing from the works of Sylvie Octobre and Vincenzo Cicchelli, Nikos Papastergiadis, and Motti Regev, I demonstrate that aesthetic cosmopolitanism illuminates people's everyday perceptions of their place in the world and contributes to the formation of the cosmopolitan imaginary, which serves as a critical starting point for the cosmopolitan sphere. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism shapes the universal standard of the field in question, which brings to light the aspirational dimension of cosmopolitanism. Drawing from the work of Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, I examine aspirational consumers and the aspirational class who arguably replaced what Thorstein Veblen labels as the leisure class. Both dimensions are strongly prevalent

---

<sup>5</sup> For such a framework, see Walter D. Mignolo's *Border Thinking and Decolonial Cosmopolitanism*.

within contemporary *lakhon phleng*, which continues to grow towards Anglo-American musical theatre.

### **Cultural Hybridity**

In the eighteenth century, debates about hybridity were held in the field of biology and were primarily concerned with the interracial breeding of White Europeans and their colonised races, pointing out the danger of racial contamination (Kraidy 5). Since then, the term has been increasingly employed in the context of globalisation to cover numerous definitions. To give a few examples, Nestor García Canclini, an Argentinean anthropologist, sees hybridity as “a constant process of negotiation between different cultural groups, a form of intercultural dialogue” (Richard 2014); Homi Bhabha, an Indian English scholar, describes hybridity as the “Third Space” and emphasises its ability to subvert dominant discourse (Bhabha 2); and John Hutnyk, an Australian sociologist, summarises it as “cultural mixture where the diasporised meets the host in the scene in migration” (Hutnyk 79). Unsurprisingly, due to hybridity’s versatile definitions, Guillermo Gómez-Pena, a Mexican/Chicano artist and activist, remarks how the concept of hybridity “can be appropriated by anyone to mean practically anything,” highlighting its slipperiness and ambiguity (12-13). Therefore, it is important to ground the scope of hybridity as employed in this thesis. This is also to ensure that the term does not get utilised merely as a descriptive term of a cultural mixture, leading to the notion that everything is inherently hybrid. Although, as Edward Said rightly points out “all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid” (xii), many scholars such as Marwan Kraidy, Phillip Stockhammer and John Hutnyk, warn that such a notion can limit the usefulness of hybridity as a general descriptive term and undermine its capacity as a critical approach for analysing the process of transcultural relations (Stockhammer 43-48, Kraidy 3, Hutnyk 80).

In parallel with Kraidy, Stockhammer, Hutnyk, and Bhabha, I understand cultural hybridity as an ongoing and dynamic process rather than a fixed identity. As Bhabha explains in *The Location of Culture*, the process of cultural hybridisation can be compared to a stairwell, which functions as a liminal space (5). He further explains that the movement in-between the stairwell “prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities”, and it is this liminal space, or “Third Space”, where cultural hybridity occurs from the “negotiation of incommensurable differences” (ibid 5, 218). The notion of negotiation instead of negation,

as Bhabha puts it, indicates “a temporality that makes it possible to conceive of the articulation of antagonistic and contradictory elements” (ibid 25). Such an articulation creates tension and ambivalence between primordial cultural entities due to the displacement and overlap of the two (ibid 2). In this sense, the process of cultural hybridisation refers to the encounter and negotiation of different cultural entities, which results in an unstable entity that is neither one nor the other and not simply “an addition of its origins” (Stockhammer 47). Hence, a hybrid of two entities is produced.

The liminal space is a contact zone where two or more cultural identities actively engage and negotiate. While Bhabha sees cultural hybridisation as a sign of subaltern resistance towards colonial power, Stockhammer argues that Bhabha’s politically charged notion of hybridisation limits the application of the term beyond the context of postcolonial studies (Stockhammer 45). He demonstrates how, in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha’s concept of hybridity gradually loses its adjective of ‘cultural’ and is replaced by ‘colonial’ (ibid). In his discussion of the transdisciplinary nature of the cultural hybridisation process, Stockhammer advocates the term “entanglement” instead of cultural hybridity (ibid 47). While I prefer the term cultural hybridity due to its clearer connotation of a new and unstable entity, I find the term entanglement beneficial in illustrating the dynamic negotiation of different cultural entities in the process because it underscores the agents and the “unstructuredness of human creativity” during the process while enabling the application of the term to cover interdisciplinary contexts (ibid). This unstructuredness is compatible with Bhabha’s notion of the interstitial passage between two cultural entities that leads to “cultural hybridity without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (3) and “an ambivalence in the act of interpretation” due to the unconscious relationship between two cultural entities (36).

Summarily, within this liminal space, “the construction and perception of otherness and difference” is the trigger in cultural exchanges, leading to the process of appropriation, which transforms and ascribes a new meaning to the result object within the local system. This state of entanglement or cultural hybridisation is called the “relational entanglement”, which denotes how the context of the object is changed locally (i.e., changed from its original context), but not the materiality of the object itself (Stockhammer 49). This leads to the second state of “material entanglement,” where the appropriated object (from the first step) is materially transformed, resulting in a completely new object which fuses “the familiar with the previously foreign” (ibid 50). This new object is not “the result of local continuities, but

changes triggered by encounters with otherness” (ibid 50). Therefore, it is an incommensurable “combination of all of them” (ibid) that “creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (Bhabha 218). Both Bhabha and Stockhammer mention the unfixed and unending condition of the cultural hybridisation process because the new object can be constantly read anew, reappropriated, and created (ibid 51, Bhabha 37). This underlines the unstable condition of a hybridised object and its dwelling in constant flux. Therefore, to examine a hybridised object is to look closely at its ongoing processes and its continuous shift within the social context and materiality.

When speaking of cultural entities within the concept of hybridity, there is a risk of falling into essentialism and the belief that a pure culture exists or that a fixed and stable culture is attainable. Many academics, including Paul Gilroy, Stockhammer and Hutnyk, recognise the problem of the non-mixed anterior culture in the use of hybridity. Gilroy acknowledges that the use of hybridity implies the “existence of uncontaminated purities” (Gilroy 250), while Stockhammer remarks that “hybridity can exist only in the opposition of purity” and that “every aim to transcend borders starts with the acknowledgement of those borders” (Stockhammer 2). Echoing this, Hutnyk questions the degree to which any discussion of hybridity relies on “the positing of an anterior pure that precedes the mixture” because such a discussion is bound to refer to “non-hybridity or some kind of normative insurance” (81). Notwithstanding this, in parallel with Said’s statement above about the involvement of all cultures, cultural hybridisation has occurred across the globe for centuries, making the claim of a pure and single culture rather weak.<sup>6</sup> Bhabha also supports this by explaining that the hybrid site or the Third Space “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity” (37). Given the long transcultural relations between each civilisation, cultural purity is, therefore, untenable.

Consequently, what matters to the usage of hybridity is no longer about whether anterior cultures before mixing are pure or not because all cultures possess a certain degree of cultural hybridisation. What matters here is that, as Stockhammer suggests, we need to define what we designate as ‘pure’ for the research in question in order to achieve a stimulative analysis

---

<sup>6</sup> See Jerry Bentley’s *Old World Encounters* (1993) for cultural hybridisation in world history.

of a process (2). In other words, what is classified as a cultural entity prior to discussing the process of hybridisation? For the purposes of this thesis, a cultural entity includes cultural elements that are widely recognised by the locals of that culture as their particularistic or, in Motti Regev's term, ethno-national uniqueness (Regev 125). Therefore, it does not matter if such elements occur from hybridising different and non-local cultures preceding their position in the local culture. It is important to stress that culture is referred to as an entity as a "mental template" only for analytical purposes (Stockhammer 49) while recognising that all cultures are inherently synthetic (Kraidy 14). While I acknowledge that no culture is pure and stable, disregarding the uniqueness of a culture hinders us from examining a hybridisation process. This is because if we take the notion that all cultures are hybridised to the extreme, we can no longer distinguish one cultural identity from the other, and the examination of such a process arrives at a dead-end, preventing us from going beyond the descriptive use of hybridity and from understanding the process of how each element is transformed by encountering one another. The redundancy is best illustrated by Gilroy who states that "the plurality of cultures, or the truism that everything is hybrid, surely leads to the torturous reasoning of: 'if so, so what?' (23)". As such, labelling the anterior cultures before mixing cultural entities become helpful, as it enables us to analyse the negotiation process, its agent(s), and the ambivalent surplus that occurs from such a process. Some of the elements or, based on Stockhammer's concept of entanglement above, entangled artefacts (Stockhammer 50) that occur from such processes eventually become regarded as quintessential traits of a particular culture. As Rustom Bharucha, an Indian cultural critic, points out, elements resulting from cross-cultural exchange often become ordinary once the importations are indigenised (32). Such elements are often represented as traditional forms of the national framework and are employed, usually by the nation-state, to promote cultural heritage. This also reveals the socio-political aspect and the power of the agents involved in the hybridised process, both of which are present throughout the development of *lakhon*. In this case, I consider such quintessential traits part of the entity of the culture in question.

Such hybridised elements that are later deemed quintessential are prevalent in the case of 'Thai' culture. Thailand has been significantly influenced by Indic and Chinese cultures in the ancient and pre-modern periods as well as Europe in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century and America in the latter half (Peleggi 11). Indeed, the Thais, particularly the ruling class, welcomed influences from the outside world and adapted them to suit their taste and convenience. This is evidenced by the remark of Prince Damrong,

regarded as the father of Thai history, that “The Thai knew how to pick and choose. When they saw some good feature in the culture of other people, if it was not in conflict with their own interest, they did not hesitate to borrow it and adapt it to their own requirements” (quoted in Peleggi 10). This statement underlines the localisation of cultures beyond the local territory, leading to hybridised forms of such cultures which eventually became a part of the local tradition.

Thai cuisine is a good example of this case. For instance, the traditional Thai egg yolk-based desserts known as *thong yib*, *thong yod*, and *foi thong* are, in fact, adapted from the Portuguese desserts *trouxas das caldas*, *ovos moles de aveiro*, and *Fios de ovos* respectively.<sup>7</sup> Despite their fusion of Portuguese recipes with Thai ingredients (Luang Sitsayamkan 57), these traditional desserts have been a part of Thai tradition known as *khanom mongkol*, the nine auspicious desserts often served at Thai auspicious ceremonies until the present day (Siriwat 2004). This example demonstrates that certain cultural forms which are deemed quintessential and have been a part of traditions are, in fact, the result of cultural hybridisation. As Bhabha points out, such hybridities challenge us to think about a historical culture that might disguise itself in the form of an authoritative past or national culture which might not be entirely faithful (7). Nevertheless, their history started when they were established as Thai national culture. As such, I consider them a part of the Thai cultural entity as well. Apart from Thai cuisine, fusions of different cultural entities to produce a new style have been strongly prevalent in Thai performing arts since the emergence of Thai traditional dance and especially during the modernisation period of *lakhon* (examined in Chapter Two).

On the other hand, the danger of hybridity lies in its celebration of the cultural mixture. Rey Chow, a Hong Kong cultural critic, sees the process of cultural hybridisation as a negative sign when she argues that the concepts of hybridity, diversity and pluralism serve to obliterate questions of politics and histories of inequality. This is achieved by projecting ideas from hidden colonialist perspectives and extending an invitation to join global capitalist power without holding on to the injustice and suffering of the past from colonialism (1998). As Hutnyk notes, this can make one forget about colonialist elements, including its violence,

---

<sup>7</sup> These traditional desserts were introduced by a Thai woman of Japanese-Portuguese ancestry named Maria Guyomar de Pinha, who was born and lived in the Ayutthaya Kingdom during the seventeenth century. Having married Constantine Phaulkon, an influential adviser of King Narai of the Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350-1767), she significantly contributed to the Thai cuisine by introducing new types of desserts and dishes based on her family’s recipes.

white supremacy, exploitation, and oppression. If one accepts the invitation to join the hybrid territory, one is saved (96). In parallel with these, Kraidy also warns of hybridity's potential in helping "elite groups integrate memory and the cultural artefacts reminiscent of the past into a hegemonic national framework" (Kraidy 65). Although Bhabha suggests that the inscription and articulation of cultural hybridity may open a way to conceptualising international cultures (7), Hutnyk contends that hybridity, in this case, would merely "offer up no more than festivals of difference in an equalisation of cultures" (95).

Taking into consideration Bhabha's warning that "hybridity is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures" as the process is formed of "conflicts between and within the constitutive cultures of a colonised society," Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo see the integration process as positive contamination in theatre. They further state that "hybridity has been used in various forms and contexts [...]to de-establish the power of the dominant culture" (5). In this sense, hybridity in theatre is a positive process as it functions as an important part of cross-cultural performances, the concern of which is to integrate multiple cultures and achieve a new mixture while maintaining equality of power in each performance. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the case of *lakhon phleng*, equal collaboration in artistic exchange might be difficult to obtain due to the geographical dominance of certain types of performance or simply due to the creators' perspectives driven by the global standard (analysed in section three). However, the hybridity which occurs does not always have to involve cultural exploitation. As shall be seen in the three case studies, Thai practitioners mostly turn to Western performative elements, especially Anglo-American musical theatre for inspiration and aspirations. However, by using hybridised Thai and Western performative elements, they produce original musical works that are distinctive in their own rights, neither fully Thai nor Western. Such works stimulate the thriving of Thai theatre and, in the case of Patravadi Mejudhon's productions, function as a bridge between traditional and contemporary contexts (see Chapter Three). Therefore, although Thai musicals, particularly recent productions, significantly employ performative elements from Anglo-American musical theatre, their characteristics are uniquely hybridised and feature amalgams of aesthetics that resonate with both Thai and Western performance traditions, yet such aesthetics often contradict one another simultaneously. Local practitioners are able to experiment with hybridising different cultural entities due to their exposure to cultural products beyond their borderlines, thus advancing their horizons of cultural knowledge and causing them to re-evaluate their existing local cultural repertoires. This act of extending

inclusivity to one's understanding of herself in relation to the world at large is clearly grasped through the concept of cosmopolitanism.

### **Cosmopolitanism**

I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world.

- Diogenes the Cynic

Diogenes the Cynic (400-323 BC) is generally regarded as the originator of cosmopolitanism (Brown and Held 4). His statement above concisely summarises the core idea of cosmopolitanism – the idea that a person belongs to and has duties for all people, regardless of location in society or the world. Such an idea at this time, as Eric Brown explains, demonstrated an act of rebellion against “social convention and cohesion in a time of communal primacy” (quoted in Commissiong 26) and was not viewed favourably. Indeed, owing to this claim of being “a man without a country”, as well as other disagreements with contemporary philosophical schools, Diogenes and his followers were eventually exiled from his native Sinope.

It would take later Stoic philosophers re-engaging with the idea, emphasising the dignity of humankind and its capacity for reason as part of a universal community, for cosmopolitanism to be viewed more positively. Despite their encouragement of duty towards the wider human community, the Stoics did not ask a person to abandon their own community. Rather, they believed that “all humans inhabit two communities”—one in which one was born and another greater one shared by all human beings in the world (Brown and Held 5). The classical characteristics of cosmopolitanism as established by the Stoics remain in later works of cosmopolitanism, from Immanuel Kant to Martha Nussbaum.

Although this thesis is not centred around Kantian cosmopolitanism<sup>8</sup>, his work provides the point of departure for the contemporary field of cosmopolitanism studies (Gilbert and Lo 5), so is briefly addressed here. Garret Wallace Brown's definition efficiently summarises Kantian cosmopolitanism in a broad sense:

---

<sup>8</sup> See Garret Wallace Brown's *Grounding Cosmopolitanism* (2009) and *Kant And Cosmopolitan Legacies in Routledge International Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, second edition (2019).



In its most basic form Kant's cosmopolitanism concerns itself with delineating the moral, legal, and political conditions required to establish a condition of cosmopolitan right (a condition of justice—mutually consistent external freedom) between all global inhabitants...

What Kant is suggesting is that external freedom (independence from being constrained solely by another's choice) is only fully possible if it is also grounded and mutually recognised under a universal system of law, where one's freedom "can coexist with the freedom of every other".

(36-37)

Kant's moral principles, particularly a priori free-will (i.e., the capacity to be a self-legislating moral being), require cosmopolitan rights to be established in a cosmopolitan law, through which an individual's human capacities can be developed (Brown 31). This is where Kant's moral principles translate to his political and legal framework, leading to his suggestion of a pacific federation (ibid 40) in order to establish "a universal rightful condition that should exist between all humans and all states regardless of national origin or state citizenship" (ibid 46). This framework, establishing universalism through community, is a focal point for criticism and discussion, particularly when applied to non-European civilisations, as we shall now examine.

In making the positive case for cosmopolitanism, we can note that universality in cosmopolitanism decrees that "individuals are free to make moral decisions" (ibid 34) and are equally capable of being refined and developed. Consequently, they all should have equal dignity and be treated as such, no matter where they are in society. Thomas Pogge, a contemporary cosmopolitan theorist, considers this equality a vital trait of cosmopolitanism, as it suggests the concept's capacity to take into account all human subjects regardless of their races, beliefs, and educational and economic backgrounds (48). Combined with the belief that humans are inhabitants of two communities (i.e., local and global), cosmopolitanism urges awareness of and empathy towards all humankind regardless of any perceived differences—to know that "she is as different to me as I am different to her" (Commissiong 57). By taking the perspective of the Other and keeping universal justice in mind, Piet Strydom argues that the cosmopolitan imagination is formed, leading to "immanent possibilities for self-transformation" in the social world (quoted in Chernilo 149). Cosmopolitanism, then, has the potential to mitigate various issues in the world relating to

human differences, including racial and religious conflicts. It also encourages openness to these differences without necessarily abandoning a local identity, leading to global solidarity.

The criticism of Kantian cosmopolitanism, however, sees the above as a form of unobtainable utopianism, viewing it instead as a disguised mechanism for the promulgation of Western civilisation. In this view, the universalism of cosmopolitanism is closely interlinked with Western imperialism, due to cosmopolitanism's origins and development in the Western world rather than as a global philosophy (ibid 64). The danger of this universalism lies in the fact that it can be manipulated by those who have the upper hand in justifying their actions (Western civilisation, in this case), leading to the imposition of their authority and virtues on others in a less advantageous position. When Kant talked about a project of global conviviality propelled by cosmopolitanism, as Walter Mignolo notes, he referred to a world order arranged by European standards, and not others (166). Consequently, a cosmopolitan project, particularly one determined by Kantian legacies, would be Eurocentric and imperialist and thus an exercise of cultural subjugation for non-European civilisations.

This argument is disputed by theorists such as Gerard Delanty and Neal Harris (2019), Bo Stråh (2019), Brenda Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin (2019), and Daniel Chernilo (2019). The latter points out that the core ideal of cosmopolitanism universalism was established long before “the rise of the West itself” (Chernilo 64). Although some elements were later integrated with and labelled as Western philosophy, Chernilo questions whether such a “fallacy of origins” should still affect our view of cosmopolitanism today (ibid). In his article, he also draws evidence from the work of Eric Voegelin, who shows that a strong undercurrent of universalism is found present and developed in religions worldwide as early as c. 800 (ibid). Given this, he argues, the root of cosmopolitanism is consistent with philosophies from across the world and is thus capable of integrating with non-European civilisations. This evidence indicates that the universalism of cosmopolitanism has existed in different civilisations and, thus, it is not a sole product of Western civilisation. Therefore, as a theorem shared by various communities across the world, it can be used globally.

Furthermore, regarding the claim that Kantian cosmopolitanism is inherently imperialist, Brown argues that such notions mainly arise from Kant's works prior to 1790, in which he strongly endorsed the superiority of white races (41). Brown points out that Kant's works after 1790 tend to contradict his previous beliefs, as he condemned European imperialist

schemes in *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Perpetual Peace* (ibid 43). Due to the contradiction and underdeveloped ideas in his work, it is difficult to pinpoint whether or not Kant set out his cosmopolitan project with imperialist intentions. Despite this ambiguity, his principles can be shown to highlight dignity and equality for people across the world (ibid 46), enabling cosmopolitanism to be a useful global framework and applicable to the context of *lakhon phleng*.

Theoretically then, the concept of cosmopolitanism possesses a strong potential to propel all people to become aware of, compassionate for and curious about others beyond their community. However, empirically, the concept faces the challenge of asymmetrical relationships, raising doubts over the concept's attainability. Thus, it is essential that we do not naively ignore the powerful agencies behind the claim of cosmopolitan universality. As Walter Dignolo reminds us:

Simultaneously, any cosmopolitan thoughts today have to take into account two basic components of the world order: dependency (developed and underdeveloped countries, emerging and fully fledged economies, the memories of the First/Second/Third World division and, last but not least, the clash/dialogues of civilisations) and power differentials.

(159)

The policy of adopting knowledge and social norms from Western countries initiated by King Mongkut Rama IV (1851-1868) of Thailand is a good demonstration of an asymmetrical power relationship between Thailand and the Western world. Surrounded by Western colonies during the nineteenth century, King Mongkut pursued a policy of opening the kingdom to trading with and adopting knowledge and values from Western imperialist countries in order to present Thailand as equal to them (Loos 84). This policy was continued by his son and successor, King Chulalongkorn Rama V (1868-1910), with the emerging middle strata of society following in later reigns (Harrison and Jackson 342-343). This policy elevated the status of cultural capital from the Western world to become a signifier of the elite class in Thailand and being *siwilai*, the term directly borrowed from 'civilised'. This term emerged in Thailand in the late nineteenth century resulting from the encountering of the West and Thailand's subsequent westernisation, underlining the impact of Western imperialism (Peleggi 10).

Even today, westernisation is often elevated in status and associated with being *sakol*, which is translated as being universal/international. Some examples can be seen in a music genre known as *phleng sakol* or international songs, which are almost always dominated by Western, particularly English language, songs (see Chapter Seven). The dress code of *sakol* similarly refers to formal Western attire; tuxedos and gowns, rather than any other kind of attire, Thai or otherwise. Lastly, it is considered a preferable choice for well-to-do Thai families to send their children to study in Western educational institutions, in particular those in the United Kingdom and the United States. Based on my own experience as a graduate from Western performing art schools in Singapore and England, I am aware of how my international degrees can perhaps over-impress people as a mark of Western sophistication. These examples illustrate how, in Thailand, the claim of universality is highly linked to being westernised, which serves as a positive social signifier. This by no means indicates the inferiority of Thai culture or artistic practices but rather the unequal power that exists between Thailand, a developing country, and Western European countries that possess powerful economic and capitalist forces as well as memories of imperialism. The imperialist and commercial forces that contribute to asymmetrical power relationships are extensively explored by Gilbert and Lo in their book *Performance and Cosmopolitics*. They investigate such forces in cosmopolitan performing sites such as the Adelaide Festival and other cross-cultural performances in Australia. Their work not only shows the impact of these forces on indigenous and intercultural performances in Australia but also serves as a useful analytical framework for investigating performances that rely on cross-cultural engagement like modern theatrical performances in Southeast Asia. Notwithstanding the currently growing economic power of other geographical areas like China, musical theatre, particularly in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, is still significantly influenced by Anglo-American musical theatre, which is evident in how such countries used the latter as their aspiration and as a standard in appreciating and practising the art form.

Here, the causal links between the terms westernisation, Anglo-American, and international are worth some explanation. Westernisation and, in fact, all things Western, Anglo-American or not, are mostly referred to by the Thais as *farang*, meaning a Caucasian person and any products—culturally and ideologically—associated with the race. The term *farang* by association also carries the connotation of being *sakol* and *siwilai*. In this sense, being *farang*

equates being universal and international. This suggests that, at least in the Thai case discussed here, to assert one's ethno-cultural uniqueness in the global area and claim membership in a cosmopolitan world, one should integrate Western elements into one's identity or at least in the way one presents herself to the world. In supporting this, Catherine Diamond also demonstrates in her book *Communities of Imagination: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatre* that theatres which integrated elements from Western drama signified modernity in Southeast Asia (2). As mentioned, this is not necessarily out of feeling of inferiority about one's culture, but rather due to the world order.

In making similar cases, Shzr Ee Tan coins the term "aspirational cosmopolitanism"<sup>9</sup> to explain the ecology of the Singaporean music scene, especially in classical music, which seeks to establish Singaporean identity in the global platform by presenting themselves on par with Western art music (547-555). Likewise, Shelby Chan demonstrates the thriving of translated theatre (i.e., theatre productions based on translated Western canonical pieces) in Hong Kong, which often guarantees box-office success due to its status as "good stuff" (72, 92). In her argument, the popularity of translated theatre, which is dominated by Anglophone works, is due to it being intrinsic to Hongkongers' identity construct (ibid 44, 50, 98-100, 217-218). Along the same canon, as shall be clearly demonstrated throughout the development of *lakhon rong* and *lakhon phleng*, Thai musical theatre practitioners have been attempting to establish links with Western dramatic arts, particularly the Anglo-American musical theatre industry, whether through forms, globalised technical training or active collaborations. All these underline how Western performing arts, particularly Anglo-American ones, sit in a higher cultural milieu amongst local contexts and often shape their repertoires with cultural nobility.

Therefore, an imbalanced and unequal world order casts a shadow over Kant's notion of an autonomous subject and the utopian status of his cosmopolitan project. Nevertheless, I believe that in spite of the challenge above, namely, Western imperialisation in the guise of cosmopolitanism, the concept still has validity. It remains, however, important to thoroughly examine and evaluate cosmopolitanism with an awareness of such forces. This is particularly important when analysing the cross-cultural entanglement in such a hybridised art form as *lakhon phleng* because it brings to light social factors that propel local practitioners to

---

<sup>9</sup> My discussion of the concept will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

experiment with integrating Thai and Western performative elements and the way they situate such elements in their works.

With these fundamental principles of cosmopolitanism and echoing the works of Ian Woodward and Zlato Skrbiš, I define cosmopolitanism here as a performative aspect of self-reflexive transformation with an attitude of openness towards encountering differences within spaces of cultural flows (Woodward and Skrbiš).<sup>10</sup> It is performative in the sense that cosmopolitanism is not viewed here as a fixed condition that either exists or does not exist in individuals. Rather, it is an emergent condition that resides in varying degrees in particular spatio-temporal contexts, which is given form through a mode of thinking, feeling, and acting (ibid 201).

### **Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism**

Aesthetic cosmopolitanism, to use Sylvie Octobre and Vincenzo Cicchelli's definition, refers to "cultural consumption patterns and their associated imaginaries, as well as opportunities for contact (either virtual or mediated) with aesthetic and cultural alterity" (x). It is essential to note that, in parallel with the concept of normative cosmopolitanism discussed above, this is a dynamic transformational process, which is accompanied by an attitude of openness towards foreign cultural products and global imaginaries. Let us first briefly look at the concepts of taste and aesthetic construction within the context of Western philosophy.

The meaning of taste and an understanding of how good taste is elevated are integral to understanding aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism. In the Western philosophical context, taste was initially identified by Aristotle as one of the five bodily senses, which were associated with "hedonism and instantaneous gratification", indicating its lower status (Straczowski 2, Vercelloni vii). Its status gradually increased and, by the Age of Enlightenment, or the "Century of Taste" as David Howes calls it, it was no longer considered sinful (Vercelloni vii). Rather than viewing the lower senses as something that should be suppressed, the German philosopher Alexander von Baumgarten found the sensory process important in guiding one on a path "towards a more refined spirit" (Straczowski 7). Baumgarten then coined the term "aesthetics", which derived from the Greek term "aisthēsis"

---

<sup>10</sup> See Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996).

(sense perception), referring to “the capacity to discern the unity in multiplicity of sensible qualities, without recourse to reason” (Vercelloni viii, 67). As Straczowski explains, aesthetics in this sense covers “our faculties of perception and cognition, as well as our emotive sensation of pleasure and displeasure” (3).

The term aesthetics in this sense is in parallel with its counterpart in Thai philosophy, which is embedded in Theravada Buddhism. Here, the term “aesthetics” or “*suntareeya*,” also covers both the meanings of bodily senses and the perception of beauty (Buarapha 8-10). In Buddhism, aesthetics is divided into two categories, which are *kwam ngam thang tham*, divine beauty, and *kwam ngam thang lohk*, mundane beauty (ibid 11). While the first refers to the value of dharma (i.e., cosmic law and order), which is deemed to be objective, the latter refers to human desires and passions, which are considered subjective (ibid 13). It is in this sense that the term aesthetics is applicable to the analysis of Thai performing arts.

Although factors involving the cultivation of aesthetics and the goals that one should strive for in aesthetic education vary according to each school<sup>11</sup>, one facet of aesthetics remains prevalent in the use of aesthetic cosmopolitanism and throughout the development of *lakhon phleng*: aesthetics as “the means by which art is made intelligible” (Papastergiadis 296). In relation to intelligibility, aesthetics is not confined to the training of the gaze, but, based on Rancière’s theory, aesthetics is where “artistic practices, sensible affects and thoughts are constituted through mutual inter-dependence” (ibid). In this sense, it is also “an identification of art” (ibid). Such identification and associated sensory experiences from consuming the arts are often influenced by the notion of “good taste”.

As demonstrated above, taste belongs to the bodily senses, which is part of aesthetic discourse. As such, taste is naturally embedded in our needs as part of how we experience the world. Drawing from the work of Benito Jerónimo Feijóo, Vercelloni demonstrates that this aspect of taste is an innate sense, known as “temperament” (43). However, taste also features another aspect that is constructed and therefore subject to contextual time and space, social milieu included (ibid 1). This aspect of taste is called “apprehension,” indicating its elements of acquisition and adaptability (ibid 43).

---

<sup>11</sup> See Joanna Straczowski’s *From Paideia to Transaesthetics: The Concept of Aestheticisation and Its Significance in the Digital Age* (2018).

The taste of apprehension is often tied to the psychological image of certain habits and materials and, consequently, can be considered as “a source of cultural capital” (ibid x), signifying one’s membership of a particular social stratum or, at least, the class that one aspires to be associated with. Since this type of taste has to be acquired, good taste is established as an experience to be shared and communicated within a particular community. Fay Hammill observes that good taste is often constructed on “the assumption that most people have bad taste” (10). To demonstrate this quality, as Pierre Bourdieu suggests, is to “experience or assert one’s position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept” (quoted in Hammill 17). Therefore, good taste, particularly prior to and during the emergence of the leisure class, was limited to highbrow culture as well as conspicuous consumption among the elites. Consequently, non-elites aspired to adopt these norms to present themselves as people of quality and claim their cultural nobility. Therefore, as Vercelloni puts it, taste became “a matter of aesthetics that provided spiritual guidelines for appropriate behaviours shared by the elite and by those who aspired to belong to such elevated spheres” (47). As shall be demonstrated throughout the modernisation of *lakhon* and *lakhon phleng*, the notion of good taste is set by those in the higher social milieu and increases the attraction of their performances.

Since aesthetic cosmopolitanism is concerned with the taste of apprehension and aspiration, it can come across as being superficial. As demonstrated above, taste is constructed and therefore inherently fickle. It can be influenced by various factors, including material or habit rarity, the environment, and changing attitudes. Thus, it is not surprising that the concept of aesthetic cosmopolitanism is often disregarded in cosmopolitanism studies. It is often considered a by-product of cosmopolitanism, with emphasis instead placed on the ethical and political aspects of cosmopolitanism. This is because when the ethical and political aspects are in place to strengthen the cosmopolitan sphere, a subject tends to develop an openness towards being exposed to foreign cultures and is thus exposed to them as an organic result (Sassatelli 271). The capriciousness of taste and the fact that it can be determined by those who possess the higher power, therefore, accentuate its status as merely a by-product of other forms of cosmopolitanism and its incapability to represent the broader sphere of cosmopolitanism.



As such, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is perceived by several scholars such as John Tomlinson, Jon Binne and Beverley Skeggs, to be weakly linked to the core purposes of cosmopolitanism. Rather, it is perceived to be “the ideology of globalised market capitalism,” which promotes the consumption of appropriated or exotic versions of foreign cultural products without requiring an understanding of the particular culture used (Octobre and Cicchelli 250). To support this, Tomlinson argues that even when a subject possesses an attitude of openness and favours aesthetic cultural cosmopolitanism, there is no guarantee that “it will be followed by any necessary sense of responsibility for the global totality” (quoted in Sassatelli 273). This indicates that aesthetic cosmopolitanism is perceived to be rather shallow and thus does not always create a substantial impact on the subject. Even Ulf Hannerz, one of the pioneers in the field of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, measures the worth of this dimension insofar as the nature of its contribution to ethical cosmopolitanism (quoted in Sassatelli 271) rather than its own capability within the cosmopolitan sphere. Hannerz’s view implies that aesthetic cosmopolitanism is still considered secondary to ethical cosmopolitanism.

As cosmopolitanism is often associated with people who have greater mobility, which tends to refer to the economic mobility of the upper classes, its aesthetic side is perceived to be a phenomenon even more limited to the elites. Even though this point carries a lot of weight, particularly with the involvement of capitalism, it is worth bearing in mind that the idea of cosmopolitanism emerged from an outcast group who turned themselves against the elites at the time. Consequently, in theory, aesthetic cosmopolitanism should apply to all human beings regardless of their economic mobility. Furthermore, as evidenced in the works of Motti Regev (2007), Martha Meskimmon (2011), and Octobre and Cicchelli (2018) which will be investigated in relation to the cosmopolitan taste, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is a social aspect present across social milieux in different parts of the world.

Given the reasons above, it is not surprising that the aesthetic dimension of cosmopolitanism can be perceived as an inefficient tool to measure the cosmopolitan sphere. To a certain extent, as it concerns aesthetics, the concept cannot escape its superficial tendency accompanying the notion of aesthetics and taste of apprehension. Nevertheless, this should not undermine the concept because it provides the framework for understanding cosmopolitanism as a real phenomenon, particularly in contemporary artistic practices. As Papastergiadis argues, the cosmopolitan sphere consistently involves an element of critical imagination and, thus, “can be clearly grasped through the concept of aesthetic

cosmopolitanism” (287). This is because, as a self-reflexive process, imagination, or “a world picture making process” in Papastergiadis’ words, functions as a key foundation for mobility in a person’s global imaginary, leading to an expansion of curiosity and concern beyond the local community to a greater awareness of being a world citizen. Imagination, in this case, does not refer to a representation of illusive dreams, but rather “the faculty for both representing and creating realities through the form of images” (298). Drawing from the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, Papastergiadis demonstrates that the act of creativity inherent to the imagination is linked with “the capacity to grasp universality” and that “all social institutions in our daily life can exist insofar as they have been imagined” (ibid 300). Imagination, then, is a crucial starting point for becoming aware of the relations of Self, Other, and the World, which are embedded in the core of cosmopolitan thoughts.

In this sense, the perpetual imagination helps ensure that “the aesthetic is always cosmopolitan”, which produces a cosmopolitan worldview (ibid 288, 299). When the cosmopolitan sphere is consistently shaped and produced by its aesthetics, the result manifests through curiosity, interest and concern in people’s everyday perception towards those beyond their community, which, then, forms an interconnection and inter-dialogue between the local and the global. Particularly in but not limited to artistic practices, one manifesting sign of a subject’s curiosity and interest towards those beyond her local sphere can be seen through the consumption of foreign cultural products, which forms cosmopolitan taste. Such consumption leads to a self-reflexive transformation in one’s perception. This is an important factor that, in this instance, drives Thai practitioners to produce hybridised musical works and influences the way musical aficionados in Thailand appreciate musical theatre art form.

### **Cosmopolitan Taste**

To demonstrate a link between the consumption of foreign cultural products and aesthetic cosmopolitanism, I draw on the empirical research conducted by Octobre and Cicchelli (2018) on aesthetic cultural cosmopolitanism in the taste of French youth and how this leads to cultural alterity in their attitude and behaviour. Despite the scope of the research being limited to French subjects, their aesthetic and consumption patterns serve as a useful framework for understanding the value of cosmopolitan taste and its impact on subjects in other geographical areas that participate in global flows. Their proposed cosmopolitan

configurations (discussed below) provide trends in a subject's taste and reflexive transformation, which are particularly helpful in investigating the manifestation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in urban cities such as Bangkok. Moreover, as consumption in this case includes cultural participation (e.g., watching performances), these trends can be used to analyse the cosmopolitan sphere in the context of *lakhon phleng*.

Octobre and Cicchelli categorise the examined youth into five configurations based on their stance of openness and investment in foreign cultures as follows:

- Inadvertent cosmopolitans (34% of youth);
- Specific cosmopolitans (32% of youth);
- Cosmopolitan fans (17% of youth);
- National fans (11% of youth);
- Impossible cosmopolitans (6% of youth) (69-100).

The first group, inadvertent cosmopolitans, are those who consume mainstream cultural products such as Hollywood blockbusters and popular Anglophone television series that are available across their community. Although they enjoy foreign products, their intention of getting to know those cultures in detail is generally quite low. Members of this group who possess higher levels of affluence can also be associated with “frequent flyers” who are interested in foreign cultures but refuse to leave their comfort zone. They, therefore, opt for the option of experiencing commercialised ‘authentic’ cultural products catered for foreigners. Their consumption serves as an example of what Gilbert and Lo call “thin cosmopolitanism,” which refers to a cross-cultural exchange that is often based on exoticism and commoditisation (9).

The second group, specific cosmopolitans, manifest their cosmopolitan worldview mostly through their reading activities. Although they still favour their native language, their reading orientation leans towards foreign publications, aspiring to gain cultural knowledge and references from around the world. Nevertheless, when it comes to other cultural activities such as film or music consumption, their behavioural patterns are similar to those of inadvertent cosmopolitans.

The third configuration, cosmopolitan fans, are those who are open to and willingly immerse themselves in foreign cultures both mediated (e.g., travelling, contact with foreigners) and virtually (e.g., reading, watching films and television series). Compared to other configurations, this group invests their time in consuming foreign cultural products the most and, in return, develops the most comprehensive cultural repertoires as well as “a vision of the world that reflects its shared humanity” (Octobre and Cicchelli 84). It is also interesting to note that this group as a whole tends to have the highest level of education of all the configurations. They tend to live in an urban environment, thus having more opportunities to be exposed to foreign cultures.

As the name suggests, the fourth group of national fans possess a robust national orientation for almost all their cultural taste and activities. They also express dislike and unfamiliarity towards foreign cultural products apart from some mainstream ones such as songs in the English language. This group tends to consist of blue-collar workers with a low level of education and economic mobility.

Lastly, the impossible cosmopolitans, or what Octobre and Cicchelli refer to as a cultural retreat group, have a strong orientation towards their regional community without necessarily holding much regard for their national one. In general, their cultural consumption of any kind is quite low, which shows in their lack of cultural references both in terms of national and global sources.

Based on this set of configurations, the top three groups of inadvertent cosmopolitans specific cosmopolitans and cosmopolitan fans are those that possess more concrete signs of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, Octobre and Cicchelli’s findings for each group of interviewees are not entirely consistent, as there are a vast number of factors in play when they examine individuals. For instance, some of those among the cosmopolitan fans group do come from a privileged background and use their higher level of affluence and mobility to develop an aesthetic cultural cosmopolitan attitude. Others in the group may not have the same privilege and instead develop their aesthetic cosmopolitan attitude through lesser economic means, underlining the fact that aesthetic cosmopolitanism is not a phenomenon limited to privileged individuals. Also, some in this group admit that they do not consider themselves cosmopolitans, as they do not prioritise their concern for fellow humans over concern for their nations.

This statement thus contributes to Tomlinson's doubts about how much aesthetic cosmopolitanism can actually aid the ethical or political stances of cosmopolitanism. Although the first configuration, the inadvertent cosmopolitans, can be seen as exemplifying Tomlinson's thoughts, I argue that the ambivalence found among cosmopolitan fans suggests otherwise. In varying degrees, this ambivalence represents a sign of dynamic transformation in the subject's everyday acts of the cultural consumption of and participation in foreign cultural activities. This transformation occurs from the tension between the local sphere, to which the subject belongs by her origin, and the global sphere, in which she plays the role of a human being in an endless cosmos. It is the act of constant curiosity and play in their lifestyle that demonstrates the elements of aesthetic cultural cosmopolitanism, which continuously shape their imagination to be cosmopolitan. These acts may appear to be so banal and subtle that the subjects themselves disregard them as a sign of cosmopolitanism, but this should not be overstated. Their role as an imaginary trigger should not be underestimated, as they precisely serve as a crucial starting point of cosmopolitan imaginary—defined as “an aesthetic of openness that engenders a global sense of interconnectedness” (Papastergiadis 298). This leads to the subjects' increased awareness of their role in the sphere beyond their native community. In this sense, aesthetic cosmopolitanism “coexists with, and even precedes, normative cosmopolitanism,” enabling the subject to imagine beyond the normative framework (ibid 288). As shall be demonstrated from Chapter Two onwards, transformational attitudes that occurred as a result of consuming foreign cultural products led Thai practitioners to modernise and experiment with their existing traditional performances and, in turn, contribute to the cosmopolitan sphere in Thai theatre, which is influenced by Anglo-American theatre.

Octobre and Chicchelli's findings also bring to light trends that influence the subjects' choices of consumption, which is useful in understanding the way Thai practitioners engage with Western performing arts and the asymmetrical relationship between Anglo-American and Thai theatre underpinning the analyses throughout the thesis. Firstly, the environment and social background of an individual establishes a pre-condition of cosmopolitanism and, consequently, has an impact on their perception of openness to other cultures. For example, those who grow up in an urban environment tend to be exposed to globalised experiences regardless of products, people, news and stories of foreign cultures in their everyday life. As shall be demonstrated, these social factors play an important role amongst Thai practitioners who have been involved in the development of *lakhon phleng* from its early forms of *lakhon*

*rong* to the contemporary form at the present. Most of these practitioners tend to possess higher cultural capital and come from at least the middle classes, factors that afford them more opportunities to consume or, at least, be exposed to foreign cultural products. Their exposure to foreign cultural products reflexively transforms their aesthetics, leading to the hybridised artistic styles employed in each style of *lakhon*.

The second trend based on Octobre and Cicchelli's findings is the majority of the youth, apart from the national fans and impossible cosmopolitans, perceive the consumption of diversified cultural products as positive and even as good taste to be acquired (13). This consumption leads to more interest in other cultures to varying degrees. For some, it leads to the acquisition of more material from and knowledge of particular cultures and the desire to eventually visit that country. For others, it leads to more invested consumption of culture, but only as it is easily accessible to them. Thirdly, the desire to be cosmopolitan does not negate feelings of nationalism and patriotism amongst the youth. They recognise the importance of belonging to their community and the broader community beyond their national boundaries, indicating the interrelation between the local and global. Lastly, the available cultural products from around the world provide them with the "transnational universal standards specific to their generation" (ibid 33).

Such transnational universal standards are extensively explored in the work of Motti Regev (2007). Focusing on the fields of contemporary films and pop-rock music, Regev demonstrates that practitioners in such fields often adopt influences from the territory beyond their ethno-cultural uniqueness in order to create ethno-national products for their local audiences. This is not because they view their local products as inferior, but it serves their interests and signifies their cultural competencies to keep up with the global repertoires of the field in question (Regev 130). This means that there is a global standard set up by the dominant geographical area that is widely recognised across the globe and deemed worthy to be followed amongst practitioners and enthusiasts of that particular field. Such a 'global' standard, as Regev shows, is a form of cultural imperialism, particularly by the Anglo-American cultural industry, contributing to aesthetic cosmopolitanism at the local level (ibid 130). Subsequently, the less dominant geographical areas tend to adopt the aesthetics of the dominant areas in order to produce work that is on par with the dominant standard or, at least, features the same trends as the global field (ibid 128-132).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that all cultural products in non-dominant regions will be homogenised by the dominant regions and lose their ethno-cultural uniqueness. Rather, by using the global standard in the field, local artists glocalise their works—a complex interaction of the global and local characterised by cultural borrowing (Steger 77)—leading to hybridised works that resonate with the local and global aesthetics (ibid 127). In this sense, the consumption of global repertoires, which results in glocalised work, is a manifestation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism produced from within. In turn, the audiences who consume local cultural products “with elements of otherness weaved into them” thinking that they are their ethno-national products “become inadvertently open to experiences from other ethno-national cultures” (ibid 126). This leads to the strengthening of the cosmopolitan sphere in the area and, I would add, across the globe, which contributes to perpetual imaginary work to consistently shape aesthetics as cosmopolitan and form the cosmopolitan worldview (Papastergiadis 288, 299).

In this way, it is no wonder that many academics view the culture of the twenty-first century to already be cosmopolitan in itself (Ochoa and Cicchelli 296, Regev 135, Delanty 27). Supporting this, Regev suggests that aesthetic cosmopolitanism in late modernity should be located “at the structural collective level, as a cultural condition that is inextricable from current ethno-national uniqueness” (126). Although this is true to a certain extent, it is also important to note that cultural cosmopolitanism is a tentative and uneven aspect in each part of the globe. Furthermore, even in the areas that are substantially permeated by cosmopolitan culture, some ethno-national cultures might dominate the field more than others due to several reasons, such as their economic power or their geographic location. In Thailand’s case, large-scale performances, especially musical theatre, almost always take place in Bangkok. This is because Bangkok functions as the hub of cultural exchange and commodity and financial markets. Although Japanese, Korean, and Chinese cultures have increased their cultural power in Bangkok lately due to their entertainment products, the Western art forms still dominate the contemporary performing arts, particularly musical theatre. As discussed in the introduction of the thesis, many Southeast Asian theatre performances in the last few decades already contain an interweaving of their ethno-traditional and Western performative elements. Consequently, such Western-infused performances in the guise of modern ethno-national cultural products help circulate and sustain the dominance of Western performance aesthetics in the field of performing arts in different areas of the world. Again, it is important to emphasise here that such performances are not simply an assimilation of Western

performances but are hybridised performances produced through glocalisation of global aesthetics and they are often presented as ethno-national cultural products to local audiences.

Such perpetual imaginary work to form the cosmopolitan worldview reflects Lee and LiPuma's concept of cultures of circulation. They see circulation as not only a form of transmission from one space to another but also as a dynamic, performative cultural phenomenon that serves as a causal agent in shaping global imaginaries (Lee and LiPuma 192, Aronczyk and Craig 93). The results manifest in varying forms depending on the interpretive communities in question, speeding up local subjects' self-reflexivity, interaction with foreign cultural and economic capital as well as the inclusivity and exclusivity of the field. One common form of manifestation discussed by Lee and LiPuma and in volume forty of the journal *Poetics* under the theme "cultures of circulation" (2012) is how circulating forms shape the interpretive communities' rational evaluation of a subject (Lee and LiPuma 194, 210, Aronczyk and Craig 94 – 97). This is in tandem with the transnational universal standards found in the works of Octobre and Cicchelli and Regev discussed above where subjects' evaluative thoughts derive from their consumption of foreign cultural products that dominate the genre in question. While Regev sees the act of "producing cosmopolitanism from within" by local agents as positive because it leads to glocalised products that are on par with the global level (196), Lee and LiPuma emphasise how such agents also simultaneously strengthen the dominant cultural and economic power of certain geographical regions. In their view, this denotes "a process of the encompassment of others that is the successor of colonialism and other historical forms of domination—the simultaneous advent and intervention of something entirely new" (Lee and LiPuma 210). As this thesis shall demonstrate, the ever-growing dialogues between Thai musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts with the Anglo-American musical theatre industry help stimulate the active development of Thai musicals, but they also help maintain and strengthen Anglo-American musical theatre's status as providing the global and, therefore, aspirational standards of the art form.

### **Aspirational Cosmopolitanism**

The domination of global aesthetics, which forms the transaesthetics of different fields across the globe, reveals an aspirational dimension of cosmopolitanism. As the name suggests, this



dimension refers to a subject's desire to grasp the shared set of norms and practices that lie beyond their local community, which are deemed to be globally valid. In other words, the subject aspires to acquire what is globally deemed as 'good taste'. Drawing on the work of the sociologist Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, this section examines aspirational consumers and their choices of consumption. This type of consumer and their associated dispositions are important in analysing Thai practitioners who aspire to adopt the global standard in their artistic practices and Thai audiences who aspire to consume 'world-class' cultural products.

A brief look at the leisure class as defined by Thorstein Veblen contextualises the 'good taste' underpinning the aspirational class. In the seventeenth century, Veblen observed that the standards of good taste tended to be constructed by the leisure class, those who had the wealth to be able to not work or take the bulk of the profit from others' labour. This leisure class defined the standard of good taste through conspicuous consumption, in which an item or experience was chosen not primarily for its utility or value, but for its status. Some examples of conspicuous consumption provided by Veblen include the possession of hand-crafted silver spoons, reading classics at Oxford or the display of a medicine cabinet, symbolising the wealth to access a doctor. For an example from Thai society, in the reign of King Rama V, European dining chairs were popular items purchased by the elite. However, as the preferred custom for dining was to sit on the floor, in practice these were rarely used and were for display more than actually being sat on (Smith 193). As such, these items of conspicuous consumption often had marginal purposes of use, or, where useful, were overpriced relative to their utility. Instead, they broadly functioned as symbolic status items and as signifiers of good taste.

By the twenty-first century, due to the emergence of a middle class, the advancement of manufacturing and the increased circulation of commodities and the imaginary by globalisation, conspicuous consumption is no longer confined only to the leisure class (Currid-Halkett 8). Instead, conspicuous consumption is accessible to a much wider group of people as others over a wider economic range have the leisure and means required for status-led conspicuous consumption. This has led to a new class of consumers, the aspirational class, who prioritise the acquisition of cultural knowledge for conspicuous consumption. This class consists of people who share the same cultural capital and, thus, a collective consciousness regardless of where they sit in the economic spectrum. This does not mean, however, that its members are all egalitarian or disregard materiality entirely as there are

certainly some members of the aspirational class that are wealthier than others and consume items to display this accordingly. Instead, the point to note is that affluence is not always needed as an entry point into the aspirational class.

Aspirational consumers aspire to be “their version of better humans in all aspects of their lives, with their economic position taking a back seat” (ibid 20). They distinguish themselves from other groups by deploying the knowledge they actively acquire to make well-informed decisions in various aspects of their lives. They strive to ensure that they have made the right decisions based on their collective research and beliefs. They seek lifestyles and consumption choices deemed to be legitimate and reasonable. Their social status is expressed through their informed choices and behaviours. Such choices can include eating organic food, using reusable bags instead of plastic ones and supporting cruelty-free cosmetic products. Although some of these activities require money, others rely on cultural capital, including participation in activities such as the performing arts.

Aesthetic cosmopolitanism for the aspirational class manifests as a desire to acquire direct or virtual opportunities for globally shared cultural consumption. By acquiring these opportunities, those within the aspirational class are kept informed and up-to-date on the shared set of norms and practices of the class. The participant can then use the knowledge gained from participation in these activities to make decisions informed by this shared cultural consumption. Aspirational cosmopolitans become bonded through this openness towards shared cultural consumption by a shared global aesthetic sense, developing a shared, interconnected imaginary. As shall be demonstrated in the three case studies, key Thai practitioners are driven by their aspiration to establish a creative dialogue with the global standard driven by Anglo-American musical theatre and their glocalised works, in turn, attract aspirational audiences.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have defined my understanding of cultural entities central to the notion of cultural hybridity. Within the process of cultural hybridisation, two or more cultural entities entangle with one another without a structured pattern, leading to a cultural surplus that is in constant flux between such entities, yet it does not settle into the primordial forms of the entities. The notion of cultural hybridity is significant to understanding the development of

*lakhon phleng* from its beginnings to its contemporary form. This is because the art form is essentially a product shaped by an ongoing cross-cultural engagement, mostly between Thai and Western performative traditions. Although several recent commercial Thai musical productions have sought to promote Thai stories and national heritage (examined in Chapters Three to Seven), the fusion of performative techniques and aesthetics deeply embedded in such musicals should not be disregarded or deemed as authentic Thai performance. This is not to say that *lakhon phleng* should not be regarded as a part of contemporary Thai performing arts because most of them do carry Thai ethno-national uniqueness. Hence, they are not just assimilation of Western musical theatre, though the latter often functions as an inspiration and aspiration. As shall be demonstrated throughout the thesis, Thai musical theatre is a hybrid, constantly moving between cultural borderlines. It would be naïve to perceive or practice the art form of musical theatre in Thailand without paying close attention to its highly hybridised nature, both in terms of performative techniques, performance aesthetics, and forms. As such, to fully understand the characteristics of Thai musical theatre in each period requires a close examination of the hybridisation process involved in its creation and development.

This is where the concept of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism comes in, as it brings to light how local practitioners and theatre enthusiasts participate in a dialogic relation of Self, Other and World. That is, local agents (i.e., Self) encounter aesthetics from outside of their local borderlines (i.e., the Other) which, in turn, reflexively transform their horizons of imagination. As demonstrated, imagination is a crucial starting point for the constitution of cosmopolitan imaginary, which manifests in forms of one's inclusivity of others beyond her local borderline, whether that is expressed in forms of curiosity, interest, or care. The relation of Self and Other is largely determined by universalistic values (i.e., World), which are influenced by global flows. Such universalistic values often provide the dominant or the 'global' aesthetics of the field in question. As shown, the 'global' refers to the geographical area's speciality and dominance in the particular field rather than that their products possess the sole and validated cultural power. Such a global standard, linked to the notion of good taste underscores an aspirational aspect, driving one to grasp what is globally deemed as good taste. The concept of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, therefore, provides a comprehensive scope in capturing the dynamic of global and local flows, which strongly manifests in the development of *lakhon phleng*. Such interplays are not only present in the performative elements on stage, but also in the creative team's cultural competencies and

aspirations, which in turn affect the reception of Thai audiences. To put it simply, aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism is an important concept in understanding how *lakhon phleng* was developed as a hybridised art form and why this might be the case.

Nevertheless, what remains important to the examination of hybridised art forms and the cosmopolitan sphere is awareness of the social agents and the asymmetrical relationships between Thailand and the foreign countries in question. As shall be demonstrated throughout, most especially in Chapter Three, the dominance of Anglo-American musical theatre amongst Thai practitioners shapes them as mimics of Anglo-American practitioners. Their hybridised musicals are ambivalences, which, in turn, imbue them with the power to challenge and place themselves alongside Anglo-American musical theatre, thus resisting cultural homogenisation. Throughout the development of the art form, I will show how the contemporary *lakhon phleng* is both positioned in and influenced by the transnational flow of the musical theatre art form, carrying an identity both Thai and international.

## Chapter Two – Becoming *Lakhon Phleng*: The Emergence of *Lakhon Rong*, 1853-1960

This chapter outlines the chronological development of *lakhon phleng* in Thailand from the Fifth Reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) when *lakhon rong*, the prototype of the contemporary *lakhon phleng*, emerged until the Seventh Reign of King Prajadhipok Rama VII (1925-1935). It highlights the continuity of the art form that goes against the (mis)conception that *lakhon phleng* is a relatively new form of performing arts in urban Thailand strongly associated with contemporary productions from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The chronological development is investigated against the backdrop of socio-political events and the impact of increased global flows across each reign. Such transformations in urban Thailand contextualise how Thai subjects were increasingly placed in contact with those beyond their local borderlines, allowing for a greater understanding of their place in world relations. Bound to this chronological narrative, this chapter analyses the manifestations of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism amongst Thai theatre practitioners, situating the development of *lakhon phleng* as part of the transnational flow of musical theatre. I argue that these practices functioned as the core construction of *lakhon rong*, which then formed the basis of hybridised performative elements found in contemporary *lakhon phleng*.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of traditional Thai dance and drama and its significance in the reigns of King Rama I-IV (1782 – 1868), highlighting the fundamental characteristics of Thai performing arts, which serve as the Thai cultural entity in the analyses of hybridisation processes throughout the development of *lakhon phleng*. The second section investigates the modernisation of *lakhon* in the reigns of King Rama V-VI (1868-1925), focusing on the emergence of *lakhon rong* due to the expansion of cultural horizons strengthening cosmopolitan imaginary amongst local practitioners and audiences. The final section examines the pinnacle and subsequent fall of *lakhon rong* in the reign of King Rama VII (1925-1935), focusing on the hybridisation of performative elements in notable *lakhon rong* models; those in the style of Prince Narathip and Phran Bun.

### Traditional Thai Dance and Drama

The forms of traditional, sometimes called classical, dance or *nattasin* and drama or *lakhon* as we see today can be traced back to the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries during the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) (Rutnin 4). Thai classical dance is a core element of classical *lakhon* because the term *lakhon* initially referred to dance-drama, which employed dancing and singing as the main component in the storytelling (Kerdarunsuksri 9). Rooted in a tradition of Buddhism, Brahmanism and Hinduism, the core purpose of Thai performing arts lay in worshipping the gods and the spirits of nature, particularly in agriculture (Rutnin xiii). Similar to other neighbouring countries like Cambodia and Indonesia, Thailand has been strongly influenced by South Asian cultures and beliefs, which a French orientalist George Coedés explains as the process of ‘hinduisation’ or ‘indianisation,’ (Peleggi 11). Thai classical dance is an amalgamation of the basic movement of folk dances and the elaborated gestures of India’s Bharata Natayasastra (Rutnin 3, Kerdarusuksri 21). However, Thai classical dance contains its own idiosyncrasies, making it appear noticeably different from its two original sources (Rutnin 3).

Thai classical dance, then, dwells between two cultural entities, which are Indian and Thai folk dances, though it does not settle into primordial polarities. As explained in Chapter One and thus summarised here, the space where this cultural surplus dwells can be called the Third Space, which functions as a liminal space or an interstitial passage (Bhabha 3, 5, 218). Within the Third Space, the two cultural entities come into contact with one another and actively negotiate without “an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (ibid 3), which ascribes a new meaning to the result object as well as transforming the object materially (Stockhammer 49-50). As Bhabha explains, this object is an unstable entity that articulates an ambivalence between the two cultural entities due to its overlap of the two (ibid 2, 36). This object or this cultural surplus is then a hybrid of the two.

In this case, Thai traditional dance is produced through a negotiation of performative elements from Thai folk dance, which relies on movements that derive from local traditions, improvisation and simplicity, and Bharata Natayasastra, which contains fixed repertoires of physical gestures, music, dramatic composition and aesthetic goals.<sup>12</sup> The end result,

---

<sup>12</sup> See G.B. Mohan Thampi, *Rasa as Aesthetic Experience*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1965): 75.

subsequently, resonates with both cultural entities, evidenced in its refined movement and set repertoires which are executed with simplified and distinctive physical and hand gestures. Thus, the characteristics of Thai classical dance are neither those of Thai folk dance nor Bharata Natayasastra, but rather, they move between the two without settling on either. Consequently, it can be said that Thai classical dance and dance-drama are hybridised products that became indigenised for so long and so consistently that they became an ethno-national art form.

The characteristics of classical *lakhon*, particularly the distinctive features of *lakhon nok* and *lakhon nai*, are essential to understanding the hybridisation process in modern forms of *lakhon* in the later periods (examined in section two). When *lakhon* was incorporated as a part of court performances in the reign of King Baromakot (1733-1758), it was significantly refined and reformed, leading to new classifications of *lakhon* as *lakhon nai* (court drama) and *lakhon nok* (outside-of-court drama or *lakhon* of the common people). The royal court's *lakhon nai* functioned as the official performance style and differed from the style outside the court – *lakhon nok* – in terms of refinement of dance styles, music accompaniment, costumes, and stories. According to Prince Damrong, the term *lakhon nai* derived from *lakhon nang nai* (directly translated as *lakhon* of ladies inside the palace) or *lakhon khang nai* (directly translated as *lakhon* of the inside) (Kongthanwon 176, 183). Early evidence of *lakhon nai* in the reign of King Baromakot indicates that it featured an all-female cast and was performed by ladies who served in the palace (ibid). As rulers in the following eras of Thonburi (1767-1782) and early Rattanakosin sought to revive the flourishing of court performances to show the peaceful and prestigious status of their kingdoms, this led to the wide belief that the all-female cast was a core distinctive feature of *lakhon nai*. However, as Kongthanwon and Wirunruk demonstrate throughout their research, since the early Rattakosin period, particularly in the First (1782-1809), Third (1824-1851), and Fifth (1868-1960) to Sixth Reigns (1910-1925, *lakhon nai* was not solely performed by *nang nai* or the ladies in the palace, but also featured an all-male cast who were initially trained as *khon* dancers (i.e. Thai masked dance) (ibid 182-183, Wirunrak 226, 292, 360). Particularly in the reigns of King Rama V and VI, both female and male *lakhon nai* were widely practiced (Wirunrak 226, 292). Therefore, the main distinctions between *lakhon nai* and *lakhon nok* are in the performance style, costumes, and written works. *Lakhon nai* strictly followed set movements and gestures, and only performed four pieces: *Ramakian* (derived from India's *Ramayana*), *Inao*, *Unnarut* and, added in the Sixth Reign (1881-

1925), *Sakultala* (Rutnin 13). The costumes employed in *lakhon nai* were much more exquisite, suitable for the royal characters in the stories (ibid 14). The dancers in *lakhon nai* performed with the accompaniment of singers and a chorus instead of singing their parts (Kerdarunsuksri 22). Although both types of *lakhon* used the *piphat* orchestration, the music of *lakhon nai* was slower to suit the elaborative and slow-paced movements of the dancers and often contained more musical instruments (Rutnin 14). *Lakhon nok*, on the other hand, used more flexible movements and music styles, and tended to use a broader range of comedic stories, including *Sangthong*, *Kaew Nah Mah* and *Grai Thong*. They were not to be interchanged or taken out of their performing areas (i.e., the royal court dance performance could not be performed outside of the palace and vice versa) (ibid, Kerdarunsuksri 22-23).

Although originating outside the court, the splendour of *lakhon nai* as set by the court impacted the styles of *lakhon nok*, resulting in the latter's attempt to elevate the costumes, dance gestures, and complexity of dramatic texts. Regardless of these attempts, *lakhon nok* troupes were not allowed to perform the dramatic texts of *lakhon nai* nor imitate gold ornaments and royal costumes (Rutnin 14). This limited *lakhon nai* as the sole property of the king and, with the exquisiteness of the performance and the aristocratic stories, *lakhon nai* reinforced the prestige and sacredness of the king and indicated the abundance of the kingdom (i.e., the prominence of performing arts often signified the stability and wealth of the kingdom).

The golden age of *lakhon* and *khon*, Thai masked dance, which was considered a court performance, was in the reign of King Lerdlanapalai Rama II (1809-1824), during which the development of performance aesthetics and dramatic texts reached its pinnacle (Kerdarunsuksri 26, Rutnin 68). The king himself significantly contributed to the flourishing of such performances due to his personal interest and versatile skills in performing arts and literature. The performative elements and dramatic texts employed in his royal troupes later standardised the repertoires and aesthetics of classical *lakhon* until the present day (ibid). In parallel with the flourishing of *lakhon nai*, the king also encouraged the popularity of *lakhon nok*. This was when the bridge between *lakhon nai* and *lakhon nok* was strengthened because the king adopted dramatic stories from *lakhon nok* to perform within the court (Wingworn 99). He would adapt it to suit the aesthetics of *lakhon nai* such as by sanitising vulgar jokes, refining the music and dance, and using an all-female cast. This led to *lakhon nok baeb luang* (the royal style outside-of-court drama) (ibid 92). Examples of



dramatic texts from *lakhon nok baeb luang* in this reign included *Khawee*, *Maneepichai*, and *Chaiyachet*.

What is noteworthy is the significant role of the Thai monarchy. From the early Rattanakosin period to the present day, the royal palace has functioned as the centre of civilisation, though its role has gradually become more symbolic during later reigns. The monarchy often serves the role of a trendsetter, determining the social norms amongst their subjects. Such norms are deemed as good taste and, therefore, aspirational to others. They are initially adopted by members of the royal family and nobles and gradually spread out to the common people who have the capacity to acquire such norms. As explored in Chapter One, this aspect of taste is called taste of apprehension, which is “a source of cultural capital” to be acquired to flag one’s membership in a particular social milieu (Vercelloni x). In the Thai case though, following social norms as set by the monarchy is not only tied to the subjects’ aspiration to claim cultural nobility but also to the belief in divine kingship, which asserts that the king is a divine being deemed rightful to be obeyed and followed. This is why Thais’ desire to follow the norms set by the king is not only a product of the aspiration to be fashionable but also a consequence of the fact that it is appropriate to do so. In this case, with the approval and patronship of King Rama II, *lakhon nok* and *lakhon nai* flourished and became highly popular amongst people in the court and beyond. His investment in *lakhon nok* also elevated the status of the art form, signifying it as a valid and respectable art form appreciated by the court. Hence, this led to the increase in dramatic repertoires for both types of *lakhon* and a lesser gap between practitioners of both types.

In contrast to the reign of King Rama II, King Nangklao Rama III (1824-1851) suspended all kinds of dramatic activities within the court due to the country’s instability and his perception of *lakhon* as a worldly pleasure (Kerdarunsuksri 27, Rutnin 71). As *lakhon nai* was suspended, *lakhon nok* became increasingly popular, particularly *lakhon nok baeb luang* (Wingworn 103). This was likely because this type of *lakhon* integrated the aesthetics of both *lakhon nai* and *lakhon nok*, enabling the audience (of common background) to appreciate the stories and, at the same time, experience more refined performative elements of the royal court style. Furthermore, now that *lakhon nai* ceased to be the sole property of the king, many nobles established their own troupes in the style of *lakhon nai*. This meant that their popularity gradually spread out to wider society, leading to the creation of other performances in the same style throughout this reign (ibid).

Having established the main characteristics of classical *lakhon*, which formed the foundation of modernised forms of *lakhon* in later periods, let us now proceed to the emergence of *lakhon rong*, starting with the Fourth Reign, which can be considered the pre-modernisation period of *lakhon*.

### **The Modernisation of *Lakhon***

The reign of King Mongkut Rama IV (1851-1868) was faced with significant threats of Western imperialism as more neighbouring countries became colonised by the West. Having spent twenty-seven years in monkhood and associated himself with many Westerners in Thailand, the king was well-accustomed both to the delights of the West's culture and the dangers of its imperialism. Having ascended to the throne, he opened Thailand up to other countries and sought to maintain good international relations with foreign nations, particularly European ones, as part of a policy that his successors would actively follow until the Seventh Reign. Due to the dual priorities of retaining independence and modernising the country, Thai performing arts in this reign were not restored to the glory of the Second Reign. Nevertheless, Western influences advocated by the king also impacted the realm of performing arts, leading to more freedom in performances, greater interest in dramatic literature, and increasingly modernised forms of *lakhon* in the following reign.

In fact, King Mongkut was the first to break the court rule of having *lakhon nai* as a strictly royal property and had *lakhon nai* dancers (all female) perform for Western envoys (Peleggi 48) as he welcomed them to Siam with great vigour. Another reason for this was the refrain of female dancers and practitioners outside of court at the beginning of this reign. As demonstrated previously, the *lakhon* outside of court flourished in the previous reign due to King Rama III's prohibition of *lakhon nai*. As King Mongkut revived the *lakhon nai*, theatre troupes gradually stopped their performances out of fear of competing with the king and performing dramatic texts of *lakhon nai* (Kerdarunsuksri 32).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> King Mongkut declared that the dramatic texts of *Ramakien*, *Unnarut*, and *Inao* should only be performed by the royal troupe since they were written by members of the royal family and had been traditionally performed within the court (Kerdarunsuksri 33).

The king decided to modernise the country by introducing new technologies and Western knowledge, starting from inside the palace. During this time, the palace still functioned as the hub of civilisation. With collaboration from Dr Bradley and Dr Smith, they managed to bring printing technology to Thailand and published a variety of newspapers, periodicals and dramatic literature in Thai. This resulted in a higher literacy rate and greater artistic appreciation among his subjects (Rutnin 86). Based on his personal letters and diaries, it was clear that King Mongkut was genuinely interested in and impressed with Western civilisation. His skills in various languages, including English, French and Latin, allowed him to study them and analyse the Westerners' intentions for Siam. However, it was not purely his interests that made him adopt the norms of Western civilisation and welcome many foreigners to the kingdom. Aware of the dangers of colonialism, his plan was to ensure Siam would be considered an equal to the imperialist countries of the West in terms of culture and traditions in order to stave them off. A good example is when he sent portraits of himself and his family to Queen Victoria along with a letter addressing the queen as his royal friend, thereby suggesting that the two of them were equivalent as monarchs of their respective countries (Peleggi 14). Similar to when he abolished the rule of *lakhon nai* dancers, he also broke the secular taboo of having himself photographed, for it was a Thai belief that the person being photographed would pass away soon as if their souls were sucked out by the camera.

The king's wise strategy to counteract Western colonialism underlines the world order at the time. As Siam was in a noticeably less advantageous position, she actively participated in a more intense dialogic relationship between herself and the rest of the world shaped by Western imperialism. This participation indicates the asymmetrical power between Siam and the Western world, leading to the counteracting policy of adopting Western civilisation. This brought global and local spheres into more intense contact with each other, which gave rise to the cosmopolitan sphere and strengthened subjects' cosmopolitan imaginary. As Delanty and Harris explain, the encounter with the Other drives cultural entities to undergo transformation, opening up new horizons (150). In this case, such encounters led to the re-evaluation of cultural heritage and Siam's identity in the world by local agents, resulting in the synthesis of aspects of Western civilisation with that of Thailand. As a result, this cross-cultural interaction led to the expansion of cultural repertoires and cultural hybridisation in the country, which could be seen more clearly in the following reign.

Although King Mongkut built the foundation of Western knowledge (i.e., the Thais' familiarity with Western traditions and development as well as Western languages and academic subjects), more noticeable results occurred in the reign of his son, King Chulalongkorn Rama V. According to the Thai historian Prince Damrong, this reign can be considered "the turning point" in Thai *lakhon*, in part due to the reign's total period of forty-two years. Likewise, Kerdaunsuksri also demonstrates throughout his PhD thesis that the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century was "a watershed in the history of Thai theatre," evidenced in terms of "new dramatic forms, the transformation of aesthetics and growth in commercial theatre" (28). The new dramatic forms resulting from the modernisation of *lakhon* during this reign were *lakhon phan thang*, *lakhon duekdamban*, *lakhon rong*, *likay*, and *lakhon phut*. I will now focus on *lakhon rong*, which is the prototype of contemporary *lakhon phleng* and briefly discuss other forms of *lakhon* that had an impact on the development of *lakhon rong*.

Being able to understand and adapt to Western culture more efficiently than his father did while remaining deeply connected to Thai cultural heritage, King Chulalongkorn continued to nourish classical performances by reviving and patronising performances and drama troupes. One of the main reasons for reviving classical Thai performances was also due to his attempt to utilise Thai performing arts as a symbol of national culture and, thus, emphasise the continuity of Thai civilisation. Therefore, in parallel with his father's policy, the king sought to modernise, closely linked to westernise, Thailand while showing her prestige. Thus, he sought to make Thailand become "the dignified and respectable East in the eyes of the West" (ibid).

Due to his preferred aesthetics of both Thai and Western cultures, the king often expressed dissatisfaction regarding the slowness and repetitiveness of Thai classical dance. Similar to the manifestation of the cosmopolitan sphere in the Fourth Reign, his familiarity with Western cultures and dissatisfaction here also indicates a strengthened cosmopolitan sphere at the local level and shows how his consumption of Western performing arts reflexively affected his understanding, causing him to re-evaluate existing Thai classical dance. In this sense, it can be said that King Chulalongkorn possessed an orientation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. As examined in Chapter One and thus summarised here, aesthetic cosmopolitanism refers to "cultural consumption patterns and their associated imaginaries, as well as opportunities for contact (either virtual or mediated) with aesthetic and cultural

alterity” (Octobre and Cicchelli x). Aesthetic cosmopolitanism functions at the level of the imagination, which contributes to the cosmopolitan imaginary, and shapes the universalistic values of the field in question (Papastergiadis 298, Regev 130). In this case, due to the power of the West and King Chulalongkorn’s personal preference for Western cultures (which was also shaped by the domination of Western countries at the time), the king developed a stance of openness towards foreign cultural products and became aesthetically transformed by them. This enabled him to perceive his ethno-cultural artistic practices by taking into consideration foreign practices in the same field (i.e., performing arts) and, in turn, experiment with them in accordance with popular global trends shaped by Western performing arts. As demonstrated in Chapter One, a significant number of global trends were influenced by Western cultures due to their status as cultural nobility, which underscores an aspect of cultural imperialism present in Thailand. This is because, during the era of colonialism in the nineteenth century, Thailand, particularly the royal family and elites, considered Victorian culture and advancement to be civilised, though not necessarily superior. In order to save Thailand from the danger of being colonised like her neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia and due to his personal inclination, King Chulalongkorn decided to adopt aspects of Western civilisation to show the imperialist countries that their claim that it was ‘white man’s burden’ to enlighten us was neither just nor needed (Peleggi 145). This resonated in the king’s speech to the scholars on his scholarship in 1879 in which he told them: “Always bear in mind that we are not here to study to become *farang*.<sup>14</sup> We study to become Thais who have equal knowledge as *farang*” (Graireuk 2004).

His re-evaluation of Thai classical dance led to his attempt to modernise Thai drama, particularly its spontaneity, which resulted in new dramatic literature and new forms of Western-influenced drama (Rutnin 111). Although borrowing stories from foreign cultures in dramatic literature and performance was not unusual in Thailand, the stories were all from neighbouring Asian countries and China, nations that had enjoyed well-established relationships with Thailand for centuries. In this way, it can be said that prior to the westernisation policy initiated by King Rama IV, the cosmopolitan imaginary and the dominant aesthetics were dominated by South and East Asian aesthetics as well as neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, King Chulalongkorn’s adaptation of *The Arabian Nights*, *Lilit Nitra Chakrit* (1879), was the first drama to be taken from an English

---

<sup>14</sup> *Farang* is a Thai term which refers to white Caucasians.

text. Staging it as the very first *lakhon phut*, spoken drama, in Thailand, the play was meant to be a New Year's gift to entertain his family members.

The adaptation of an English text highlights Thailand's more concrete intercultural dialogue with the West at the time. This dialogue, however, fell short of being a mutual dialogue between Thailand and the Western countries where both sides met in the middle as the latter simply possessed higher political power at that time. Rather, the dialogue demonstrated the interactive interplay of Thailand and foreign countries within the global flows shaped by Western imperialism, leading to their interest in those beyond their local sphere regardless of their purposes. The adaptation choice also underscores King Chulalongkorn's consumption of foreign cultural products, which led to his glocalisation—an interaction of global and local as shaped by cultural borrowing, resulting in cultural hybridity (Steger 77)—of well-known foreign cultural products. His version of *The Arabian Nights* was hybridised in the sense that the original plot was revised to suit Thai tastes and composed in a Thai poetic form called *lilit suphab*. The emphasis on costumes that “followed closely to the national Persian styles” (Rutnin 135) can be read as a demonstration of his cultural knowledge beyond nearby territories, his attempt to represent the Other with accuracy (as much as possible), and his intention in expanding the cultural horizons of his audiences. All of these point to the formation of a cosmopolitan sphere aided by aesthetic cosmopolitanism amongst himself and his audiences.

Apart from King Chulalongkorn's initiation of *lakhon phut* (which became prominent in the Sixth Reign), the king's remark on classical Thai performances' lack of appeal for foreign guests led to other modern forms of *lakhon*. As a response to the king's dissatisfaction, Prince Naris invented *lakhon duekdamban*, opera with court dance, a new art form inspired by Western opera and Thai classical dance. This new drama was initially meant to entertain foreign guests in an after-dinner concert, following the tradition the king learnt and observed in the West. Therefore, it still used Thai classical dance as the main element and contained the elaborated gestures of *lakhon nai*, but featured songs and dialogues in Thai performed by male and female actor-dancers themselves (Upparamai 146, Kerdarunsulksri 40-42).

The invention of *lakhon duekdamban* and the king's concern regarding Thai classical dance's appeal to Western audiences could be seen as a continuation of his father's policy to show that Thailand was a modern country with a rich cultural heritage. Of course, classical Thai

dance alone could also have been used to showcase Thai culture, but the goal of showing a modern Thailand would not be achieved if it did not appeal to the targeted foreign audience. In this sense, Thailand took part in world relations and shaped her identity based on the dominant artistic traditions in the global cultural market to actively present herself in the world community. In other words, this was the first step in adapting Thai cultural forms for a foreign audience, interpolating their ideas without just reproducing them, although this was likely an impossible ask owing to Thais' lack of experience with Western art forms. This resonates with Prince Damrong's comment on the Thais' habit of borrowing good features of other cultures without hesitation and, I would add, without the intention to understand them properly as well.

This lack of understanding (and the need to do so) led to more freedom in experimenting and integrating the Western theatre art forms with Thai performing arts. In order to make it palatable for Thai taste, the adaptations usually contained more elements from Thai performing arts. This could be seen as a one-way cultural exchange, rather than an equal exchange between both cultures, where one culture could manipulate and appropriate the other. Such cross-cultural exchange is a form of aesthetic cosmopolitanism which echoes John Tomlinson's warning of the concept's superficial sides. Supporting this, Tomlinson argues that the reflexive transformation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism may not lead to "any necessary sense of responsibility for the global totality" (quoted in Sassatelli 273). Although the concept of aesthetic cosmopolitanism is, to a great extent, influenced by the "ideology of globalised market capitalism" (Octobre and Ciccchelli 250) and, in the case of modern types of *lakhon*, leads to the appropriation of foreign cultural products without a full understanding of them, I contend that it is helpful for Thai theatre. This is because it makes practitioners constantly re-read their existing products and imagine even wider artistic possibilities in their field, leading to hybridised performances that stimulate the scene. As shall be further demonstrated, this pattern of cultural exchange and the associated cosmopolitan imaginary significantly contributed to the experimentation of *lakhon rong*.

As the king predicted, the complicated dance style of *lakhon nai*, which could only really be appreciated by those with significant education in it (i.e., by the royal family and elites), gradually declined in practice and popularity (Rutnin 152). It is unclear to what extent, if at all, his attempts to modernise the dance with *lakhon duekdamban* were successful, particularly to foreigners, as it too suffered from the rigidity that marked *lakhon nai*. This

decline, however, helped make way for another experimental drama titled *lakhon phan thang* (opera with outside-of-court dance) created by Chao Phraya Thewet and Chao Phraya Mahin.

Based on the model of *lakhon duekdamban*, it aimed to alter the inflexibility of the previous form by using the outside-of-court dance style rather than the royal court style and again combined it with aspects from Western opera. It was performed in public on many occasions with notable success (Upparamai 151). In fact, the first permanent theatre in Thailand that charged admission, the Prince Theatre of Chao Phraya Mahin, was established to showcase its performances. Considered the first theatre in Bangkok, The Prince Theatre was named after that of London and marked the official beginning of commercial theatre in Thailand (Kerdarunsuksri 36). The theatre's name suggested its link with Western theatre and, thus, gave the performance an air of modernity since modernity was mainly associated with the Western world.<sup>15</sup> To attract the local audience, the stories were often taken from Thai and Asian (primarily China and India) sources "to give exotic flavours" (Rutnin 141). This opened up opportunities for creating foreign costumes, sets, music, movements and even song lyrics and dialogue. Although most of these factors were mainly accomplished from a Thai perspective, such as by using Thai instruments to create the particular sounds of certain countries, there was an obvious step towards realism in Thai drama. For instance, Prince Mahin featured a Chinese dance movement in *Rachathirat*, taught directly by Chinese opera dancers, and Western military marching, taught by Westerners (ibid 142). With exotic stories and attractive costumes and sets, *lakhon phan thang* became successful both inside and outside the royal court while Thai classical dance generally lost its popularity. Thus, similar to *lakhon duekdamban*, though more successful, *lakhon phan thang* used foreign elements to rejuvenate the existing traditional art form and make it more appealing, or perhaps exotic, to the audience.

---

<sup>15</sup> Modernity can be understood as a comparison to what was before. It refers to a shift from an agrarian society towards an industrialised one, which originated in North-western European countries between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Largely due to the transoceanic colonisation, such North-western European countries possessed higher power in terms of economy, labour and natural resources, making them rise above other countries, particularly non-Western ones. Their higher capital as well as the development of technology and science enabled them to progress at a rapid speed, leaving other countries behind. Western modernity, at least in Thailand, was held as the direction which should be followed and, thus, many cultural products from the West were deemed as cultural nobility.



The examples of the above productions that portray other cultural identities on stage and their popularity amongst Thai audiences indicate heightened awareness of the cosmopolitan imaginary, which was in part produced through the consumption of foreign cultural products. With the royalty holding the highest authority, all developments in Thailand tended to start from the palace and gradually spread outwards to commoners. In some cases, like in the creation of *lakhon duekdamban*, the new trends did not travel out of the palace at all. Therefore, the fact that *lakhon phan thang* utilised outside-of-court dance style and was performed widely in public spaces meant that it could encourage commoners to construct the imagined worlds and express their curiosity and interest in others beyond their national territory.

Nevertheless, their imagination might not be as free as it theoretically sounded, due to absolutism and a hierarchical social structure organised as follows: royalty, nobility, court officials, commoners and bonded slaves (Peleggi 67). Although the mass population was constituted of commoners regarded as free men, they were not as free as the concurrent middle strata. In addition, as a predominantly agricultural country, most commoners were not educated, though some were able to read and write. Therefore, the royal family and elites had an easier task in guiding their thoughts, beliefs, and practices. In this case, the monarchy functioned as head of the nation-state and could, therefore, employ means to construct its legitimacy and control national territorialisation. Since most publishing or print capitalism—print media that shapes people's imagination—in that time was either done, approved or granted by members of the royal family or nobility, they could strengthen nationalism and national identity.

After a while, the audience became tired of chronicle plays and their tastes changed to romance, tragedy and particularly melodrama on the back of which the genre immediately regained its popularity. As Western-influenced drama in Thailand rose in popularity, Prince Narathip, who had been involved in the creation of the two drama forms mentioned earlier, decided to develop Thai drama to the next level, resulting in *lakhon rong*, sung drama, which is the closest model to contemporary *lakhon phleng*.

Until today, there is still a debate amongst academics regarding the origin of *lakhon rong*, which can be divided into three theories: the first that Prince Narathip imitated Western opera; the second that he was inspired by the creation of *lakhon deukdamban*

(mentioned above); and the third that he was inspired by a Malay opera form called Bangsawan Malayu (Rutnin 167). Looking at the chronology and the prince's involvement in theatre, I contend that all three theories are interrelated. Below I demonstrate the link between the three theories and how they influence one another.

As seen in the new forms of *lakhon* preceding *lakhon rong*, popular Western performing arts, particularly opera, had had a substantial impact on the modernisation of Thai drama. At the same time, the number of Thais, including royal family members, that went to study abroad increased, while missionaries coming from the West similarly saw an increase in numbers. Consequently, these people would bring knowledge, aesthetics, and traditions from the Western world to Thailand upon their return. King Chulalongkorn also went on European tours and would adopt their traditions for Thai culture, which supported the process of glocalisation evidenced in his adaptation of *The Arabian Nights* and his encouragement of the modernisation of traditional *lakhon* by adopting aesthetics from Western performing arts.

Furthermore, Prince Narathip had always been at the forefront of experimenting with Thai drama in the court and was involved in the development of *lakhon deukdamban* and *lakhon phan thang*, the aesthetics of which were a hybrid of royal court dance and outside-of-court dance with Western classical performing arts. Therefore, it would make sense that the prince was influenced by popular Western performing arts like opera, operetta, plays and ballet during his involvement with *lakhon duekdamban* and further experimented with *lakhong rong* as a Thai version of operetta. This is supported by Princess Duangchit, daughter of Prince Naris, who stated that “Prince Narathip made Thai *lakhon* to appear like the *lakhon farang*” (quoted in Rutnin 177). As such, the first two theories go hand in hand and are interrelated. Let us now look at the third theory that the prince was influenced by the Bangsawan Malayu.

Bangsawan, or so-called ‘Malay opera’, developed from a localised form of Parsi theatrical forms, which incorporated various elements from global theatres spreading across colonial empires in the early nineteenth century (Farid 107). According to the Southeast Asian scholar Matthew Isaac Cohen, presenting Bangsawan as an opera was essential to avoid paying taxes for their performances (ibid 108). In colonial empires in Southeast Asia, especially in Batavia, there was a daily permit fee for all *wayang* performances, which referred to local forms of performances. On the contrary, there was no fee for Western forms of performances.

Consequently, adopting the name opera allowed local troupes to stage their performances for free (ibid). Apart from avoiding taxes, Cohen states that using the term opera was also a result of the troupes' integration of Western opera aesthetics in the performance repertoire of Bangsawan, leading to the troupes' desire to present their performances as an equivalent to Western opera (ibid).

The reason why I believe Prince Narathip was also inspired by Bangsawan is due to the trips of the king and the royal family at the time. During the Fifth Reign, King Chulalongkorn, members of the royal family and, later, Thai scholars, went to study and observe the modernisation processes in the Western countries and their colonial empires, particularly in Java and the Malay peninsula. During his visits, King Chulalongkorn often wrote letters back home to his family and officers containing detailed descriptions of his experiences. From his letters and documentation on his visits, it was evident that the king was well-received by the host in Java and Malayu and was taken around to see the development and the locals' ways of life (Suharto 2012, Lim 52-54, 144, 160, 165-167, King Chulalongkorn 1925). Local performances were often incorporated to welcome the king and his troupe. As Prince Damrong explained in his letter to Prince Naris, a newly created type of performance called Bangsawan was performed for King Chulalongkorn during his tour of the Malay peninsula (Rutnin 166). Some years later, the Bangsawan troupe came to perform in Bangkok, and that was where Prince Narathip saw the performance and adopted their styles to create his *lakhon rong* (ibid).

As King Chulalongkorn entrusted Prince Narathip with the development of modernised *lakhon*, it is highly plausible that the prince heard about Bangsawan from the king or royal court members. Once the prince watched the Bangsawan performance in person, he came to realise how to fuse it with the existing forms of *lakhon* in Thailand. This theory is, in fact, in tandem with the first two theories due to the following reasons. Firstly, as Bangsawan developed from hybridising Western opera with indigenous performative elements, it was presented through Western aesthetics or, at least, their appropriated versions. This style of presenting a local performance through appropriated Western aesthetics was similar to how the prince and other Thai nobles presented their modern forms of *lakhon*. As an experienced practitioner who developed *lakhon duekdamban*, which hybridised Western and Thai elements, Prince Narathip likely noticed how traditional performative elements mixed with elements from Western opera in Bangsawan. Thus, this fusion potentially sparked more ideas

on how to further experiment with his *lakhon* to attract more audiences and to continue the modernisation of *lakhon* in parallel with King Chulalongkorn's vision. In this sense, it can be said that *lakhon rong* was a surplus of *lakhon duekdamban* and Bangsawan as both already contained a high degree of local performative elements and Western classical performing arts. Therefore, the theory that Prince Narathip was inspired by Bangsawan to create *lakhon rong* is interrelated with and supports the first two theories. Furthermore, the fact that both *lakhon duekdamban* and Bangsawan were created from hybridising local and Western performative elements underscores the domination and transnational flows of Western dramatic traditions in Southeast Asia which shaped the global aesthetics of local practitioners who wished to elevate their status and gain recognition for their works. Nevertheless, such domination resulted in hybridised forms of local performances as a result of glocalisation, and such performances served as the ethno-national products of the local areas.

*Lakhon rong* shared many similarities with its predecessor *lakhon duekdamban*, but it simplified the movement to mostly swaying and hand gestures, allowing the story and the music to dominate. Following the Western model, it had thematic titles for each act, changes of approximately four sets per show, and an interval between acts with comedians playing a short act in front of the curtain (ibid 172). Most of the stories were about domestic life and largely relied upon melodramatic and tragic plots, which allowed the music to heighten the emotions of the play. The costumes, sets and vocabulary tended to be realistic and the songs were taken from existing popular tunes or composed as contemporary pop tunes. *Lakhon rong* can be classified into two categories: traditional *lakhon rong* and *lakhon rong salub phut* (alternating between singing and dialogues). The first usually used scripts written by King Vajiravudh Rama VI, which were a mix of his original plays and his translation and adaptation of Western playwrights such as Shakespeare, Moliere, and Conan Doyle. Having been educated in England where he adopted many British traits, he likely chose these playwrights due to their popularity in England. The performance was sung-through with some dances in between accompanied by Thai orchestration. The second one, Prince Narathip's style, featured songs and dances with spoken dialogue to advance the story. The main characters were played by female performers only, regardless of a character's gender, while the supporting roles, particularly the clowns and servants, were played by male performers. Using plots from Western plays, the names and races of characters were changed to be more relatable to a Thai audience, such as *Sao Khreu Fah* (adapted from *Madamme Butterfly*) and *Tukata Yot Rak* (adapted from *The Enchanted Doll*) and Western plays were

translated into Thai and performed with Thai instruments, such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Upparamai 167).

As *lakhon rong* focused on singing and dialogues instead of Thai dance like its predecessors, it was initially perceived to be peculiar by most Thais at the time. However, with King Chulalongkorn signalling his approval of both Western opera and Prince Narathip's works, *lakhon rong* received more attention. Again, this process indicates how the Thai monarchy often set trends within the country, which continues to a certain extent to the present day (Peleggi 153). By the end of the Fifth Reign, the art form had become increasingly popular, with the emergence of a large number of *lakhon rong* troupes, both private and under royal patronage. Prince Narathip continued to introduce more exotic tales adapted from the *Arabian Nights* and other foreign tales, with the art form in high demand until the Seventh Reign.

*Lakhon rong* was initially perceived by local audiences to be peculiar due to the switch of the main element from dancing to singing as well as the minimal physical gestures. The physical gestures in *lakhon rong* were kept at a bare minimum to achieve a realistic performance in parallel with a realistic storyline. However, compared to other types of *lakhon*, particularly traditional *lakhon*, the reduction of physical gestures was dramatic, which was evident in King Chulalongkorn's remark in the performance as being "*lakhon kam kam bae bae*" (the clenching and releasing fists type of *lakhon*) which signifies how minimal the physical gestures in *lakhon rong* were (Rutnin 170). Therefore, the aim to make the performance appear as realistic as possible resulted in an unusual performance style at the time.

After the audience got over the unusual look of the performance, the popularity of *lakhon rong* rose dramatically and took over other types of *lakhon*, including *lakhon phut* (discussed in the next paragraph). One reason for its high popularity was likely due to the popularity of the mode of theatrical expressions amongst Thai audiences, which the Thai theatre scholar Chetana Nagavajara termed the 'aesthetics of discontinuity,' referring to the constant shift of theatrical expressions during a performance (239-240). His work reveals that Thai audiences had been accustomed to alternation of theatrical modes rather than concentrating on a single mode of expression (e.g., like in spoken drama). In this sense, the theatrical expressions in *lakhon rong* were highly compatible with the popular taste of Thai audiences. With additional elements including realistic movements and stories, softer sounding orchestration,

singing and dialogues performed by the performers, and the reiteration of the dialogues by songs and chorus sections, *lakhon rong* thus contained both new and familiar aesthetics occurring from hybridising Western and Thai performative elements. The process of hybridisation in Prince Narathip's style of *lakhon rong* and the art form's solidified version will be analysed in section three. Now let us return to the chronological development of modern *lakhon*.

In the following reign of King Vajiravudh, Rama VI, revered as “the father of *lakhon phut*,” spoken drama took over in priority. However, this trend only occurred within the court and the elite class within the king's social circle. *Lakhon phut* derives directly from the Western form of spoken drama and its early performances were usually Western plays. As such, the audiences who appreciated spoken drama in Thailand were mostly Western-educated intellectuals or those who wished to be associated with them. Spoken drama thus functioned as cultural capital amongst the elites and those who wished to gain approval from the king. In the outer circle, however, the spoken drama did not overcome its highly westernised appearance, which was deemed incomprehensible for local audiences (i.e., those who were not Western-educated or in the high social milieu). An important reason behind this was due to the popular mode of discontinuity discussed above. Since spoken drama relied on a single mode of expression, the non-Western educated audience quickly lost concentration on the performance and, as a result, did not understand the play. Furthermore, spoken drama expected the complete illusion of belief from the audience (i.e., it required the audience to believe that a 'real' event was happening before them) (Nagavajara 238). This was in contrast with *lakhon rong*, which alternated between various performative elements, clearly presenting it as an 'unreal' event. Therefore, although the Sixth Reign was the golden age of spoken drama which formed a model for contemporary spoken drama in Thailand, previous forms of *lakhon*, especially *lakhon rong*, remained popular amongst the audience who were not a part of the king's club.

Throughout his years in England, King Vajiravudh had participated in almost all forms of dramatic activities ranging from acting, directing, and writing to doing archaeological research for a play. Apart from translating and adapting Western plays, he would write an original play roughly every two months, resulting in a flourishing modern theatre scene in Thailand. Most of his plays were comedies and later adapted into *lakhon rong*, which helped boost its popularity. Taking another step towards realism, the king also introduced

Stanislavski's acting techniques and encouraged actors to go through acting training. Facing internal political conflicts and the approaching World War I, King Vajiravudh used theatre as a political tool by promoting nationalistic themes such as *Hua Jai Nak Rob (A Warrior's Heart)* and *Nithan Thong-In (The Tale of Thong-In)*. Nevertheless, his extreme devotion to theatre raised questions amongst some groups of people who criticised him for neglecting the country's affairs (Rutnin 196).

The Sixth Reign contained many interesting contradictions in the socio-political scene, much of which resulted from globalisation. It was not surprising that a British-educated king like Vajiravudh, who adopted many of his interests from Western culture, introduced Thais to more Westernised forms of entertainment. He even established theatre troupes and the boy scouts based on his experience in England, and built Dusit Thani, a model of small-scale white house in the area of his palace where, along with his elite clubs, he would exercise a more democratic form of government and publish its progress in the national papers. Nevertheless, he also brought back obsolete traditions from previous reigns in an attempt to promote nationalism. Apart from plays like *Hua Jai Nak Rob* that strongly promoted patriotism, he also staged *Michigan Test* and *Soht Tham Jariya*, which portrayed a sardonic take on those foreign-educated Thais who forgot their roots. With his expressed dislike of the overwhelming Western influence affecting Thai society, the experimentation of new art forms inspired by Western performing arts came to a temporary halt. Rather than generating a new type of hybrid performance, most attention was given to creating new scripts and songs for either *lakhon phut* or *lakhon rong*.

Fearing the danger of imperialism during their reigns, both King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn were quite receptive to Western civilisation, intending to modernise the country and maintain its independence. With the monarch's control of the state and people, they were able to adopt and adapt various forms of Western culture without fear of weakening the nation-state. Despite being an absolutist ruler like the previous reigns, King Vajiravudh was faced with the emergence of the middle class (starting from the Fifth Reign), who had also received foreign education and were exposed to different ideologies like democracy and social revolutions in Europe. As Arjun Appadurai, an American anthropologist, points out, conversations with these people also constructed imagined worlds, leading to social actions from the local subjects who might not leave their country at all. According to Rosenau's theory, these factors in the distant location "serve to cascade through

the complexities of regional, local, and neighbourhood politics,” leading to the revealing of local problems that often involve violence (quoted in Appadurai 164). In the case of Thailand, this eventually led to the overthrow of the absolutist monarchy in the Seventh Reign.

Therefore, the reasons for King Vajiravudh’s efforts to increase nationalist feeling and the limitation of imported cultures could be seen as his acknowledgement of the weakening of the nation-state and his prediction of future cultural homogenisation. However, with the rise of the modern middle class and the king’s strong commitment to theatre, many groups questioned his obsession with his dramatic world which had the effect of making the monarchical institution more vulnerable. After his death, he left a significant amount of personal debt and a near-bankrupt Privy Purse to his brother and successor, King Prajadhipok Rama VII. In order to save the country’s and the court’s economic situation, King Prajadhipok cut a great deal of royal household expenses and dramatic activities, leading to the suspension of many *lakhon* troupes. Many actors and dancers lost their patronage and had to take other jobs to survive. However, the king successfully stabilised the country through his intervention.

### **The Rise and Fall of *Lakhon Rong***

Although King Prajadhipok prioritised leading Thailand towards becoming an industrialised country through modern technology, he himself was a fine musician. Thus, royal court music flourished significantly, and he formed a modern Western-style orchestra for the first time there (Rutnin 217). This later had an impact on *lakhon rong*, which started to feature Western orchestration in its scores with the initiation by the Chantarophat troupe in 1931. Despite the dramatic decline of *lakhon nai*, the *lakhon* outside the court continued to thrive, particularly *lakhon rong* and patriotic *lakhon* by Luang Wichit.<sup>16</sup> Another factor that boosted the popularity of *lakhon rong* was the lack of imported film negatives. In the early 1940s, the film industry in Thailand became popular with films mostly imported from the West and Japan functioning as an important portal transporting Western cultures to Asia. However, during the Pacific War, there was a lack of imported film negatives, causing people to turn to the theatre.

---

<sup>16</sup> See Kusuma Prasertsud’s PhD thesis *Luang Vichitr Vadakarn: The Use of Theatre for Propaganda* (1998).



According to the Thai theatre scholar Sirimongkol Nattayakul, the Pacific War was the period when *lakhon rong* truly solidified its form due to Western entertainment culture in film and music at the time (10). This demonstrates that, at least in the field of performing arts, cultural products from the West still dominated the global artistic values, allowing local practitioners to stay up-to-date with the popular trends in order to incorporate them in their artistic works. Such works which hybridised elements of local and otherness, exposed local audiences to the aesthetics of those beyond their ethno-cultural uniqueness, thereby shaping circulating aesthetics to become increasingly cosmopolitan and contributing to the active interplay of global and local spheres. Using Prince Narathip's style of *lakhon rong* as the model, many *lakhon rong* troupes such as Manot Samai, Pramot Meaung and Pramothai, to name just a few, gradually gained recognition for their performances.<sup>17</sup> This was when *lakhon rong* performances also became known amongst local audiences as *lakhon weatee*, directly translated as stage performance, due to the prominent stage area in such performances. Although they mostly performed their original works, they sometimes borrowed the works from Prince Narathip's repertoire (Kerdarunsuksri 49). Below I examine the process of hybridisation in Prince Narathip's style of *lakhon rong*.

Prince Narathip's model of *lakhon rong* was mostly hybridised through performative modes and scriptwriting rather than by music and singing. Instead of having a separated group of the chorus singing dialogues and narrating the entire narrative for the dancers on stage as in traditional *lakhon*, the performers sang their own dialogues. This mode of performers singing their parts was the main element that the prince adopted from Western opera and operetta. Nevertheless, in keeping with various modes of theatrical expressions, the prince retained the element of the chorus from the traditional *lakhon*. The function of the chorus was hybridised with the mode of performers singing their own parts, resulting in the former's role as commentators, merely reiterating each event on stage rather than taking on all parts. The chorus also provided the *uan*, a wordless vocalisation, a characteristic associated with Thai classical singing (further discussed in Chapter Seven). However, the prince reduced the length of the *uan* and increased its pace to avoid the issues of repetitiveness and slowness of traditional *lakhon*. As demonstrated above, such issues were due to King Chulalongkorn's

---

<sup>17</sup> Prince Narathip gave up his troupe at the Pridalai Theatre in 1913 due to a mysterious fire accident.

intention to modernise traditional *lakhon* based on his exposure to Western classical performances.

Due to the choice of having performers singing their parts and the lack of theatres with good acoustic systems, this style of *lakhon rong* mostly relied on a Thai orchestra called *piphat mainuam* to avoid overpowering the singing parts executed by the performers. The word *mainuam* signifies the use of cushioned mallets for the *ranat ek* (a high-pitched Thai xylophone), *khong wong yai* (a large circular instrument with gongs) and *khong wong lek* (a small circular instrument with gongs) instead of using *maikhaeng* or the wooden head mallets to achieve rounder and softer timber. This type of orchestra also featured *soh ooh* (alto two-stringed fiddle) instead of *soh duang* (soprano two-stringed fiddle) and *piang or* flute to enhance the smoothness of the sound. The music employed in Prince Narathip's *lakhon rong* was mostly based on traditional Thai melodies and, thus, its music was not further hybridised (ibid 52).

Other elements adopted from Western opera were the naturalistic styles of physical gestures and the structure of the show and sets; the show was divided into two acts with a script containing scenes and dialogue rather than a minimal description of the scene and reliance on improvisation like older forms of *lakhon*, and employing realistic settings and costumes rather than using a single bench to signify whatever objects were required in the scene. The new structure and approach to scriptwriting indicate the Prince's attempts to grasp the theatrical styles determined by Western theatre traditions. This is a manifestation of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism in which a subject is driven to rethink their existing work to strive towards global aesthetics, which were determined by Western theatre in this case.

Despite incorporating the aforementioned elements from foreign aesthetics, the narratives of Prince Narathip's *lakhon rong* remain predominantly local. This is evident in how his productions often localised Western scripts, making the characters and contexts familiar to the local audience. For instance, one of his most well-known *lakhon rong*, *Sau Khreua Fah*, was adapted from *Madame Butterfly*, with the female protagonist changed to a northern Thai girl and the male protagonist to a Bangkok man. This was due to the local perception of northern girls being beautiful and innocent, while Bangkok men were perceived as being more 'experienced' with the world. This indicates how the portrayed narratives and stories prioritised their relatability to local audiences. As shall be demonstrated throughout this

thesis, the emphasis on making the narrative palatable and closer to local audiences despite attempts to incorporate global aesthetics remains intrinsic to Thai musicals.

The hybridisation of Thai and Western aesthetics in Prince Narathip's *lakhon rong* was kept to a low degree, resulting in the former noticeably dominating the latter. Nevertheless, as demonstrated earlier, even a small degree of Western aesthetics was significant enough to make the Thai audience perceive *lakhong rong* to be a foreign form initially. As the hybridisation process was initiated by Thai practitioners and an asymmetrical degree of both entities, the overall characteristics of *lakhon rong* remained in the realm of Thai performing arts, masking its influence from the West. Having established the main characteristics of Prince Narathip's *lakhon rong*, let us now look at the characteristics of *lakhon rong* during the Seventh Reign in order to examine its more active hybridisation of aesthetics.

In 1931, a Western orchestra was introduced as a part of *lakhon rong*. As King Prajadhipok enthused about Western music in Thailand, Phran Bun, a trained musician both in Western and Thai music traditions, incorporated Western instruments in his troupe's performances. Phran Bun was the head of a troupe named Chantarophat, specialising in *lakhon rong*. His *lakhon rong* was sometimes referred to as *lakhon rong baeb Phran Bun* (Phran Bun's style of *lakhon rong*) or *lakhon rong baeb Chantarophat* (Chantarophat's style of *lakhon rong*) (ibid 51). Since Phran Bun's professional training was situated between that of Thai and Western music traditions, his original works featured a fusion of elements from both sides. Replacing Thai musical instruments in the *piphat mainuam* orchestra with Western orchestration, he often sought inspiration from Western musical films and gramophone records and fused them with traditional Thai melodies and local tunes (ibid 54). His fusion of both aesthetics also resulted in the creation of *phleng neua tem* (a full-text song), a type of song that had no *uan* parts and a chorus (ibid 52). Phran Bun's *lakhon rong* not only introduced the use of a Western orchestra instead of a Thai orchestra, but his scores also influenced the genre of *phleng thai sakol*, modern Thai songs which featured Western music style with Thai lyrics, elements from Thai classical singing, and occasionally, Thai traditional melodies (ibid 52). His style of semi sung-through *lakhon rong* also set up the model for other *lakhon rong* performances afterwards.

My observation of the restaged versions of his two notable musicals titled *Rosita* and *Chan Chao Kha* illustrate the hybridisation process involved in his work. Although the signature

style of Phran Bun's *lakhon rong* was the use of *phleng neua tem*, it was noticeable that a small degree of *uan* parts still existed. Nevertheless, since the aim was to bring a modern performance to the Thai audience rather than a classical Thai performance, the *uan* was hybridised with Western-style pop music, resulting in it being significantly shortened and executed with the help of the light vibrato, scooping motions, and exasperated sound commonly found in Western-style pop singing. Instead of using *uan* as a long session of wordless vocalisation, it was incorporated at the end of each phrase to elongate the ending word. The ending consonants were often closed tightly and the *uan* would use the same vowel and register to carry on briefly instead of using a specific vowel set in the traditional technique (further discussed in Chapter Seven). This demonstrates the tension between Thai and Western aesthetics whereby the *uan* featured elements of Thai classical singing, but, at the same time, it was not done in a traditional way because it was executed with Western pop singing techniques (though it could not be classified as Western pop singing either). In this sense, this style of *uan* resonates with aesthetics from both sides, but does not fully reside in either polarity; it keeps shifting between them. As explored in Chapter One, such a shift is a sign of ambivalence articulated by the overlap of two cultural entities (Bhabha 2), leading to a hybrid of both aesthetics.

Apart from the execution of *uan*, the singing employed in *Rosita* was not entirely of Thai classical singing but was also hybridised with Western-style pop singing. Vocal characteristics from the Western side could be seen in the following points. Most melodies dwelled in the modal register to achieve the speak-singing style and pattered parts in the songs. Certain phrases were 'shouted out' over others to convey the point and emotion. In *Chan Chao Kha*, the vocal range was wider as the performers tapped into their mixed and head registers to deliver the romantic songs' sentimentality. The singing style in *Chan Chao Kha* resembles what is later known as *phleng luuk khruung*, which refers to a singing style that mixes Western popular singing with Thai classical singing and heightened lyrics (discussed in Chapter Seven).

The score and the use of instruments in both productions were mostly shaped by Western music and theatrical styles. In both productions, the Western orchestration was performed as overture and finale scenes as well as accompanying each transition, resulting in smooth transitions from songs into scenes. The songs were composed in several Western styles such as marching style to signify the military theme, waltz for sentimental songs, and jazz brass

band for celebratory songs in *Rosita*. In *Chan Chao Kha*, piano and its improvisation and strings were prominent. The Western instruments were employed to play pentatonic scales enhanced by *soh duang*. Furthermore, the productions contained realistic sets and costumes, naturalistic acting and dialogues, and a seamless transition from spoken dialogues to singing and vice versa. Instead of using a chorus to reiterate or narrate an event, his *lakhon rong* relied on background music and spoken dialogues by performers. The songs in Phran Bun's *lakhon rong* also progressed the narrative instead of reiterating the events as in Prince Narathip's *lakhon rong*.

Another interesting characteristic found in Phran Bun's productions was his decision to incorporate English words in the lyrics. In productions like *Rosita*, the lyrics also featured some English words such as "whiskey", "come to me", and "love only me". Kerdarunsukri remarks that the use of English words was an attempt to make the production more fashionable, which underscores that the *lakhon rong* itself was the product of the middle class who tended to be familiar with influences from the Western world (54). The notion of making the performance become fashionable also underlines how the English language, associated with Western power, served as the mark of cultural nobility and modernity. In this way, it elevated the status of his *lakhon*, shaping it as an aspirational product amongst local consumers.

With Western music styles combined with pop singing styles fused with elements of *uan*, the scores of Phran Bun's *Rosita* and *Chan Chao Kha* present an ambivalent identity between Thai and Western musical aesthetics because they shifted between the two without settling into any of them. This demonstrates that Phran Bun's work was produced through an interplay of local and global aesthetics, with the latter being shaped by Western popular music and vocal techniques, resulting in new artistic styles at the local level. Such styles were a hybrid of both Thai and Western cultural entities in the sense that they used the *uan* sound and selected Thai instruments, mostly those with higher pitches (e.g., Thai flutes and a soprano fiddle), to achieve the Thai characteristics, yet these were executed at a much faster pace and balanced with techniques from the Western music traditions to present the performance as a new and modern form of artistic practice.

Unlike Prince Narathip's *lakhon rong*, which often relied on traditional Thai musical aesthetics modernised by the presentation of ideas from Western performing arts, Phran

Bun's *lakhon rong* actually incorporated Western instruments and vocal techniques with their Thai equivalents, resulting in a higher degree of Western aesthetics in his works. Therefore, his works contributed to the cosmopolitan imaginary of local subjects more efficiently than older forms of *lakhon*, exposing local audiences to Western performance aesthetics through a form of local 'Thai' *lakhon*.

With the popularity of Phran Bun's works and the lack of film negatives in the early 1940s, many *lakhon* troupes turned empty theatres into a performing space for their *lakhon rong*, such as the Sala Chaloeornnakhon Cinema in Bangkok (Nattayakul 20). As such, it can be said that *lakhon rong* reached its peak of hybridising Western operetta with Thai performing arts in this reign. With Western-style orchestration, music styles became more diverse, incorporating genres such as country and brass bands. Nevertheless, many *lakhon rong* still featured Thai instruments, particularly percussions and strings. Sometimes Western instruments were used to play traditional Thai melodies. Although the lyrics were in Thai, the singing style became more operatic for both males and females with a strong vibrato. This also resulted in modifying some Thai vowels, which tended to be more nasal and compressed than the English vowels, making popular songs in this period lean more towards Western aesthetics. Some basic hand gestures remained in the simplified movement and the dialogue was still in everyday Thai language. Apart from the hybridised process of performative elements, the globalisation phenomenon became more prominent as the range of famous foreign plays, particularly Western ones, became wider and more available within Thai society, reflecting - at least in Bangkok - a more interconnected world. Some troupes, such as Pakawalee, were able to turn Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Mermaid* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into *lakhon rong* with original songs and dances accompanied by a chamber orchestra consisting of eleven musicians (ibid 185). Unlike Prince Narathip's model, most *lakhon rong* in this period were played by both male and female performers according to the characters' genders due to the influence of imported Western films and spoken drama that emphasised more realistic acting styles.

After enjoying five decades of success, *lakhon rong* gradually declined when the film industry made a comeback in the 1950s and 1960s with more developed 16mm films. The popularity of films dramatically increased to the point that it sent *lakhon rong* effectively into extinction in Thailand. Interestingly, this was the same period as the golden age of American musical theatre. Many famous musical films such as *South Pacific*, *West Side Story* and *Mary*

*Poppins* were imported around the same time from the United States, as a more globalised world created a bigger cultural supermarket through the power of modern technology. The takeover of American musical films reflects the rise of American political power, which began to dominate the world, especially in Southeast Asia. American popular culture, subsequently, permeated social norms and popular culture amongst urban Thai subjects, particularly among younger generations who preferred going to the cinema (Rutnin 224). Furthermore, the advancement in technology and sound recordings of American films was much ahead of Thai films at the time, leading to their increased popularity amongst Thai audiences and the elevated status of American products. This made many theatre actors turn to film and many theatres converted into cinemas to show both Hollywood and Thai films (Kerdarunsuksri 61). Nattayakul also adds that another reason for the decline of *lakhon rong* in Thailand was due to quick changes of cast occurring so often that it reduced the quality of the performance, with the audience eventually getting bored of seeing the same faces on stage for a long time (184). Although there were some attempts to bring *lakhon rong* back, mainly by the Fine Arts Department, it was largely performed for educational purposes or performed as an exhibition of national heritage within drama departments in universities (Rutnin 173).

The exhibition of *lakhon rong* as a part of national heritage demonstrates that although *lakhon rong* was a hybridised product of Thai and Western aesthetics, its long presence in the Thai theatre and its ongoing hybridisation process initiated by Thai practitioners resulted in the art form being regarded as a part of ethno-national repertoires. Furthermore, younger performers (i.e., those who were not a part of *lakhon rong* in its heyday) who performed *lakhon rong* as a part of such exhibitions were usually trained in or studied Thai classical performing arts, particularly traditional Thai singing and dance. This supports the status of *lakhon rong* as a traditional Thai repertoire despite its long hybridisation process. As shall be demonstrated in the subsequent case studies, because *lakhon rong* is labelled as a part of traditional performing arts, practitioners who further experimented with hybridising Thai and Western performative elements chose to present their work as *lakhon phleng* or a transliterated name of ‘musical’ rather than as a part of *lakhon rong*’s genealogy.

## **Conclusion**

Since the policy of modernisation was introduced from the Fourth Reign onwards, Thailand took part in increasingly more intense global flows, leading to interactive cross-cultural exchange. A significant part of this was due to the cosmopolitan leanings of King Rama IV and his descendants, who actively engaged in the interplay of global and local spheres, striving to modernise Thailand while maintaining her ethno-cultural uniqueness. In the field of performing arts, such interplay led to the modernisation of *lakhon* produced by integrating Thai and Western performance aesthetics. Such integration indicates how local practitioners were aesthetically transformed by encountering foreign cultural products, which made them re-evaluate their local artistic works, imagining beyond their ethno-cultural repertoires.

The modernisation of *lakhon*, particularly *lakhon rong*, reveals particular trends in the Thai theatre of this era. Firstly, local practitioners, particularly the kings and royal family members, displayed a stance of openness towards foreign cultural products and were reflexively transformed from consuming them, leading to their intention to glocalise such products. Secondly, their glocalisation of such products remained rather shallow due to their technical base in Thai performing arts and their intention to showcase Thai heritage. Thus, Thai aesthetics usually dominated the Western side in the hybridisation process of their *lakhon*. As the practitioners became more exposed to Western performing arts, whether through their trips to Europe and their colonial empires, through conversing with the royal family members who went there, or through imported films and records, they gradually experimented with new forms of *lakhon*, which incorporated more aesthetics from Western performance traditions. This is evidenced in the comparison between Prince Narathip's and Phran Bun's models of *lakhon rong* where the latter featured integrated Thai and Western performative techniques more explicitly. Thirdly, European countries and, later, the United States were associated with modernity and good taste amongst local subjects due to their higher political power in world dependency. They served as providers of the global standard in the field of performing arts, resulting in practitioners' attempts to produce works that featured elements and trends determined by such a standard. The high status also made cultural products from these geographical areas or products shaped by these areas become aspirational to those who desired to grasp what was recognised globally, even though the global in this case mostly referred to Western countries. Finally, the modern forms of *lakhon*, particularly *lakhon rong*, were, and are, considered an ethno-national product of Thailand even though they are a hybrid of Thai and Western cultural entities. With the status of being part of a national repertoire, *lakhon rong* performances contribute to the sphere of aesthetic



cosmopolitanism amongst local audiences, which is a form of cosmopolitanism produced from within.

In this sense, *lakhon rong* and the theatre practitioners during this time can be said to be important contributors to the early cosmopolitan sphere in Thailand. They paved the way for later generations to access cultural repertoires beyond the local without having to leave home, and create new artistic works through hybridising local aesthetics with the global. The outcomes of this will be examined in the chapters on contemporary *lakhon phleng* that follow.

### Chapter Three—The ‘Classic’ *Lakhon Phleng*: The Development of Patravadi Mejudhon’s Contemporary Musicals, 1990s—present

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the art form of *lakhon phleng* as seen today developed from *lakhon rong*, which emerged in Thailand since the Fifth Reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). Alongside this, I have contextualised the modernisation of *lakhon* and the shifting hybridised performance aesthetics throughout the rise and fall of *lakhon rong*. This chapter continues to trace the chronological development of *lakhon phleng*, beginning when the art form made a strong comeback in the 1990s. In doing so, I examine one of the most significant theatre practitioners of the time, Patravadi Mejudhon (1948 – present). I will focus on her musical productions, which marked a significant beginning of musical theatre that was based on Thai classical literature in Thailand. I contend that presenting such classical literary works through the art form of musical theatre is part of her strategy in bridging traditional repertoires with younger Thai audiences and, thereby, promoting Thai heritage and establishing her artistic identity through Western dramatic art forms. Focusing on her productions titled *Inao Choraka* and *Phra Lo*, I will analyse how performative elements from traditional Thai and foreign aesthetics encounter and entangle with each other more deeply than in *lakhon rong* and without an imposed hierarchy, leading to mutual collaborations from both sides. I contend that such collaborations are due to Mejudhon’s professional training and artistic visions, which are shaped by aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism. Furthermore, I will investigate how her hybrid musicals and her one-woman show served as a heuristic tool to challenge and reappropriate the dominant power of Anglo-American musical theatre in Thailand.

Mejudhon is a versatile theatre practitioner, actress, and former model who was awarded the title of National Artist in Performing Arts in 2014. She is well-known for her work as an actress, dramatist, and acting teacher, especially with her works at the Patravadi Theatre, Studio One, and Vic Hua Hin. Her notable musical works include *Singhakraiphob* (1992), *Inao Choraka* (1994), *Ngo Pa* (1995), *Sahatsadecha* (1997), and *Phra Lo* (2009, 2019).<sup>18</sup> The most important characteristics of her musicals are the integration of traditional Thai performative elements and classic Thai literary works with Western performative styles as well as collaboration with international artists.

---

<sup>18</sup> The first production of *Phra Lo* was staged in 1986 as a spoken play titled *Lodilokrat*. It was adapted from Tommayanti’s novel titled *Rak Thi Tong Montra* based on King Rama II’s *Lilit Phra Lo*.

Apart from her extensive career, Mejudhon was the first artist to create a substantial impact in various areas of the Thai entertainment industry, underlining her influential position as a trendsetter for urban subjects. For example, she set up the first professional modelling and makeup school in Bangkok and initiated the practice of memorising one's lines without relying on a prompter on shooting sets. Her school and practice would later standardise working professionalism in the Thai entertainment industry. She also originated a leading female protagonist in *Nangsao Maliwan* (*Miss Maliwan*) that exhibited flaws and negative behavioural patterns, which was in sharp contrast to the innocent and virtuous leading ladies in those days (Figure 2). This character aimed to show how negative behaviours led to negative results, but one could learn to change (Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2020). In this way, such a character challenged the audience to have some understanding and sympathy towards those who might not appear to be a good person from the beginning.

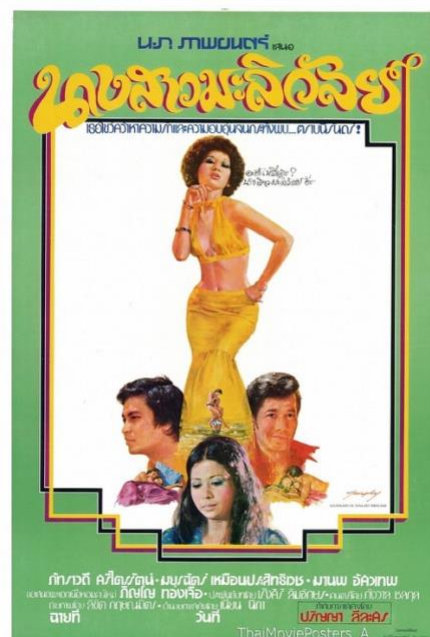


Figure 2: A film poster of *Nangsao Maliwan* (1975), directed by Parinya Lilasorn and starred Patravadi Mejudhon as Maliwan (Thai Movie Posters 2017).

In addition, her one-woman show titled *An Evening with Patravadi* was the first Broadway-style one-woman concert by a Thai performer in Thailand, which marked the official beginning of a full-scale Broadway-style performance by local talent. The style was categorised as Broadway in the sense that it was modelled after the American musical revue *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music* (1981), and its narrative was constructed upon the

interweaving of songs and dance numbers, many of which were from American musicals and popular songs. Her musical productions were amongst the first to turn classical Thai literature into a commercial musical with original scores and choreography and featured performative techniques from both Thai and foreign theatre traditions. Her musical *Phra Lo* toured the United States and Canada after its premiere in Bangkok in 2009, while *Singhakraiphob* was selected to represent Thailand in the Third ASEAN Theatre Festival (Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2019, Kerdarunsuksri 125), suggesting their national and international recognition. Her works subsequently promoted the trend of using traditional Thai literature as a source text for many theatrical performances during this period and served to propel the government's policy of strengthening Thai national heritage.

Such productions were also amongst the first to establish connections with international artists, leading to more substantial dialogues between the local and beyond. As shall be demonstrated in the performance analyses of her two productions, *Inao Choraka* and *Phra Lo*, the integration of various performance traditions in her work can be said to establish the mutual cross-cultural engagement of practitioners from Thai and international sides, leading to deeply integrated hybrid performances where all elements undergo some transformations after encountering one another and are exhibited on stage without a structured hierarchy. Therefore, this chapter seeks to bring forth how her productions can demonstrate a clear manifestation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism which lead to an interest in others, and potentially, global solidarity in the field of performing arts.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on contemporary Thai theatre after the fall of *lakhon rong* when Western dramatic arts dominated theatre practices within universities and in public spaces. As shall be demonstrated, this domination shaped the act of going to the theatre to see Western plays and musicals as an increasingly popular activity in urban Thai societies. Section two examines the significance of Patravadi Mejudhon and her artistic achievement, focusing on her training background and experiences which shaped her artistic visions and aspirations for Thai theatre. I will focus on her one-woman show titled *An Evening with Patravadi* which caught the attention of Bangkok audiences as the first Broadway-style performance executed by and featuring a Thai performer as the lead. The last section investigates Mejudhon's attempt to promote and challenge traditional Thai repertoires through hybridised performative elements in her two

productions of *Inao Choraka* and *Phra Lo*, focusing specifically on vocal techniques, choreography, and storytelling modes.

### **Contexts: the Post-*Lakhon Rong* Period (post-1950)**

During the Eighth (1935 – 1946) and Ninth Reigns (1946 – 2016), with more intensified processes of globalisation and deterritorialisation occurring, the government and the monarchy sought to revive Thai classical performance, especially *khon*, in order to promote and preserve ethno-national heritage. Television and film—both foreign and Thai—dominated the entertainment industry in Thailand. There were hardly any new scripts developed for theatre in the Eight Reign to early Ninth Reign. Even when there were new theatrical works, they tended to be shared amongst university groups (ibid 235). It seems that King Chulalongkorn’s remark about Thai people’s taste, “preferring *farang* things”<sup>19</sup>, remains true, with Thai theatre considered old fashioned at this point (quoted in Rutnin 142). As demonstrated in Chapter Two, although *lakhon rong* was significantly influenced by Western performing arts, to the point where the employment of Western orchestration and stories were common, it still could not compete with American musical films. Despite its hybridised nature, *lakhon rong* was still considered a part of the ethno-national product and, thus, no longer contained aspirational aspects like other ‘*farang* things’.

I contend that the decline of *lakhon rong* and, in fact, *lakhon* theatre in general, is likely due to the wider cultural supermarket available in urban Thailand, which exposed local subjects to cultural products from the wider shores, particularly American cultural products. In this way, local subjects consumed Western-style musical films directly without any degree of hybridisation from Thai practitioners. In other words, they were able to consume products produced directly from the ‘global’ standard, whereas *lakhon rong* appeared to be ‘Thai’ and, thus, old-fashioned. Tied with the elevated status of Anglo-American regions, it was not surprising that their cultural imperialism spread across and took over the popular culture of urban Thailand. Along with the trend of ‘preferring *farang* things’ came the emergence of Western dramatic arts in Thai universities.

---

<sup>19</sup> *Farang* is a Thai term used to refer to white Caucasians and all forms of cultural products associated with the race.

While private *lakhon rong* troupes became inactive by the late 1950s, it was in the mid-1960s that Western stage drama was reintroduced into Thai theatre, prompting interest at the university level. Stage drama in this case mostly referred to spoken plays from the West, which initially started as an additional activity for students in the English departments at Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, two top universities in Thailand. At Chulalongkorn University, Sodsai Pantoomkomol, who graduated from the United States in theatre arts, staged Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1964, leading to the establishment of the Department of Dramatic Arts to raise the standard of theatre in Thailand following the West's example in 1972 (Kerdarunsuksri 66). Similarly, at Thammasat University, Mattani Rutnin, a graduate from Wellesly College and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, introduced Theatre Studies as a part of the English Literature programme and, later, offered drama as a major subject in 1986 (ibid 67). Both universities would produce stage productions based on canonical pieces (e.g., Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Sophocles's *Oedipus*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), which were highly popular amongst university students and those interested in the arts and literature (Sukhee 63). Since these two universities, considered leading universities in Thailand, were the first to officially offer Western-based actor training, particularly in terms of acting techniques as taught in Western conservatoires (e.g., Stanislavski, Meisner, Strasberg), they sparked interest in and recognition of Western-style dramatic arts and produced many Thai theatre practitioners (some from the Faculty of Arts and others from involvement in university drama) who would use such training to shape contemporary Thai theatre up to the present day. Examples of such

practitioners include, but are by no means limited to Pornrat Damrung<sup>20</sup>, Sukanya Sompiboon<sup>21</sup> and Nikorn Saetang.<sup>22</sup>

The technical training adopted from recognised Western acting techniques and the canonical pieces (e.g., Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Sophocles's *Oedipus*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) that Pantoomkomol and Rutnin selected for their students underline how Anglo-American dramatic repertoires determined the globalised technical training and were perceived as the global standard to which Thai practitioners should aspire. This should not be a surprise since Pantoomkomol and Rutnin were professionally trained in Western conservatoires themselves and, therefore, were shaped by such repertoires. In this sense, it can be said that they developed an aesthetic cosmopolitanism from their professional training in the United States and the United Kingdom. As such, their intention to raise the standard of contemporary dramatic arts in Thailand by introducing Western theatre techniques and repertoires was likely shaped by the Anglo-American cultural industry which they perceived to be dominant in the theatre world. By distributing such Western performance techniques and theatre

---

<sup>20</sup> Also known by her students as “Khru Ooi,” Pornrat Damrung pioneered access to Thai theatre, both contemporary and traditional arts, by founding projects in youth theatre, educational theatre, community theatre, post-modern theatre, and multicultural theatre. Alongside her projects, she trained many important Thai theatre practitioners including Pradit Prasarttong (works include *Yak Tua Deang* and *Klab Ma Theud Wanthong*), Pichet Klunchun (works include *Phom Pen Yak* or *I Am A Demon* and *Nijinsaky Siam*), Sineenadh Keitprapai (works include *Biyo* and *Rachomon: Condominium*), and Nikorn Saetang (works include *Non Mai Lub* and *Rai Phamnuak*) who won the Silpathorn Award in 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010 respectively. Furthermore, she has helped develop small-scale theatre through the Bangkok Theatre Network and Bangkok Theatre Festival (Faculty of Arts 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Sukanya Sompiboon is a versatile theatre practitioner, playwright, and assistant professor at Chulalongkorn University. Amongst her creative works in the field of performing arts, she is arguably best-known for her contribution to contemporary *likay* and her involvement in the Anatta Theatre troupe (established in 2012) focusing on *lakhon rong* for contemporary audiences. Her passion in and first-hand experience in *likay* led to promotion of and experimentation with the art form, aiming to elevate the status of *likay* for local and international audiences. This is evident in her performances such as *Chan Ruk Ther Sameuhma Thuk Nati* (2015) at the Bangkok Theatre Festival and *Len Likay Play of My Life* (2017) written by Pradit Prasarttong as well as her staging *likay* based on Western playscripts. Her performances with the Anatta Theatre troupe include *Bantheuk Itsara* (2014), *Mungkorn Salad Kled* (2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016), and *Ruk Talerd Perdsakad* (2013, 2014 and 2016) (Wongwisetphaibul 2020, Faculty of Communication Arts 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Nikorn Saetang is a playwright, dramatist and actor specialising in small-scale and physical theatre. He won the Silpathorn Award in 2010. Initially, he worked with Dass Entertainment (discussed below), for whom he wrote plays such as *Maew Jom Khuan* and *Sad Krapong*. After leaving the company in 1998, he established Theatre 8x8 and went for further training in physical theatre at the renowned L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris. Upon his return, he has actively contributed to small-scale theatre in Thailand by producing spoken plays, physical theatre, and experimental theatre at the national and international levels. His notable works include *Khrungthep Naruk Nachang*, *Wan Dab Fun* and *Maenam Haeng Kwam Tai*. His productions are well-known for being minimalistic, low budget and featuring a small cast, stimulating audiences to actively decode and interpret the meanings on stage. Saetang also co-founded Bangkok Theatre Festival, which still operates until the present (as of 2022) (RCAC n.a., DNA Attitude 2018).

repertoires, these training programmes exposed students and audiences to foreign aesthetics derived from Western dramatic arts; thus, strengthening their stance on aesthetic cosmopolitanism. As a result, local assimilation and appreciation of Western dramatic repertoires were highly prominent amongst the educated class during this period.<sup>23</sup> As shall be further demonstrated in the case of Mejudhon's works and subsequent case studies, although Western dramatic traditions shaped the globalised training in Thailand, it also propelled local subjects to utilise such training in combination with local aesthetics in order to produce artistic works that were palatable for local Thai audiences.

In tandem with the rise of Western dramatic arts within universities, the number of imported musicals and plays underlined the domination of Anglo-American cultural products and how they became cultural capital amongst urban Thai audiences. In the 1980s, some hotels in Bangkok, notably the Montien Hotel, the leading hotel and entertainment spot at the time,<sup>24</sup> hosted Western-based performances at the Montientong Theatre, a cocktail-lounge style theatre inside the hotel. The early performances included light plays and musicals such as Charles Dyer's *Staircase*, Mart Crowley's *The Boys In The Band* and Alan Jay Lerner's *My Fair Lady* and later branched out to support smaller theatre troupes and new performers (Silpawattanatham 1993). Occasionally, they would stage a concert by West End and Broadway singers as well. The Montientong Theatre became highly popular to the point that it hosted about six stage productions per year and each production lasted about one to two months (which was considered a long performance for Thai theatre) (ibid). The theatre even established the first Thai theatre awards - the Golden Mask Award (*nagak thongkhum*) for Best Director and Best Actor/Actress in a stage production. This underlines the prominence of stage theatre and the venue itself as part of the Thai theatre scene at the time (Kerdarunsuksri 74). Meanwhile, in Chiangmai, international tours of Western musicals such as *South Pacific*, *West Side Story*, and *Grease* came to perform at the Kad Theatre.

---

<sup>23</sup> There were attempts to localise the narratives of such Western dramatic repertoires to be closer to Thai audiences by Mattani Rutnin as seen in her production titled *Butsaba Rim Thang E-san*, adapted from *My Fair Lady* where she localised Eliza Doolittle as a northeastern Thai (E-san) girl selling garlands at the Sanam Luang and the flower market in Bangkok (Kerdarunsuksri 67-68).

<sup>24</sup> The Montien Hotel was significant to Thai entertainment industry in the 1980s because it gave opportunities for unknown performers to perform at the hotel lounge and, subsequently, produced many now-famous Thai singers including Raewat Phuttinun and Anchalee Jongkhadikij. It also set up the Montientong Theatre, which was opened for interested theatre troupes and hosted performances from international artists. The theatre closed in 1943 due to a financial loss (Wongrujuwaranit 2020, Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2020).



Apart from productions at these venues, there were also other theatre groups that staged their performances in other spaces, especially at the Silpa Bhirasri Art Museum, Goethe Institute, AUA auditorium or universities' auditoriums. Some of the most popular and well-known theatre troupes who staged some musical productions during this period are Dass Entertainment and Troupe 28 (khanalakhon songpead). The former's notable musicals (active from 1986 – 2000) include *Rai Saensook* (1986 and 1987), *Ahphinihan Maemodfaed* (1989), and *Nang Phaya Ngukhao* (1999 and 2000). Today, some of the founding members of Dass Entertainment left for private businesses while others formed new troupes, such as the ongoing group Dreambox Theatre, which produces stage works such as *Khoogam The Musical* (2003), *Maenak The Musical* (2009) and the upcoming *Pinaikam Khong Ying Wikonjarit: A One-Woman Musical* (2022)), and 8x8 Theatre by Nikorn Seatang. The latter's most successful musical titled *Soo Fan Ahn Yingyai* (1987) adapted Dale Wasserman's musical *Man of La Mancha* (1965) and marked the first time in Thai theatre history that Thai practitioners directly bought an American musical and translated it into a full-scale musical to be performed by an all-Thai cast (The Showhopper 2022, Nagavajara 80-81). By the late 1990s, the troupe no longer produced new works and its members dispersed (Kerdarunsuksri 75).

These musical performances were referred to as *lakhon phleng*, musical drama, which was a translation for the term musical, and, for those who were more comfortable with the English language, musicals. Going to see such performances quickly became a popular form of entertainment amongst middle-class urban audiences in Thailand. This was considered the early days of live musicals for contemporary audiences, which were mainly imported musicals or adapted works from the West and mostly performed by practitioners who were not directly trained in musical theatre. In this sense, it can be said the taste of urban theatre-going audiences became increasingly Westernised, leaving even modernised forms of *lakhon* far behind. Thai theatre academic Chetana Nagajavara also remarked how by this time, the (urban) Thai society became “*farang*” enough to “absorb delicacies of Western arts” and that the aesthetics of Western-style musicals were already somewhat familiar and absorbed by Thai performers and audiences (81). Furthermore, this indicates that such imported performances were perceived as aspirational amongst the Thai middle-class audience, partially owing to the cultural nobility associated with products from the West. Therefore, the popularity of such performances indicates the increasing stance of aspirational cosmopolitanism amongst audiences who wished to consume ‘world-class’ products deemed

valid amongst Anglo-American societies (since the imported performances were often well-known and successful theatre pieces in the West) and, subsequently, amongst the higher social milieu in Thailand as well.

With the increase in Western-style productions to meet demands, popular theatre in urban Thailand soon became saturated with spoken plays and musicals imported from the West or translated from Western texts. Such proliferation led to a new trend in popular Thai theatre: staging Western-style performances based on Thai stories. The change from Western-based stories to Thai-based stories here is worth some unpicking. On the simplest level, this can be interpreted as the point at which Thai theatre became over-saturated with Western-based performances, triggering the audience's demands for new styles of performance. Therefore, by using styles and aesthetics derived from Western performance traditions, which were proven to be popular amongst middle-class audiences, local practitioners created new performances by using Thai stories to enhance the attraction of their performances. Although this carries some truth on a basic level, I contend that the change was more strongly propelled by the rapid intensification of globalisation, self-reflexive transformations of local practitioners, and the national campaign to promote Thai heritage. The demand for Thai-based stories and the cultural promotion campaign progressed in parallel with what the Malaysian theatre scholar Krishen Jit calls the "decolonising theatre" movement across Southeast Asia (Kerdarunsuksri 129). This movement saw Southeast Asian theatre practitioners adopt performance aesthetics and techniques from Western dramatic arts and apply them to their ethno-national art forms. Through such cross-cultural engagement, local practitioners strove to liberate themselves from Western-oriented theatre by finding their own identity and ways to highlight their ethno-national art forms using Western performance aesthetics (ibid 130). This movement was particularly evident in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand (ibid 129).

Compared to the period of *lakhon rong* examined in the previous chapter, the circulation of Anglo-American cultural products in this period increased substantially. This was evidenced in the rise of Hollywood films that contributed to the decline of *lakhon rong* and other types of modern *lakhon* and the domination of Western plays and musicals in popular theatre and theatre studies in urban Thailand. This pointed to a rapid intensification of globalisation, which expanded and somewhat democratised the cultural supermarket in urban Thailand. The increase in Anglo-American cultural products that permeated popular culture led to worrying

signs of cultural homogenisation, leading to nostalgic feelings for ‘Thai’ ways of life and several campaigns for cultural promotion launched by national authorities and private organisations around 1989-1995 (Suveeranon and Tejapeera 36-37).<sup>25</sup> This prompted local subjects to look back to their cultural roots and vernacular Thainess.<sup>26</sup>

Another factor that propelled the change from demanding Western-based to Thai-based scripts, as I contend, was the self-reflexive transformation from consuming, studying, and practising Western plays and musicals among Thai practitioners. In parallel with the rise of Western dramatic arts, Thai theatre practitioners, especially those who were trained in or exposed to Western theatre programmes, began to produce stage productions based on Western source materials. As they gained understanding and experience from working on such materials as well as exposure to a number of imported Western plays, musicals, and concerts, they became familiar with the aesthetics derived from such cultural products. Their understanding of and familiarity with Western performance aesthetics expanded their artistic visions and, perhaps, their confidence in creating original works based on Western dramatic art forms. Without relying on Western scripts, they were able to re-examine available local source materials through the perspectives of Western dramatic arts, aiming to achieve local uniqueness.

As such, the phenomenon of returning to the cultural root indicates that more intensified global flows and active consumption of foreign cultural products do not necessarily lead to cultural homogenisation. This is because, as Octobre and Cicchelli explain, when a subject invests in the consumption of foreign cultural products, their worldview is indeed shaped by cosmopolitan aesthetics, but it does not negate their feelings of nationalism and patriotism (33). Such aesthetics emerged from the interaction of local and the broader community beyond their national boundaries, which, as Delanty explains, can lead to multiculturalism and re-orientation in self-understanding (150). In the case of Thai theatre practitioners during this period, their aesthetics shaped by Western dramatic arts led to their attempt to re-examine and understand their local dramatic arts.

---

<sup>25</sup> Examples included the government’s *pi ronnarong wattanatham thai* (discussed below) and Phanu Inkawat’s article “Hot dog, Hamburger, and Apple Pie” published in *B.A.D Awards* (1995).

<sup>26</sup> Vernacular Thainess is defined by Kasien Tejapeera as diluted Thainess, signifying Thai ways that exists in everyday life context and does not necessarily tie to the solid cultural root, national prestige or invented traditions like traditional Thai culture. As such vernacular Thainess usually carries inferior status to traditional Thainess (Suveeranon and Tejapeera 36).

The use of Thai materials in stage productions was prompted by the period of *pi ronnarong wattanatham thai* or the Years of Thai Cultural Preservation from 1994-97 (Kerdarunsuksri 123). This policy sought to strengthen and promote Thai cultural identity against the rapid flows of globalisation in modern Thai society and was a part of the cultural promotion canon mentioned above. Of course, the ‘Thai’ cultural identity that the government aimed to foster was strongly linked with the past and numerous forms of invented traditions that were employed to present Thainess. Traditional Thai performing arts, particularly Thai dance and music and traditional literary works by well-known authors, were amongst the heuristic tools in promoting this so-called ‘Thainess’. Consequently, this policy and the saturated market of Western shows caused many Thai practitioners to look back on traditional or well-known Thai stories and employ elements from traditional Thai performing arts in their original productions. One notable figure who skilfully experimented with fusing traditional Thai performing arts and stories with Western performative techniques to create a contemporary *lakhon phleng* is Patravadi Mejudhon (ibid 77, Diamond 366).

### **The Significance of Patravadi Mejudhon**

The works of Patravadi Mejudhon sought to make traditional Thai arts more relevant to the contemporary audience and establish a creative dialogue with practitioners in the performing arts traditions beyond her local sphere, leading to more active hybridisation of performative elements from both cultural entities (demonstrated later in this section and section three). Executing such a hybridised artistic work requires a practitioner’s extensive knowledge of particular cultural repertoires. This is the case of Mejudhon whose experience in both Eastern and Western performing arts is extensive.

Her background indicates her experience in and familiarity with both traditional Thai and Western performing arts. Born into a well-to-do and cultured family in Bangkok, Mejudhon grew up surrounded by Thai performing arts and traditions. Her mother and nanny used to work in the palace in the late Sixth Reign and encouraged Mejudhon in learning traditional Thai dance and singing as well as allowing her to watch all kinds of *lakhon*, particularly *likay* and performances by the Fine Arts Department (Poovaphiromkwan 56-58). Such training built a strong foundation of traditional Thai performing arts and encouraged her appreciation of them from a young age. At the age of twelve, she went to study at Micklefield

School in England and, later, pursued a business degree in North Carolina, United States. During her years in England and the States, she was exposed to various kinds of Western performing arts. Mejudhon stated that she actively took part in a choir, piano lessons and spoken plays, notably Shakespeare's (Department of Cultural Promotion 2020). This was where she started to develop an understanding of Western performing arts and began to acquire the technical skills needed to participate in them. After dropping out of business school, she pursued acting and modelling at the Pasadena Playhouse, which was where she gained professional training in dramatic arts and experience as a professional model in the States.

Upon her return to Thailand, her extensive career began with modelling for famous clothes shops and setting up the first professional modelling school in Thailand and, later, branched out into film and television. Mejudhon's work was to transform the performance industry and standardise the technical training for modelling and filming in Thailand as shaped by Western performance traditions. One good example is when she initiated new ways of working on sets, though not necessarily deliberately. Arriving on set for the film "*Mai Mi Sawan Samrub Khun (No Heaven For You)*," Mejudhon anticipated that all actors would have their lines memorised and rehearsed before filming, just as she experienced during her years abroad. However, this was not the case as Thai actors still relied on a prompter who would tell the actor every single line while filming. She refused to use a prompter and stuck to the working ethics she acquired from her training. Although her way was perceived by the crew to be strange at first, it slowly set the working standard for actors in the film industry (Poovaphiromkwan 78-80). Her establishment of the first modelling school and working ethics for actors demonstrate that she was a mediator who shaped the cosmopolitan sphere in Bangkok by bringing aesthetics from the wider shores to the local sphere. Again, this did not lead to cultural homogenisation but stimulation of the Thai cultural scene, resulting in the re-evaluation of existing ways of working and the work produced. The efficiency of her ways of working and her technical training was also partially recognised by her winning the Best Actress award from the *tukkata thong* committee in 1974 for the aforementioned film despite it being her first official film role.

Later, her working experience in New York significantly shaped her perceptions and work ethics as a theatre practitioner, underlining how her worldview was reflexively transformed by immersing herself in American musical theatre. This is best demonstrated in episodes

eighteen and nineteen of her documentary called *Khui Kab Khru (Lek)* where she talked about her realisation that she needed to improve as a performer and singer, leading to her moving to New York and pursuing Broadway-style singing lessons. The following snippets of the interview clearly illustrate her self-reflexive transformation. She stated that the creative teams that she worked with in New York “were very strict with time” and “were very particular with details” (ibid). She further explained that “everything is the real deal, they’re actually professional unlike in Thailand where they often do many takes” (ibid). She also said that the ways of working in Thailand were very easy, which made her realise that home was the most comfortable place for her. Yet, she remarked that “if we (i.e., the Thais) want to compete with those outside, we need to rethink and redo things” (ibid).

These statements indicate that by working with practitioners in New York, Mejudhon’s perception of the ways of working and the professionalism involved was altered, causing her to realise the difference in levels of theatre in Thailand and the States, specifically New York. As Octobre and Cicchelli point out, despite a wider cultural supermarket available in urban areas across the world, there are often specific geographical areas that dominate the particular cultural field, providing “the transnational universal standards specific to their generation” (33). In this case, her labelling practitioners in New York as ‘the real deal’ indicates that the standard of American musical theatre was high and deemed legitimate. Such transnational standards combined with her transformed perception led to her re-orientation of existing Thai theatre, evidenced in her suggestion to “rethink and redo things” to strive to be on par with such standards. Furthermore, by having cosmopolitan taste and investing in the consumption of foreign cultural products, a subject still values cultural products produced within their local sphere (ibid). This was evidenced in her comments on the Thai industry as being most comfortable and possessing a more friendly atmosphere (Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2020). As shall be further demonstrated, by recognising values of both aesthetics and the aspirational standards set by American musical theatre, Mejudhon drew upon the work ethic and learning experiences she gained from her time in New York to skilfully combine local aesthetics with the beyond.

One of the projects that I consider to be the most important in *lakhon phleng* is her one-woman show *An Evening with Patravadi* (1983). It was the first Broadway-style concert performed by a Thai artist in Thailand. The idea for the show was initiated by Arthur Faria, an American choreographer (1944 – present) who choreographed several Broadway musicals

including *Ain't Misbehaving* (1978 and 1988), *Broadway Follies* (1981) and *Lena Horne: The Lady And Her Music* (1981). Telling Mejudhon that there was no one-woman musical in the style of *Lena Horne* in Thailand, Faria suggested that she created a musical that mixed Eastern and Western aesthetics, partially because he used to study traditional Thai dance in Thailand (ibid). The entire creative process was created in New York by a local and experienced creative team and Mejudhon. When she contacted sponsors in Thailand to stage her show, no one wanted to take her on. She was told that “Thai people only watch *farang* concerts, they don't want to watch Thai people perform, no one would be interested” (ibid). This statement, which Mejudhon affirmed was true at the time, underscored the high status of Western cultural products and how they dominated the performing arts in Thailand, for only performances by *farang* were deemed worth seeing. Luckily, by convincing one local association to sponsor her performance as a fund-raising event for a charitable cause instead of a commercial show, she was able to stage her performance.

The show was in high demand and was extended for seven performances despite the original intention to stage just two performances. The impact of her show on (middle class and above) Bangkok society was significant because this was the first time Thai audiences saw that a Thai performer could offer a full-scale Broadway-style performance, showcasing a collaboration between American and Thai artists. As shall be demonstrated, it also indicated Mejudhon's position as an ambivalence that enabled her to challenge the dominant Anglo-American musical theatre. The show featured a set of original and popular Thai songs and English language songs taken from famous American musicals and popular music. Some songs and interludes were rearranged, hybridising Thai and Western styles. The impact of the collaboration can be demonstrated by the sequence based on the musical *The King and I* and the song “Slow Hand”, which was by the American R&B group The Pointer Sisters.

Having performed as an ensemble in the production of *The King and I* in New York, Mejudhon introduced the context of this musical before proceeding to the sequence (see clip 1 in Appendix II):

This musical is about an Englishwoman who served as a teacher in the reign of King Rama IV, and she boasted in her show—in her book—that she taught *everything* that we know (her emphasis in the show).

(Mejudhon 1981)

She further related her experience:

When the director saw my face, they said that this one was *great*, and they put me in what they called a *lakhon Thai outfit* and they taught me how to dance *lakhon Thai* (her emphasis in the show).

(ibid)

When the spotlight shone on her, Mejudhon was wearing what seemed to be a copy of a Thai dance outfit, but with inaccurate details and aesthetics, for the colours were too bold and contrasting and the *sabai*, the over-shoulder shawl, was out of place with the style of the outfit. The two American dancers kept putting a not-so-delicate *chada*, headgear, on her head abruptly and adjusting the positions of her arms and hands to do a ‘Thai’ dance. Eventually, Mejudhon executed a dance sequence using the positions of a ‘Thai’ dance that she learned from the production such as jumping on one leg with one flexed foot in the air and an odd-looking *tang wong* hand gesture.<sup>27</sup> Despite her comical and sarcastic takes on the musical, she explained that, regardless of inaccuracies in the show, the American team was aware of them and attempted to represent the “Westerner’s imagination (of Thailand)” rather than showing “the national history of Thailand” (ibid). She also said that the musical featured many enjoyable moments and beautiful songs, leading to her performing the song “We Kiss in the Shadow” in the way it was originally written in the musical *The King and I*.

Looking through the lens of cultural hybridity, this example resonates with Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry. He explains that once a subject becomes a mimicry of the dominators, they neither belong to their native subjects nor the dominators. It is their articulation of ambivalence that gives the subject the power to challenge, “subvert and reappropriate dominant discourses” (Bhabha 2, Stockhammer 5). By learning to be a Thai and to do Thai things as inscribed by foreigners, she offered mimicry of Western stage performers who attempted to play a ‘Thai’ character. She hid the traditional Thai dance skills embedded in her and assimilated the foreign way, or what she called *rum thai baeb farang* (Westerners’ style of traditional Thai dance). Once mastered, she became a mimic who was able to

---

<sup>27</sup> *Tang wong* is one of the basic hand gestures in traditional Thai dance; a dancer put four fingers (index finger to the pinkie) close together with the thumb tucked in towards the palm. The four fingers are pointing upwards and the fingertips are bent slightly backwards.



produce slippages by drawing on her training in traditional Thai dance and this Thai-inspired contemporary Western dance. In this piece, the slippages subverted the role of the passively dominated, allowing Mejudhon to become the dominator of the material by asserting her position of ambivalence.

The reappropriation of mimicry is also evident in her treatment of the song “Slow Hand,” which was originally a song by The Pointer Sisters from their eighth album *Black & White* (1981). In the introduction of the song, Mejudhon stated:

I have shown you Thai things that were misappropriated by *farang*. Now I will take a *farang* thing—actual *farang* thing—to perform in a Thai way, but not in a misappropriated way, in a proper way.

(ibid)

She performed this song (see clip 2 in Appendix II) with Faria who, at the beginning, asked her to walk in the *farang* style which she demonstrated as a hip walk, a basic jazz dance move. Then he asked her to walk in the Thai style, at which point she maintained the same footwork as the hip walk, but added the up and down motion, rigid upper body movement and delicate hand gestures of Thai traditional dance. This style later became the signature throughout the song, which occurred from hybridising jazz dance with traditional Thai dance. The choreography featured prominent hand gestures from traditional Thai dance that inscribed the new meaning for ‘slow hand’ in the song, and fused with jazzy walks and turns. Faria also did the same choreography and executed it diagonally behind Mejudhon, signifying the position of male and female characters in traditional Thai dance.

In this way, her show demonstrated that a subject who was driven by Anglo-American cultural products could be subverted to become one who actively harnessed such products to integrate with Thai aesthetics and decorum to present their artistic identity. This resonates with Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, who perceive such a process of integration as positive contamination in theatre, for they can de-establish “the power of the dominant culture” (5). For local audiences, her performance not only showed that a Thai practitioner could deliver entertainment strongly shaped by her experiences of Broadway musicals but also demonstrated further possibilities of hybridising foreign aesthetics with local Thai ones, maintaining a deep understanding of both entities.

Hybridising different cultural entities while having deep knowledge of them has since become one of Mejudhon's main principles as a theatre practitioner. This is evidenced in episode nineteen of her documentary:

If we truly know things, we'll be able to integrate them because it's in your blood. [...] and do so with respect, not out of a desire to show off, to be bold or to look down on old things. Do it with respect and accuracy.

(Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2020)

She later concluded:

So, remember that if your core is solid, then do it. But if not, you need to study it further or go find an expert who can do it. Never ever do anything without truly understanding it, as this will cause damages to the arts of others, and ours too.

(ibid)

As shall be demonstrated in section three, this principle led to her collaboration with international and Thai artists to deliver the core aesthetics of different cultural identities via the art form of *lakhon phleng*. It also enabled her to push the boundary of how traditional Thainess could be re-read and integrated with modern art forms from other traditions whilst preserving its core values. Drawing on her familiarity with Western performing arts, Mejudhon staged Broadway-style performances at the Montientong, and eventually started her own theatre company and performing arts school. In tandem with the demands for Thai stories and the government's cultural promotion policy, Mejudhon staged several critically acclaimed musical productions based on traditional Thai literary works during the 1990s.

Although Mejudhon's intention was to promote Thai national heritage by making Thai classical literature more appealing to younger audiences, her musicals were constructed upon a complex degree of cultural entanglement across performative elements—singing, music, dancing, and storytelling—much more so than in the works of her predecessors. In fact, through her constant collaboration with international artists, the transcultural exchange

between local and international cultures met closer towards the middle ground without a significant degree of asymmetrical hybridisation. Thus, Mejudhon's musicals demonstrate a new kind of hybridised aesthetics in *lakhon phleng*, featuring balanced integration of performance techniques from both traditional Thai, Western, and other Southeast Asian arts.

Comparing Mejudhon's musicals to the *lakhon rong* as practised by Prince Narathip and Phran Bun, it is noticeable that the works of the latter practitioners featured less hybridity. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, in Prince Narathip's style, elements from Western performing arts, particularly operetta and ballet, were employed as a performance structure to modernise the Thai *lakhon*. Such elements are mainly manifested in the show's pace, the balance between the performers and the orchestration, and the performers' roles in singing and acting instead of just dancing. Beyond this, there was little synthesis, especially in terms of choreography (due to his attempts to be as naturalistic as possible) and vocal technique. Later, in Phran Bun's works, the fusion of Thai and Western performance aesthetics was developed further by incorporating Western orchestration and Western pop-style singing. These were mixed with some characteristics from Thai traditional singing, particularly the *uan*, and selected Thai instruments as the main pieces to soar above the Western orchestration. Whilst Phran Bun's *lakhon rong* included some *rabam* dance (folk dance) and a group choreography for the chorus girls, these did not feature many technical movements from either the Thai or Western sides. Mejudhon's aesthetics thus constituted a development in the technical hybridity of *lakhon phleng*.

Before I demonstrate the entanglement of aesthetics in Mejudhon's musicals, it is important to address one of the key foundations of her musical works. As Mejudhon's primary concern was to bring traditional Thai literature back to modern Thai audiences, retaining refined literary language functioned at the core of her works. As most of her productions were based on literary works by kings or other royals (e.g., *Lilit Phra Lo* and *Inao* were written by King Rama II and *Ngo Pa* was written by King Rama V), the source texts contained poetic and archaic language that required modern readers to study in order to understand. In fact, many of these literary works are still a part of the school curriculum in Thailand. Therefore, her productions featured lyrics and text adapted, or directly taken, from the original texts, which were often in poetic verse. Only some dialogue and comic scenes featured everyday language as spoken in the period in which the musical was set. Due to her priority being to bridge traditional Thai literature with modern audiences, the narratives were mostly linear and

remained largely the same as in the original texts, but incorporated songs and dance and other storytelling modes (discussed below) to speed up the story and make the characters come alive on stage. Musical numbers mostly served to introduce settings and characters, relate the characters' internal monologues and occasionally dialogues between characters. Choosing these works and retaining the poetic language and the narrative structure reflected Mejudhon's attempt to present the beauty of the Thai language and poetic styles and make such works more appealing to the modern Thai audience through various theatrical means such as relating the story through songs, soundscapes, and interpretive dance. Supporting this, Mejudhon stated that she was inspired by watching countless performances of Shakespeare's works in the United Kingdom, for the same stories could be presented in so many different ways, stimulating the minds of children and adults (Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2020).

To demonstrate how Mejudhon utilised the art form of musical theatre to connect classical literary works with local audiences, resulting in complex hybridisation of performative elements, I will use the examples of her two productions *Inao Choraka* and *Phra Lo*. The former demonstrates Mejudhon's early attempt to present Thainess through a full-scale, two-act musical, proving that traditional repertoires could be made relevant and appealing in the modern context. The latter indicates how Mejudhon pushed the boundaries of bridging traditional and modern repertoires even further by presenting how Thai heritage could be read anew while maintaining its core, demonstrating how practitioners of both Thai and Western technical training could hone their crafts by crossing over performance traditions. Furthermore, this musical would go on to several international tours in North America<sup>28</sup>, indicating its recognition in Thailand and beyond.

### ***Inao Choraka***

*Inao Choroka* is a two-act rock-opera musical, directed by Patravadi Mejudhon with music and lyrics by Bruce Gaston and Worawut Jaemsa-ad, and choreography by Manos Meejamras. Originally a tale popularised in Java and the Malay peninsula, the epic story has been well-known in Thailand since the Ayutthaya kingdom and revised many times (Kerdarunsuksri 142). The most famous version is the one written by King Rama II, which

---

<sup>28</sup> After its premiere in 2009, Mejudhon took *Phra Lo* to perform in Canada and several cities in the United States including New York, Washington DC, San Francisco, and Houston (Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2020).

served as the source text for the musical. The story follows an accomplished Javanese prince named Inao who is engaged with Butsaba, a princess of another royal family, but takes another princess named Jintara as his wife instead. Later, Inao falls in love with Butsaba, who is then given to Choraka whose appearance and birth are significantly inferior to hers, leading to numerous problems that threaten the stability of each royal family.

The complex entanglement of aesthetics from Thai, Indonesian, and Western performing arts in *Inao Choraka* underlines Mejudhon's core principle of treating each performing arts tradition with respect, care, and understanding. Mejudhon took the choreographer Meejumras and a group of dancers to study Western contemporary dance in Canada. Then, she and Meejamras went to study Balinese and Javanese performing arts at the Sekolah Tinggi Seni Institute (STSI) in Indonesia. There, they studied the forms, their significance to Indonesian history, and the local culture. When they returned to Thailand and trained their dancers based on Mejamras' choreography, Mejudhon also hired Sri Hastanto, an Indonesian artist, as a production consultant to oversee the mask work and ensure that elements from Indonesian cultures displayed on stage were correct and appropriate.

The choreography for *Inao Choraka* integrated traditional Thai, Javanese, Balinese and Western dance. In the overture, the most notable characteristics were the flexed feet of the dancers and the *ten sao* movement (bent knees facing outwards in a square position leading to the upward and downward movement). The flexed footwork is one of the most iconic positions in Thai classical dance, which contrasts with pointed footwork in ballet, jazz and contemporary (with exceptions in certain styles). Similarly, the *ten sao* movement is one of the most fundamental movements in *khon*, a classical Thai masked dance, and is found in all types of *khon* characters. In the musical, the *ten sao* was used to transition into a different formation and travel across the stage. When travelling, though, dancers glided through in the galloping style commonly found in ballet, while keeping the feet flexed. Sometimes, the *ten sao* in the galloping style transitioned into an attitude leap and multiple barrel turns, both with flexed feet. Other times it transitioned into a glissade (without ending in the fifth position), leading to an *assemblé en l'air* or a *developpé* movement, both with flexed feet as well. This demonstrates the encounter of and negotiation between Thai (i.e., flexed feet and *ten sao*) and Western (i.e., ballet and jazz movement) aesthetics, resulting in a hybridised aesthetic featuring elements that are simultaneously contrasting and complementing one another. This is evidenced in the ways dancers executed the *ten sao* with ballet transitional

movement, and classical ballet techniques with a flexed foot and rigid body movement of *ten sao*.

The choreography for female dancers usually featured gestures from Javanese dance, notably hand gestures, the position of the head, and holding the hips at specific angles. The dancers also used their long skirts as a part of the dance, which is a common style found in Javanese dance. Such gestures were later fused with Western contemporary style floorwork, turn, and fluid movement. In the scenes which featured the character Choraka, a similar style of integration was present, but the Javanese elements were replaced with Balinese ones, particularly the Barong dance, indicating Choraka's raw and unsophisticated physicality as an islander (Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2020). These examples demonstrate how the choreography employed physicality from classical Thai dance and Javanese dance as the base and used classical ballet and Western contemporary dance techniques to complete the movement. The realised choreography, therefore, came across as neither classical Thai nor Indonesian nor Western dance but resonated with the aesthetics of all three. In this way, the choreography of *Inao Choraka* is a hybrid of such aesthetics.

The score also contained hybridised aesthetics since it was composed by Bruce Gaston whose expertise lay in both Western and Thai classical music. As the story is set in Java, the music featured the prominent sound of the *angklung*, a traditional Sundanese instrument. The sound of *angklung* was employed as the ornament on top of the Western and Thai orchestras, particularly in the forest scenes, to give the flavour of Javanese music. The main orchestrations were divided between a solely Thai *piphat* orchestra and a *piphat* orchestra with Western electric guitar, drum set, and keyboard. Most of the time, the three musical aesthetics were combined with the *piphat* orchestra playing the base melody, the electric guitar and drum set taking the running melody, and the *angklung* providing the echoing effects at the top.

In terms of singing, the poetic lyrics were realised in either *phleng luuk khruung* style for sentimental songs, which was somewhat similar to the style used in Phran Bun's works discussed previously, or a pop-rock style which featured some growling vocal work and throwing the voice forward without vibrato. Overall, the vocal technique was executed with a degree of throat contraction, resulting in a rounder quality in comparison to the nasal and rigid qualities found in traditional Thai singing. Mejudhon stated that the reason behind using

a pop-rock style was to represent the youthfulness and rebelliousness of Inao who, in the literature, was aged about sixteen. Equating Inao with contemporary Thai youths made the story relatable to contemporary audiences, showing that this character from classical literature also faced common problems and possessed common physical gestures (e.g., arrogant mannerisms, shoulder shrugs) with contemporary youths.

Apart from the hybridised score and choreography, the theatrical modes employed to tell the story were clearly derived from both Thai and Western theatrical techniques. The Western theatrical techniques were manifested in forms of advanced special effects (e.g., lighting on stage, distorted voice echoing in the theatre, and a ‘flying’ angel on stage), realistic sets (e.g., a ‘real’ lotus pond on stage where the actors could splash water at one another), and seamless transitions between each scene. The traditional Thai elements were expressed in the forms of *nang yai*, a large shadow puppet, and *nang talung*, a Southern Thai shadow puppet (Kerdarunsuksri 147), which also shared similarities with the Indonesian *wayang kulit*. In some parts, the puppet work was imitated by actual performers behind a screen. Another element from traditional Thai aesthetics is the use of an off-stage chorus performing *khab sea pha*, a recitation of verses done in traditional Thai singing. This element is an essential part of traditional *lakhon* and *khon*.

Through such hybridisation, it is clear that Mejudhon was determined to deliver aesthetics appropriate for the narrative and the art forms used, thus highlighting her principles of treating each cultural tradition with respect and care. It also demonstrated her strategy of bringing classical literature back to modern audiences through the art form of musical theatre, which carried the status of a Western and, therefore, modern art form. As contextualised at the beginning of this chapter, Western dramatic arts were deemed highly popular and aspirational for audiences of this time, while traditional Thai performing arts were perceived as old-fashioned. As such, presenting traditional repertoires in the style of musical theatre supported her intention of targeting younger Thai and urban audiences. It worked against the prejudice that such works were outdated and difficult to understand. As mentioned, this prejudice partially occurred because many of these works were written in archaic language and were, and still are, compulsory parts of school examinations. Mejudhon also acknowledged this, saying that “they (i.e., younger generations) don’t know why they have to read old books (i.e., classical literary works) that they don’t understand [...] They’re not from their generation” (Patravadi Hua Hin Channel 2020). Thus, her works functioned as a bridge

to classical Thai literature for the younger audience, aiming to spark their interests in classical work and, thus, promote Thai heritage. In this way, Mejudhon made use of her ambivalent position to create a distinctive artistic work that attracted an audience through the power of the West whilst satisfying them with cultural heritage from Southeast Asia.

As *Inao Choraka* showed that traditional Thainess could be made meaningful and appealing in a modern context through the art form of musical theatre, Mejudhon's production of *Phra Lo* went further by stimulating audiences to think of Thai heritage as a fluid entity that could be read anew while maintaining its core, challenging the notion of traditional Thainess fixed in the past.

### ***Phra Lo***

*Lilit Phra Lo* is one of the most highly regarded Thai works written in *lilit*, a Thai poetic form. Mejudhon's musical adaptation *Phra Lo* is her only work that has been continuously refined since its spoken play version in 1986 and its subsequent North American tour up until its recent restaging in 2019, which serves as the main material for the vocal analysis here. Similar to the story of *Inao*, its literary form has been revived many times with the most famous version written by King Rama II. It tells a tragic love story of a handsome prince named Phra Lodilokrat, known in short as Phra Lo, who is bewitched by two princesses named Phra Pheaun and Phra Phaeng from another kingdom. The three of them fall hard for one another and decide to stay together, but the princesses' family disapproves, leading to violence between both families. The princesses use themselves to protect Phra Lo, but the three of them eventually become victims of the feud between the two families. Adapted from King Rama II's work, this musical production of *Phra Lo* was directed by Mejudhon with the score composed by Ahnant Nakkhong. Many numbers were rearranged from existing Thai traditional tunes written in the reign of King Rama V and those written by Montri Tramote, a Thai musician who played an important role in composing *phleng thai sakol*, a style of song that mixed Thai and Western music (discussed in Chapter Seven), in the later development of *lakhon rong*. The international artist in collaboration in this production was Kyle Dillingham, "the world's famous fiddler from the United States" (Dillingham 2022), who played the role of Phra Lo and contributed to the music score.



The production of *Phra Lo*, as I contend, was a step forward in reappropriating and defining Thai heritage in the context of modern performing arts. Although its base was still musical theatre, the show became increasingly more avant-garde. As shall be further demonstrated below, many storytelling methods disrupted one another: the use of soundscape and a Thai-style chorus on stage, interpretive dance, highly hybridised classical Thai and Western vocal techniques, and even Phra Lo playing violin on a skateboard. The sets and special effects seemed not to be a priority and, thus, were kept to a minimum. Given her intention to make classical literature more relevant and easier to understand for modern audiences, staging her musicals with an estrangement effect<sup>29</sup> would seemingly hinder her goal, for such an effect required audiences to actively decode signs on stage rather than be more passive as per conventional musical theatre. Nevertheless, I contend that the reason why Mejudhon staged her musical in this style was due to her attempt to demonstrate further possibilities in incorporating traditional Thai repertoires with modern art forms. By making the audience aware that they were watching a performance, they were thus stimulated to see that traditional Thainess could exist in the modern world without necessarily being fixed and untouchable in some faraway past. Rather, it could be compatible with many performance techniques, Thai and beyond, without losing its core elements or values.

Vocal techniques that required performers to have strong training in both classical Thai, opera, and modern musical theatre singing also demonstrate Mejudhon's attempt to bridge the traditional and modern realms together. In doing so, she provided opportunities for practitioners to hone their skills from multiple training techniques in order to find their distinctive styles. The integration of multiple techniques to produce distinctive styles was clearly illustrated in the songs "Phleng Sadudi Ayutthaya (tribute song to Ayutthaya)" and "Lao Duang Dokmai".

Sung in poetic verses, the vocal techniques employed in "Phleng Sadudi Ayutthaya" constantly hovered between contemporary musical theatre styles and Thai traditional singing (see clip 4 in Appendix II).<sup>30</sup> The performer's vocal onset was in a contracted position throughout the song, resulting in broad, powerful, projecting, and resonating vocal qualities.

---

<sup>29</sup> Estrangement effect, also known as the alienation effect or *Verfremdungseffekt*, is a term coined by Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). Generally, it refers to theatrical techniques that distance the audience from the characters in the performance and, thus, purposefully make them constantly aware that they are watching a performance rather than asking them to identify with the 'real' world on stage.

<sup>30</sup> The singing techniques are discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

The placement was also noticeably forward and occasionally twangy. These were enhanced by a horizontal mouth shape with varying degrees of jaw dropping, which was in sharp contrast with the rigid jaw position and horizontal mouth shape in Thai traditional singing. These qualities are stapled to contemporary musical theatre techniques, which strongly emphasise a projected sound produced from the masked area. Occasionally, the performer employed yelping and belting techniques to achieve the air of powerfulness and sacredness of the lyrical meaning. The end of each phrase was often executed in a straight tone followed by deliberate vibrato with consistent oscillation of vocal folds, a style commonly found in most modern musical theatre in the West.

With the onsets and mouth shape based on Western contemporary musical theatre technique, the performer sang the *uan*, resulting in a broader, smoother, and much less nasal sound than the original technique in traditional Thai singing. Sometimes, the performer would contract the throat and elongate the open vowel of that word before deliberately ‘squeezing’ the sound to achieve the sudden flavour of *uan* in the original style. Another notable characteristic from Thai traditional singing employed in this song was the obvious switch between the modal and head registers and the pushing motion at the end of a sentence. It is noticeable that the performer deliberately added the switch and the pushing motion to add the flavour of traditional Thai singing, as these techniques only appeared in certain parts.

The song “Lao Duang Dokmai”, which was based on a traditional Thai song, was executed in an operatic style (see clip 5 in Appendix II). The performer whose professional training is in Western classical singing performed the song engaging her mix to head registers to deliver the high notes throughout the song. Due to the operatic style, the throat was always contracted, and the sound shape was very ‘tall’ and delivered from the performer’s squillo. The poetic lyric was executed with constant operatic-style vibrato and modifying vowels. The performer often sustained the first open vowel of each word and quickly closed the ending consonant only at the very end. Basically, the performer emphasised vowels more than the crisp and clear consonants of each word. This is a common characteristic in Western classical singing, which emphasises vowel sounds rather than hard consonants like in Thai traditional singing or crisp consonants like in contemporary musical theatre singing. On top of the operatic-style base, the performer employed a clear *uan* pattern to glide through many words, creating a traditional Thai song aesthetic.

Apart from the soloist, a chorus harmonised an *uan* section in open vowels and constant vibrato. The open vowels and vibrato are techniques borrowed from Western aesthetics to make the *uan* compatible with the operatic style of the solo part. Other notable hybridised vocal techniques were used in other songs such as the long *uan* section in an operatic style with a flavour of R&B produced by using an exasperated tone and relaxed pronunciation. There were also siren vocal effects, a rapping section, an acapella, and soundscapes performed live by the chorus (mostly in the song “Lao Joi”).

These examples demonstrate that the vocal techniques in *Phra Lo* featured the complex technical integration of vocal techniques, which required the performers to have professional training in both Thai and Western singing techniques. This is considered a leap in technical hybridisation from the vocal styles used in *lakhon rong* and, in fact, in her production of *Inao*. The techniques in this musical employed Western contemporary musical theatre and opera as the main base for vocal production (e.g., vocal onsets, throat contraction, mouth shape). Then the techniques from traditional Thai singing were executed using this base. Although the Thai techniques were built on top of Western foundations, the characteristics were noticeably in contrast to the Western ones, resulting in distinctive vocal aesthetics. In this way, this musical performance also demonstrates how Thai performers could master both Thai and Western singing techniques and crossover between the two, producing their unique identity and, thus, taking ownership of their craft. This underlines that the globalised training of Western performance techniques led to further glocalisation and hybridisation amongst Thai practitioners rather than assimilation.

The mix of disruptive Thai and Western theatrical forms employed as storytelling modes in *Phra Lo* signifies Mejudhon’s attempt to stimulate the audience to think of Thai heritage beyond the boundary of fixed traditional repertoires. The notable Thai forms in this musical included the imitation of *nang yai*, a Thai shadow puppet, by performers behind the big screen, and the use of chorus and singers narrating the events on stage as in traditional *lakhon*. The Western modes of theatrical expressions in *Phra Lo* were mostly in the style of contemporary and interpretive dance, through which performers used physical movements to tell the stories and convey emotions. For example, in the song “Lao Duang Dokmai” which described the beauty of flowers, the flowers were represented on stage by two performers wearing a big piece of decorative cloth crawling onstage slowly. Many scenes were presented through interpretive dance with a chorus or a soloist narrating events (a similar mode is found

in traditional *lakhon*), often in poetic verses taken from the original script. Most of the physical movements featured hand gestures and footwork that resembled those in traditional *lakhon*. As part of a collaboration with Dillingham, the violinist performed on a skateboard. These modes underscore how traditional Thai repertoires could be constantly read anew and reappropriated with modern artistic styles to keep them alive and relevant to a contemporary audience. In other words, Mejudhon's way of promoting Thai cultural heritage was not confined to presenting traditional repertoires as fixed in the past. Rather, she encouraged practitioners to actively engage with Thai cultural roots and rejuvenate them with aesthetics from the local and beyond.

Her attempt to challenge the possibilities of traditional repertoires and engage with the audience more directly was also evidenced in the use of storytellers who often disrupted each scene by talking directly to the audience. The storytellers were played by actors who would later resume their characters. Thus, they broke the fourth wall and alienated the audience from the performance, stimulating the audience to comprehend the messages being sent across (i.e., the moral of the story itself and the treatment of Thai classical literary works). They also alternated between telling the story in Thai and English. The use of Thai and English languages to tell the story can be interpreted as Mejudhon's intention to internationalise Thai traditional literature by showing that such literature was not limited to Thai audiences or confined strictly within its original form. The use of both languages also demonstrates that the musical was a product for a middle-class audience who tended to have at least some understanding of the English language.

## **Conclusion**

After the decline of *lakhon rong*, popular culture in Thailand was taken over by the American cultural industry, leading to the decline in Thai forms of *lakhon* and the rise of Western dramatic arts as well as imported Western performances in urban Thailand. However, the over-saturation of Western performances led to a desire for Thai stories, which was boosted by the government's policy to strengthen the national consciousness against intensifying global flows. With her well-established career in Thailand and extensive training in both traditional Thai and Western aesthetics, Patravadi Mejudhon matched the policy by turning classical Thai literature into modern musicals. Using her ambivalent position between Thai and Western performing arts, Mejudhon subverted the role of dominator (i.e., Anglo-

American musical theatre) and, in turn, established her own distinctive styles to promote Thai cultural heritage. Despite the aim to promote Thai heritage, Mejudhon's musicals were constructed upon complex hybridisation of Thai and foreign aesthetics, particularly evidenced through their vocal production, choreography, music, and storytelling modes. The hybridisation signified her attempt to rejuvenate classical literature and make them relatable to a globalised urban audience, proving that Thai heritage could be reread and re-evaluated in a modern context.

This also reflects her principle of careful cultural hybridisation and treating each cultural entity with respect. In ensuring that the cultural identities employed in her shows were accurate, Mejudhon sought direct collaborations with international artists from the ethno-national performance traditions in question. As demonstrated, the integration of Thai and international performative elements in Mejudhon's musicals was considered a new development in terms of hybridised technique in *lakhon phleng*; it established a creative dialogue between Thai and international artists rather than a one-way exchange as found in most *lakhon rong*. The encountering of different aesthetics in her musicals resembled what Delanty terms "a unity in diversity," the interplay of cultural entities that leads to their transformation without resulting in polarisation. The transformed entities preserved their diversity but also held unity amongst them "without a dominant culture taking over" (Delanty 33). An important contributor to achieving the advanced hybridised technique was her stance of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, whereby she immersed herself in both Thai and foreign performance aesthetics and developed an appreciation and understanding for all of them. In this way, it can be said that Mejudhon utilised her stance of aesthetic cosmopolitanism to bridge performance traditions together—classical and modern, Thai and foreign—to push the boundary of what Thai heritage could be and claim the distinctive styles of a contemporary Thai musical. By producing musicals that explicitly featured cross-cultural performative modes and aesthetics of discontinuity, Mejudhon's works also shaped traditional Thai repertoires as fluid entities, constantly re-interpreting Thai cultural heritage in the modern and globalised context.

### Case study two: Takonkiet Virawan

#### Chapter Four—The Cosmopolitan Strategies in Takonkiet Virawan’s Musicals: The Development of Large-Scale Contemporary Musicals, 1997-Present

In the previous chapter, I examined the significance of Patravadi Mejudhon and her artistic works, which triggered the trend of *lakhon phleng* created and performed by Thai practitioners as well as *lakhon phleng* based on classical Thai literature. I demonstrated that, compared to the models of *lakhon rong*, Mejudhon’s works featured a much more complex hybridisation of performative elements in which such elements entangled and were transformed without one element taking over the rest. Mejudhon’s knowledge of Thai and foreign performing arts and her collaboration with international artists from the particular traditions enabled her works to challenge the power of dominant Anglo-American theatre by reappropriating their materials and technical training to create distinctive Thai musical theatre. Her hybrid musicals, which were produced from the interplay of global and local aesthetics, also served to strengthen the cosmopolitan imaginary amongst local audiences, expanding their horizons of imagination regarding artistic possibilities. As Mejudhon shifted her focus to her performing arts schools and projects related to theatre for social change, another modern form of musical theatre, known by the Western transliteration ‘musical’, emerged in the contemporary *lakhon phleng*. These were the musical works of Takonkiet Virawan.

Revered as *chao poh haeng wongkarn lakhon weatee* (the father of the stage drama industry), Virawan is another significant figure in *lakhon phleng*, whose musical productions strongly dominate contemporary Thai commercial theatre. As discussed in the introduction of the thesis, the term *lakhon weatee* covers both *lakhon phut*, or spoken plays, and *lakhon phleng*, or musicals. In the case of Virawan, it is generally understood amongst Thai audiences that the term refers to musicals as almost all Virawan’s stage productions are in the form of musical theatre. His musical works significantly popularised the art form of musical theatre as mass and large-scale entertainment products in Bangkok, thereby setting the standard for other commercial musicals in Thailand. The popularity of his musicals also led to the increasing growth in musical productions, theatre troupes, and training programmes related to the art form in urban Thailand.

My argument is that the popularity of his musicals is significantly related to elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, which are not only manifested in the

realised musical productions but also in the performance venues, marketing strategies used and the creative team's dispositions, which in turn shape the reception of the local audiences. Although presenting his work as a new art form that had never been done before could be seen as part of his marketing strategy to advertise and monetise his products, I contend that it is also due to the degree of glocalisation in his work. In other words, the extent to which he adopted elements from Western musical theatre, specifically megamusicals, determined how he branded his hybridised musical productions, rendering them as examples of legitimate 'Broadway-style' musical theatre.

This chapter seeks to investigate the aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism associated with his musical works and himself as a public figure. This will be investigated from two perspectives: that of the creative process and that of the audience. For the former, I will focus on Virawan's disposition and his experience in the entertainment industry which determine his artistic choices and goals. I will also look at Rachadalai Theatre, the biggest proscenium arch theatre in Thailand, and its role as a venue that hosts both international tours of Anglo-American musicals as well as large-scale productions of Thai musicals. For the latter, I will focus on the audience of Virawan's musical productions and their aspiration in participating in the shows, including the branding strategies that help define their aspirations. The investigation will also shed light on why he might position his musicals so differently from the musical productions preceding his. The materials examined in this chapter serve as the foundational context for subsequent chapters in this case study (Chapters Five to Seven), which will further analyse the creative process and hybridisation of performative elements involved in Virawan's productions of *Four Reigns The Musical*. Collectively, these four chapters will demonstrate how every step in this musical production is infused with elements shaped by aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism enhanced by Virawan's marketing strategies.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first outlines the significance of Virawan and his background which indicate his disposition of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism that influences his artistic choices and his creation of Thai musicals. The second focuses on the elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism embedded in his branding strategies, which manifest in the general characteristics of his musical productions and their performance venues. Through sections one and two, I will also attempt to decode his intention in presenting his musical as a totally new and westernised art form. The final

section further investigates how the aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitan elements driven by Virawan's branding strategies examined in section two are manifested in the reception of the local audience. The way that the local audiences perceive his musicals underscores how such elements serve as attractions for local audiences, thereby helping to popularise his musical productions.

### **The Significance of Broadway and West End Theatre in Shaping Global Aesthetics**

Before proceeding, it is helpful to briefly outline the significance of Anglo-American musical theatre, specifically that of Broadway and the West End, in shaping the dominant aesthetics in the field of musical theatre. As discussed in the introduction, the direct and indirect relationships between Anglo-American musical theatre with other theatre scenes across the globe demonstrate the transnational flow of the art form, of which Thailand is a part. Such a globalised aspect of musical theatre is essential in understanding why subjects discussed in this case study (Chapters Four to Seven) and the next (Chapter Eight) are so drawn to these two geographical areas and strongly influenced by them, manifested in forms of their globalisation of Western musicals, marketing strategies, and horizons of expectations.

As discussed in Chapter One, through the exploration of cosmopolitan taste in French youth, by immersing themselves in a wide range of cultural products across the world, subjects display a sign of aesthetic cultural cosmopolitanism, which provide them with the "transnational universal standards specific to their generation" (Octobre and Cicchelli 33). This allows individuals to know which cultures excel at certain things and thus choose to consume that cultural product or use it as the benchmark for the associated genre. Applied to musical theatre, Broadway (New York) and the West End (London) serve as the benchmarks that define global aesthetics for the musical theatre genre due to the reasons discussed below.

As musical theatre scholar John Kenrick thoroughly demonstrates in *Musical Theatre: A History* (2008), the musical theatre art form on Broadway and the West End has a well-established history of development and worldwide popularity as well as long-held reputations as thriving and influential hubs for the genre. To the present day, Broadway and the West End thrive and continue to adapt to global audience demand (82). As well as via domestic and international tours, the experience of seeing Broadway and West End musicals can also be had through live recordings and motion film versions that are broadcast worldwide. The



aesthetics deriving from these regions also serve as globalised technical training and aspirational standards for practitioners of the art form in other regions. This is particularly evidenced amongst Thai theatre practitioners across the three case studies here. Furthermore, the use of English as the primary language in Anglo-American materials enables them to be understandable and accessible to a more extensive range of audiences than musicals in other languages. This strengthens their dominance as the benchmark for musical theatre and attracts aspirational audiences from around the globe, drawn, as discussed earlier, by the desire for shared cultural consumption. The dominance of Anglo-American musical theatre is also facilitated by Western colonisation and the global capitalism of First World countries, contributing to the cultural nobility of Anglo-American cultural products. In this way, the globalised consumption and practice of musical theatre are products of cultural imperialism. Nevertheless, as shall be demonstrated throughout this thesis, the globalised aspect of musical theatre art forms does not lead to cultural homogenisation but hybridisation amongst Thai practitioners.

It is important to note that although Broadway and West End musicals function as global aesthetics, this does not mean that musicals in other locations are necessarily inferior in quality. Rather, because they lack the same level of dominance or impact on the global musical theatre scene as shows from Broadway and the West End, they are not as globally aspirational. This is evidenced in how Anglo-American musical theatre repertoires (e.g., song and dance repertoires and acting and voice techniques) are integral to professional musical theatre training in performing arts conservatoires beyond Anglo-American regions, and how popular styles from Anglo-American musicals affect practitioners in other regions. As shall be demonstrated, the creative individuals in and the local audiences for Virawan's musical productions have been significantly influenced by the aesthetics derived from these two sites and employ them as a model for their musical productions.

### **Takonkiet Virawan**

Takonkiet Virawan (1966 – present) is a famous television and theatre producer and director as well as the CEO of channel ONE 31, a popular television channel in Thailand. He is revered as *chao poh haeng wongkarn lakhon weatee* due to his large-scale musical productions, which are widely advertised in Bangkok and broadcast nationwide through

streaming platforms. His famous musicals include *Banglang Mehk The Musical* (2001, 2002, 2007, 2019), *Thawiphob The Musical* (2005, 2006, 2011, 2018), *Khang Lang Phab The Musical (Behind the Painting The Musical)* (2008, 2015), *Si Phaendin The Musical (Four Reigns The Musical)* (2011, 2014, 2017, 2020), and *Lod Lai Mungkorn The Musical* (2016, 2018). With the support of high-profile sponsors, Virawan usually staged at least one large-scale musical production a year until the spread of COVID-19, when he switched to streaming his past musicals online and organising online musical concerts. His musicals mostly feature an all-celebrity cast (except for the ensemble), advanced theatrical special effects, extravagant sets and costumes, enjoyable stories for general audiences, pop-style scores and impressive choreography. To put it simply, the characteristics of his musicals resemble megamusicals found on the stages of Broadway and the West End.

His background and career path demonstrate his stance on aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism and shed light on what drove him to make his version of the Thai musical. Having been educated in the United States for twelve years, he developed a strong passion for theatre, particularly Broadway musicals. From his consumption of musical theatre there, mostly in New York itself, Virawan came to see American musical theatre as the standard for the art form. This is evidenced in my interview with him and his biographical book titled *Boy Story: 20 Phee Reak Nai Cheewit Kan Tam Ngan Khong Boy Takonkiet* in which he stated that he set himself the goal of creating a musical like those he saw in America back home in Thailand and in the Thai language itself (Virawan 2015, Lim *et al.* 30). Although it is apparent in several interviews that Virawan has a strong passion for musical theatre (ibid, Virawan 2014, Admin 2007), his passion is often accompanied by a small feeling of inferiority towards the performing arts in his own country. Despite being fully aware that the musical *The King and I* contained plenty of historical inaccuracies and misrepresented Thai culture, Virawan nevertheless praised its quality as a cure for homesickness. He also expressed high regard for Broadway musicals for their capability to make the audience think compared to Thai productions (Lim *et al.* 101), which he stated were more concerned with spoon-feeding narrative. These cases highlight his feelings of inferiority surrounding Thai theatre and his perception of Broadway musicals as aspirational. It can be said that this perceived inferiority drove him to create changes in Thai theatre by following the standard of American musicals.

His determination to change the Thai theatre reveals dynamic signs of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism embedded in his disposition. Although Virawan's first meaningful encounter with the art form of American musical theatre was mediated through a television broadcast of *The King and I* (ibid 65), the impact of such consumption was so significant that his perception of stage performing arts was altered. This is evidenced in his biography where he stated that he was not aware that there was such an impactful art form where the performers acted, sang, and danced at the same time (ibid). Following this encounter, Virawan immersed himself in American musical repertoires by acquiring more opportunities for contact with them and eventually going to see live productions in New York "almost every week" (ibid 72). This demonstrates that his aesthetics had been significantly transformed by American musical theatre, leading to his further investment in such products. Based on Octobre and Cichelli's empirical research on cosmopolitan taste (2019), Virawan's pattern of cultural consumption resonates with their research subjects who belong to the group of cosmopolitan fans—those who are open to and willingly immerse themselves in foreign cultures, both mediated and virtually (84). These subjects tend to be reflexively transformed by the consumption of foreign cultural products, leading to a shift in their worldview and the formation of cosmopolitan imaginary—defined as "an aesthetic of openness that engenders a global sense of interconnectedness" (Papastergiadis 298). In this sense, the consumption of American musicals expanded Virawan's cultural repertoires, shifted his aesthetics in the sense of how he perceived and understood dramatic arts, and caused him to evaluate the existing Thai theatre.

Also, in parallel with the group of cosmopolitan fans in Octobre and Cichelli's research, Virawan's active consumption of American musicals affirms that higher socioeconomic status, higher levels of education, and urban environments are key factors in enabling one to acquire and understand foreign cultural products more effectively. In other words, Virawan's immersion in and transformation by American musical theatre highlights the elitist aspect of having a cosmopolitan taste. As demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three, such factors have played an important role amongst Thai practitioners who created new forms of *lakhon rong* and *lakhon phleng*. In this sense, it can be said that Thai theatre practitioners who significantly contributed to the modern theatre scene in Thailand tended to be those who had access to such key factors, which enabled them to develop a wider cultural repertoire and, thus, broaden their imagination for artistic possibilities.

Upon his return to Bangkok, Virawan started his career in the television industry and learned to understand the huge difference in demands and tastes between Thai and American audiences. Therefore, he slowly introduced the sit-com series to Thailand, which followed the American form and gradually became successful. Notwithstanding his impressive skills in popularising sit-coms amongst Thai audiences, the fact that he glocalised the genre reveals an aspect of American cultural imperialism initiated by local talents which further strengthened the domination of American popular cultural products amongst Thai subjects. Such an initiation also brings to light what Motti Regev calls aesthetic cosmopolitanism produced from within, by which he refers to how local artists create local-national work “with elements of ‘otherness’ weaved into them” (126-127). In this sense, Virawan possesses an orientation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, which enables him to be the mediator of cosmopolitan aesthetics, contributing to the cosmopolitan sphere in Thailand and the dominant power of American cultural products.

Although his work in the entertainment industry was successful in its own right, his last name also gave him social credibility in society. Born into a well-to-do family, his father was involved in politics, rising to be Vice Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. This gave a boost to his initial work in the entertainment industry, bolstered by his foreign education, leading him to be regarded as part of a new wave within the industry. This by no means suggests that Virawan relied solely on his family reputation, but rather that these privileged factors helped him gain respect and credibility in Thailand more effectively and, perhaps, more easily. His work and biography increasingly became of interest to various newspapers, magazines and television programmes such as *Thairath*, *Trust* and *Kalamare Talkshow*, further developing his reputation.

After years of establishing himself in the Thai market, he gradually developed his creative crew whom he sent to observe and learn from Western musicals on Broadway and the West End, hoping to create his own version in Thai (Virawan 2015). His crew mainly consisted of Thai artists who had worked with him in many television productions, particularly Sarawut Lerdpunyanut, who would later become the main music composer and musical director for almost all his musical productions. The talents sent abroad were not limited to music as he also sent costume, set design and special effects designers. This indicated that Virawan’s team possessed an open attitude to encounters with foreign cultural products, allowing their perceptions to be transformed by consumption of them, leading to their creation of local

artistic work shaped by such aesthetics. It also underscored that his team perceived aesthetics deriving from Anglo-American musical theatre to be dominant and aspirational as well.

With this crew, he managed to produce his first musical titled *Wiman Muang The Musical* (1997). With a Western orchestra, pop-style score, various modern dance numbers and costumes and sets, this musical about the life of showgirls was generally well-received. This led to three more musical productions, including *Banlang Mehk The Musical* (2001), *Bangkok 2488 The Musical* (2004) and *Thawipob The Musical* (2005). The latter became so successful that he and his sponsors were able to build Rachadalai Theatre, Thailand's biggest proscenium arch theatre, to host his later performances in a longer show period (examined in section two). His strategy of sending his crew to learn from watching musicals on Broadway and the West End in order to create a similar model in Thailand not only affirms his high regard for Anglo-American musicals but also shows that the two geographical areas strongly shaped his aspirations for his musicals and the contemporary theatre in Thailand. With an established career in the television industry bolstered by the positive feedback for his aforementioned musical productions and his branding strategies, the name Virawan started to be revered as the pioneer of Thai musical theatre.<sup>31</sup>

Virawan's initial concern about the lack of understanding of musical theatre amongst Thai audiences and, in fact, the non-existence of musical theatre in Thailand, raises interesting points that are worth examination. When being interviewed on what propelled him to make musicals in Thailand, Virawan often said that, apart from his passion for the art form, it was because musical theatre did not exist in Thailand at the time (ibid, Kalamare TV 2014, Lim *et al.* 90). Before he staged his first production, *Wiman Meuang*, he was rather concerned about whether the art form would be relatable to the Thai audience (Lim *et al.* 95). These were the main reasons why he did not dive into musical theatre upon his return to Thailand. In my interview with him, he explained:

It would have been impossible because there was no existing [musical theatre] scene, no market, no audience, no practitioners. There was none. You wouldn't know where to start.

(Virawan 2015)

---

<sup>31</sup> In Thailand, Virawan is commonly referred to as Boy Takonkiet.

His reasons suggest that the art form of musical theatre did not exist in Thailand before his production and that the art form might be perceived as too foreign for the Thai audience. In fact, prior to staging *Wiman Meuang*, Virawan was worried that the audience would laugh when the characters suddenly burst into songs, making his show a total failure (Lim *et al.* 95).

However, as demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three, the prototype of musical theatre, *lakhon rong*, existed and developed more than a hundred years ago in Thailand. Notwithstanding the short period of its extinction, the art form was reintroduced as *lakhon phleng* by many Thai practitioners, notably Patravadi Mejudhon. Apart from these productions, there were also international tours of Western musicals, musical-style concerts in hotels (e.g., Montien, Dusit Thani, Intercontinental Hotel), and American musicals films which were quite popular. Given Mejudhon's fame as a theatre practitioner in Thailand, it would be unlikely that her musicals were unheard of by middle-class audiences, especially those interested in theatrical arts. Apart from Mejudhon's fame, there were also a number of local musicals, though not as big scale as Virawan's productions, in the 1990s. I contend that the reason why Virawan believed that musical theatre did not exist in Thailand and that his musicals were pioneering works was not because he was somehow oblivious to the existence of such musical productions and their audiences. Rather, he simply did not consider such existing productions as musicals. In the next section, I demonstrate the summarised characteristics of his musicals, which brings to light his perception of an ideal musical driven by aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism.

### **Aesthetic and Aspirational Cosmopolitanism in Virawan's Musical**

From my observation, Virawan's musicals often share common characteristics determined by his strategies for making his musicals easily accessible to local audiences. Such characteristics can be mainly categorised into four groups: relatable stories, pop-style scores, star power, and extravagant sets and special effects. As shall be demonstrated, such groups are driven by an interplay of local and global aesthetics initiated by Virawan and his creative team. In other words, these characteristics are driven by elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism. Such characteristics and involved strategies will also bring to light Virawan's ideal type of musical and why he claims his productions to be pioneering works.

Due to his concern about the relatability of his musicals, Virawan thus had to make them easily accessible to a Thai audience. He realised that translating famous musicals from the West into Thai was unlikely to succeed in his homeland (Lim *et al.* 93). As demonstrated in the previous two chapters, stage productions derived directly from Western dramatic texts tended to be limited amongst the class of intelligentsia in urban Thailand. Therefore, he mostly used the plot from existing popular stories in Thailand, which included Thai hit television series such as *Banlang Mehk*<sup>32</sup> and *Hong Neuah Mangkorn*<sup>33</sup>, popular novels such as *Si Phaendin*<sup>34</sup> and *Khang Lang Pab*<sup>35</sup> and classic folk tales such as *Mae Nak Phra Khanong*.<sup>36</sup> Even the later productions that featured original stories tended to be easily relatable to a Thai audience such as *Still On My Mind* (2018), a jukebox musical consisting of jazz songs composed by the late King Bhumibol Rama IX, and *Faen Chan The Musical* (2018), a jukebox musical based on a well-known Thai film of the same name and consisting of popular songs from a famous Thai pop artist, Bird Thongchai McIntyre.

Almost all of Virawan's musicals can be classified as contemporary pop-rock and have at least one stand-alone piece for release on the radio and internet. These are often sung by Thai pop stars or well-known celebrities, which helps boost their popularity. This pop music style is also one of Virawan's strategies to make his musicals more accessible to a wider audience, particularly for younger people and those not familiar with the Broadway musical theatre style. Inspired by the popularity of the musical *Chorus Line*'s "What I Did for Love" during his years in the States, Virawan emphasised the importance of creating a number that could represent a musical and could be played as a stand-alone piece (Lim *et al.* 47). He explained the reason for this:

For each musical, we still have to find a way to mix poppy-ness in it and use it to magnetise the audience, making it easier to watch. The popular songs from each

---

<sup>32</sup> *Banlang Mehk* is originally a television series in 1993 about the eventful and challenging life of Panroong and her family.

<sup>33</sup> *Hong Neuah Mangkorn* is originally a television series in 2000 about the conflicts amongst the Chinese community in Bangkok.

<sup>34</sup> *Si Phaendin* or *Four Reigns* is a Thai book written by Kukrit Pramoj (thoroughly examined in Chapters Five to Seven).

<sup>35</sup> *Khang Lang Pab* is a Thai book written by Sri Burapa focusing on the love between a young Thai student and a diplomat's wife of high class in Japan.

<sup>36</sup> *Mae Nak Phra Khanong* is a Thai classic ghost legend about Mae Nak who dies while giving birth and becomes a ghost tricking her husband and harms the villagers who intrude in their human-ghost relationship.

musical...we have to produce them in a way that the radio wants to play them, which is also done in many Western musicals [...] So when they come to see the show, they're already familiar with them.

(Lim *et al.* 209)

In my interview with him, he emphasised that using star power was still essential in Thailand, as “going to the theatre is not an ordinary thing in Thai culture”, and these stars were used as the main attraction (Virawan 2015). As a result, the lead actors in his productions tended to be the same group of actors. At first glance, this point highlights his marketing strategy of using celebrities to increase ticket sales. Upon further scrutiny, this also reveals that Virawan’s musical productions create an exclusive community of musical theatre practitioners and, to a certain extent, a culture of musical theatre audiences who go to watch famous celebrities on stage. In this way, this community of practitioners and audiences support one another in every production and, thus, help guarantee the ticket sales for his musical productions. As shall be investigated in Chapter Eight, this culture has an impact on small-scale theatre, which features non-famous performers, making it limited to a small and niche group of audiences in Thailand.

Virawan’s attempt to make a show that suits the Thai audience could also be seen in surveys conducted after his shows asking the audience about their preferences and impressions. He stated that, according to his research team, the Thai audience preferred “large-scale productions with fascinating visual effects” (Lim *et al.* 205). Indeed, the elements that impress a Thai audience and distinguish his productions from others in Thailand are his staging techniques, special effects, and elaborate stage sets. The *mis-en-scène* and props in his productions are elaborately designed to look realistic, with transitions between each scene designed to be as seamless as those of megamusicals on Broadway or the West End. Using the standard of large-scale Anglo-American musicals, Virawan’s musicals are often full of extravagant staging techniques such as the grand-scale waterfall in *Khang Lang Pab The Musical*, where the lead characters danced and splashed water at each other (Figure 3), the flying scene in *Mae Nak Phra Khanong The Musical*, where the character Mae Nak flew from the stage to the circle seating in the audience, and the real fireworks in *Si Phaendin The Musical* at Lhong 1919 (examined in Chapters Six and Seven).





Figure 3: The waterfall dance in *Khang Lang Phab The Musical* (Scenario & Rachadalai 2020).

Perhaps to a certain extent, this also applied to the acting style, which tended to be more exaggerated. This exaggeration was so noticeable that the slang term “*lehn yai rachadalai theatre*” (play it big like in Rachadalai Theatre) was used to describe people who displayed exaggerated mannerisms. Virawan added that:

Most foreign audiences (i.e., Westerners) like to think with the story, so the acting doesn’t need to reveal or spoon-feed it all, but the Thais like to see everything acted out on stage.

(Lim *et al.* 2009)

His statement underscores his intention to make his shows as accessible to mass audiences as possible, rather than producing an abstract show that can put non-theatre-goers off. To increase the attraction for his shows, advanced special techniques, impressive sets, and celebrity casts are essential in shaping his shows as a form of large-scale entertainment. Such extravaganza, of course, leads to higher ticket prices for his shows, which make them an entertainment form amongst urban audiences from the middle class and above.

Although all the elements mentioned earlier obviously contribute to this experience, the venue for these performances significantly enhances it too. Virawan, with the backing of high-profile Thai contributors such as the insurance company Muang Thai Pragn Cheewit, built Rachadalai Theatre in 2007. As Thailand’s biggest proscenium arch theatre, it was initially built to host his performances for longer show runs. Also, it was born out of a desire

to attract more international touring musicals, which previously were unable to perform in Thailand due to a lack of appropriate facilities. Before the establishment of Rachadalai Theatre, most international tours from Broadway that visited Southeast Asia stopped only in Singapore, which had appropriate venues (e.g., Resorts World Sentosa Theatre and Marina Bay Sands Theatre) that could accommodate their requirements. One of the stated aims Virawan set out for the theatre was for it to be able to host these types of musicals, most especially his personal favourite, *The Phantom of the Opera* (Lim *et al.* 193). Peter Roberts, an assistant to megamusical producer Cameron Macintosh, came to survey theatres in Asia and noted that Rachadalai was “an excellent theatre. We can definitely bring our shows here” (ibid 195), indicating that the standard of Rachadalai theatre is on par with proscenium arch theatres on the West End.

To this day, Rachadalai theatre remains the only theatre in Thailand that can fully host large-scale musicals from abroad such as *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Mamma Mia*, and *The Lion King*.<sup>37</sup> Apart from being able to host large-scale international performances, setting up a theatre that met the global standard for musical theatre was a way to help develop Thai theatre too. It gave Thai musicals facilities at the same standard as those for Western megamusicals, encouraging production teams to explore new staging options that were previously not possible. Furthermore, bringing megamusicals from abroad to Thailand allowed the Thai audience to experience performances shaped by more global aesthetics. In other words, this enabled aspirational Thai consumers to gain cultural capital deemed to be globally enriching and fashionable. This, in turn, widened the Thai audience’s knowledge about musical theatre and attracted them to the art form, thereby developing Thai musical theatre.

Based on these characteristics and Virawan’s admiration of musicals produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron McIntosh, it is clear that the kind of show that Virawan aimed to create was a commercial megamusical. It is likely that, for him, an ideal musical should be performed in a large-scale venue that was properly built for theatrical productions, and featured fully integrated components of music, dancing, acting, elaborate costume, advanced theatrical techniques, and realistic sets. Furthermore, it needed to be relatable and enjoyable

---

<sup>37</sup> The Kad Theatre in Chiangmai has previously hosted international tours of musicals, but the theatre cannot fully accommodate highly technical shows.

for a wide range of audiences (at least for those who have the means to afford the tickets). In a sense, watching his musicals is somewhat similar to watching a big-budget movie because of all the realistic components and the seamless integration between each of them. Therefore, it can be said that what Virawan perceives as a musical refers to large-scale and commercial theatre such as Anglo-American megamusicals.

Since his ideal type of musical was a megamusical, it is no wonder that he did not consider the anterior forms of *lakhon rong* and previous contemporary *lakhon phleng* as musical theatre. As demonstrated, such anterior forms, particularly in Mejudhon's productions, also featured full integration of music, dancing, acting, and special theatrical effects. However, compared to Virawan's musicals, the sets and special effects were of an inferior scale. By inferior scale, I mean the scale of production, which, of course, is tied with each production's budget and the technological advancement at the time. However, the most important reason Virawan might not perceive such productions as musicals is likely because these productions exhibited traditional Thai aesthetics more explicitly in their performative elements (e.g., vocal technique, choreography, and storytelling modes). As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the poetic language, traditional Thai tunes, the use of a Thai-style chorus, and movement from traditional Thai dance are essential parts of Mejudhon's productions due to her aim to promote Thai cultural identity and experiment with the fusion of different aesthetics. Therefore, Mejudhon's musicals were constructed upon a highly complex hybridisation of classical and modern performance aesthetics from Thai, Western, and other Southeast Asian performing arts.

Comparing Mejudhon's works to Virawan's brings to light their differences in accessibility and targeted audiences. Given the former's emphasis on the aesthetics of discontinuity (see Chapter Two) and the estrangement effect, it is clear that Mejudhon's musicals appeared more abstract and technical than the latter's which sought to achieve the complete illusion of a real story happening on stage, at least as much as the art form of musical theatre would allow. In this sense, Mejudhon's productions required more appreciation and understanding of the various styles employed to achieve aesthetics of discontinuity. Consequently, they were catered to a specific type of audience instead of the mass market. To put it crudely, Virawan's musicals were generally easier to watch than their anterior forms because they resonated with the globalised form of megamusicals, which are designed to be enjoyable by a wide range of audiences. As Kenrick points out, megamusicals often have straightforward

plots with simple points to make such as, to use Kenrick's own examples, poverty is bad (for *Les Misérables*) and America is bad (for *Miss Saigon*) (355). Megamusicals also aim to convey big and indulgent emotions and explain their characters clearly rather than letting the audience work hard to decode their roles and personalities (ibid 340-341). Furthermore, such musicals are often full of showstoppers to impress and excite the audience. Therefore, with the strategies of using popular stories, celebrities, and extravagant theatrical techniques, Virawan's musicals become a mass entertainment product for urban and middle-class audiences.

By examining Virawan's productions and associated artistic choices and goals, we can see the dialogue between local and global aesthetics. On the one hand, as the productions are targeted at a Thai audience, they are shaped to be relatable and palatable to a local audience before anyone else. On the other hand, they are produced through the lens of a global aesthetic and aspire to achieve the global standard in every aspect. Virawan's goal has always been to create a Thai musical for Thai people (Virawan 2015). The productions, therefore, do not seek to negate their Thai aesthetics and decorum—they even maximise them in order to enhance the local experience and, in productions like *Four Reigns*, to promote Thai cultural heritage and the monarchical institution. Rather, the productions present local experience through a medium that is built with global aesthetics. Subsequently, the performative elements in Virawan's musicals are also positioned in between contemporary Western and Thai aesthetics and, therefore, form a hybrid of the two (hybridisation in the performance of Virawan's musicals will be investigated in Chapter Seven). Given this, Virawan's musical theatre is a hybrid product built around the tension between the demands and preferences of the mass Thai community (mostly middle and upper class) and standards and tastes at the global level.

Based on all these elements, commercial Thai musical theatre itself, particularly today, is a product of aesthetic cultural cosmopolitanism that is situated within the transnational flows of Anglo-American megamusicals. This is strengthened by the Rachadalai Theatre, which functions as a venue for large-scale Thai and globally acclaimed musicals. The theatre not only shows that Thailand is capable of hosting an international show with a well-equipped theatre but also indicates that Thai musicals are acquiring the same production standards as global shows, at least in terms of theatrical technique and facilities.

### **Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in the Aspirational Consumers of Thai Musical Theatre**

The work of theatre scholar Susan Bennett on the theory of production and reception in theatre facilitates the understanding of aspirational consumers for Virawan's musicals. In particular, the two concepts of interpretive communities and the horizon of expectations are useful in bringing to light key factors that attract such audiences and shape their perceptions. In short, the first concept of interpretive communities refers to groups of people who "share interpretive strategies," which shape their perception prior to consuming a particular product (Bennett 51). These strategies are constituted by political factors such as race, social milieu, and education level (ibid 64). The constituted interpretive communities, consequently, bring with them their horizon(s) of expectations to the performing event. Bennett suggests that these horizons are "bound with every aspect of the performance" (ibid 110), which can be seen in the branding strategies of Virawan's productions. I argue that the interpretive communities of the Thai audience for Virawan's musicals are mostly aspirational cosmopolitans who have a developed sense of aesthetic cosmopolitanism to varying degrees.

His strategy of using the global aesthetics of Anglo-American megamusicals, which he makes explicit in his marketing campaigns and interviews, often leads to the audience associating his musicals with those produced in the West. Indeed, audience feedback from his musicals stated that "[It's] just like seeing it on Broadway," or "*lakhon thai* is no less than *lakhon farang*"<sup>38</sup> (Muangthai Rachadalai Theatre 2017). By comparing his work to '*farang*' musicals, I contend that some of his Thai audiences were, to some extent, familiar with the idea of West End or Broadway shows. It is important to note that the ability to participate in such cultural activities is limited to those who possess a mid to high level of affluence and mobility, as they can travel abroad, or possess a social status high enough to be invited to these shows.

As seen in the case of French youth, consuming various foreign cultural products was considered as good taste to be acquired (Octobre and Cicchelli 13). Similarly, in Thailand, consuming cultural products from powerful countries such as Japan, England and the United States was, and is, considered a good taste to acquire amongst the middle and upper classes

---

<sup>38</sup> *Farang* is a generic Thai term for White Caucasians. In this case, *lakhon thai* refers to a performance (i.e., musical) created by the Thais. Similarly, *lakhon farang* refers to a performance (i.e., musical) created by Westerners.

(Suveeranon and Tejapira 36). Since Virawan's musicals are products shaped by global aesthetics, they attract the audience from these classes. The high-ticket price enhances the attraction of his productions, particularly the ones performed at Rachadalai Theatre. This suggests that the audience who decides to invest in his musicals is likely to have an idea of what the musical theatre art form is. Therefore, it can be said that the interpretative communities of Virawan's work tend to have their worldviews shaped by aesthetic cosmopolitanism to varying degrees.

These audiences carry their horizons of expectations "shaped by elements before the performance" (Bennett 150). These elements arise from the branding strategies of Virawan's productions, which can be classified into four categories: the figure of Virawan, the transliterated name of the art form and its performance venues, the performance material, and star power.

Based on Virawan's background and career path discussed in section one, it is clear that his successful initiation of glocalised television programmes boosted by his foreign education and family background imbued his name with a sense of aspirational cosmopolitanism. By the time he began his experiment in Thai musical theatre, his profile and experience in television work functioned as an effective marketing strategy. Currently, he is known as a successful television and theatre director, producer, and CEO of Scenario Company and Channel One, which actively produce both stage and television work. Consequently, it can be said that his name, associated with his success in the industry, social status and education abroad, is aspirational amongst Thai people who share this aesthetic cultural cosmopolitan worldview. For the audience, his brand is likely to assure them of a high-quality product before seeing the performance.

Virawan's determination to create Broadway-style theatrical entertainment for Thai audiences (Lim *et al.* 16, 91-92) is also manifest in the transliterated name of his musicals. The fact that Virawan uses a transliteration of the word 'musical' brought from the West, rather than the Thai term (i.e., *lakhon phleng* or *lakhon weatee*) to advertise his work can be seen as a branding strategy to make his productions appear international. All the titles of his musicals contain the affix of "The Musical" transliterated from English (e.g., *Si Phaendin The Musical*, *Mae Nak Phra Khanong The Musical*, *Lod Lai Mungkorn The Musical*). This affix enables his productions to carry a sense of being an international entertainment product

by suggesting a link between his Thai musical productions and Western musical theatre, indicating that the model of Virawan's musicals derives from the Western art form of musical theatre. This is supported by several of Virawan's interviews, in which he states his intention to make Thai musical theatre reach the standard of Broadway and West End musicals (Virawan 2015, Lim *et al.* 91-92, 192-195). It is worth pointing out that the internationality here is dominated by the Western cultural market, once again indicating asymmetrical power in the global entertainment industry, which is largely dominated by Anglo-American cultural products. As Regev and Octobre and Cicchelli demonstrate in their work, the domination of particular geographical areas, whether due to their ownership of such ethno-cultural products or the viability of such productions in those areas, shapes the transnational universal standards for consumers of such products in other areas and are a common phenomenon in the field of aesthetic cosmopolitanism (Regev 130, Octobre and Cicchelli 33). In this way, the branding strategy of using the transliterated term to publicise the musical productions reveals a sign of Anglo-American cultural imperialism mediated by such musical productions which, in turn, creates a sense of aspirational cosmopolitanism attached to the art form and Virawan's status. Such an aspiration attracts audiences with the promise that they can enjoy local sentiments in an entertainment form deemed globally valid. As shall be demonstrated in Chapter Seven, although his musicals bare a sign of Anglo-American cultural imperialism, they are delivered through the hybridisation of Anglo-American megamusicals and Thai performative elements, which occur from the creative team's reflexively transformed artistic visions by consuming foreign cultural products.

Apart from the transliterated name, the second marketing strategy also includes the role of performance venues in elevating the status and quality of large-scale Thai musical theatre to be on a par with its counterparts on Broadway and the West End. Apart from the Rachadalai Theatre, Virawan also staged his two musical productions, *Lodlai Mungkorn The Musical* and the 2019's production of *Four Reigns The Musical*, at Lhong 1919. Since the role of Rachadalai theatre and its construction upon aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism - as evidenced by its advertisement as providing the experience of "Broadway-style" shows and, at the same time, representing "Thai pride" (Muangthai Ratchadalai Theatre 2011) - have been examined above, I will focus on the venue of Lhong 1919 here.

Unlike Rachadalai Theatre, which set out to host megamusicals from the West and Virawan's large-scale musicals, Lhong 1919 features a versatile outdoor theatre, which could be adapted

to fit a local stage performance. Given this point, the performance space here might seem to lack elements derived from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism compared to that of Rachadalai Theatre. Nevertheless, due to the surroundings, the entire performance venue at Lhong is, in itself, enveloped by the interplay of local and global aesthetics.

A brief exploration of the venue's history will bring to light how the performance space at Lhong 1919 embodies the sphere of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism. Spanning nine thousand and six hundred square metres, Lhong 1919 was established in the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) as a bustling harbour for sea trading with foreign lands. It was then sold to a wealthy Chinese merchant family named Wang Lee, who sent their descendants to expand their business in Thailand (Posttoday 2019). Owned by the Wang Lees ever since, the family launched it as a new historical attraction at the end of 2018, preserving the original Chinese-Thai style architecture. This fusion of architectural aesthetics signifies the encounter of local Thai architectural aesthetics with Chinese aesthetics which lie beyond the ethno-cultural boundary, leading to the integration and co-existence of two cultural entities in the final product. In this way, the Chinese-style architecture is produced through an interplay of local and foreign aesthetics joined by the global flows facilitated by its function as a bustling harbour. Such interrelations make it a product of aesthetic cosmopolitanism.

The visibility of the city is another element that imbues Lhong with a sense of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. The venue is situated on the bank of the Chao Phraya River, known for its strong ties with Thai ways of life for centuries. The river traditionally separates the old city side (*fang thon*) from the city centre (*fang phranakhon*) where the royal palace stands. Looking ahead from the audience seating, one can see an array of traditional Thai houses and temples with a wooden porch leading to the river. At the same time, one can also see the biggest and most modern department store in Thailand, Icon Siam, which also boasts a luxurious hotel and tall condominium run by the Mandarin Oriental Group. Beyond these three iconic places, there continues to be a mix of traditional Thai-style buildings and other international hotels, indicating the area's status as a cosmopolitan sphere. On top of that, the audience takes in such a view from a Chinese-Thai style architectural space, enhancing the interaction of local Thai and foreign aesthetics embedded in the performance venue (Figure 4). Such an interaction situates the venue as an artwork derived from aesthetic cosmopolitanism and Bangkok itself as a site of aesthetically cosmopolitan architecture.





Figure 4: The outdoor theatre at Lhong, Scenario's *Lod Lai Mungkorn The Musical* (Banmeaung 2019).

The view of the riverside also gives a sense of aspirational cosmopolitanism due to the role of the Chao Phraya River (Figure 5). As much as the Chao Phraya River serves as a local emblem for the history and glory of Bangkok, it is also one of the most popular tourist attractions. The price for buying or renting accommodation, and dining at the restaurants near the riverside area, are extremely expensive for locals. Subsequently, these areas are mostly dominated by high-end international hotels and condominiums for wealthy foreigners and, perhaps, even wealthier local Thais. By day, the river welcomes historical tour cruises and local commuters; by night, it hosts party and dinner cruises full of foreign tourists. In fact, during performances of *Four Reigns*, which depicted Thai ways of life in the past, the audience could almost always see and hear these party boats passing by blasting their international dance hits. Being surrounded by such mixed atmospheres, Lhong allows locals to experience a historical area popularised by tourists, resulting in a unique hybrid identity between the Sino-Thai nostalgic past and international ambience. Additionally, its outdoor space enables the productions staged here to play with unique surroundings that Rachadalai Theatre cannot offer. This is evidenced in the long sessions of fireworks and the projection of images onto the river and the manmade geyser in the two aforementioned musicals. Based on all these factors, the performance venue at Lhong thrives on its cosmopolitan characteristics, shaping the pre-cosmopolitan sphere of the performance and creating aspirations for local audiences. Combining Virawan's name and venues that promise high-quality entertainment, the ticket price elevates the status of his productions as valid cultural (and economic) capital, emphasising their aspirational characteristics.



Figure 5: The riverside view with the Magnolias Waterfront condominium in Icon Siam (Matichon 2018).

The third strategy is the chosen material. As mentioned before, most of Virawan's musicals adopt plots from his previously successful television series or classic Thai stories. Although these chosen plots indeed aim to make his musicals relatable to a wide range of Thai audiences, they can be seen as a strategy to make money from Thai sentiments and secure a positive reception from the audience as well. For instance, *Si Phaendin The Musical* is based on the popular Thai novel of the same name, which has been adapted into countless other productions on stage, television and radio for the past forty years. Therefore, the highly regarded status of the title alone will attract the audience. Combined with the art form shaped by Western musical aesthetics, his productions provide an opportunity to experience Thainess in an international context, attracting even more aspirational cosmopolitans.

The last and arguably most significant strategy is star power. As part of Virawan's television work, he also produced a singing contest titled *The Star*, which became highly popular and served as a platform for a number of singers and celebrities. In a virtuous cycle of sorts, successful contestants on the programme would then take lead roles in his musicals and television series, bringing their audience and fans with them. Based on my experience, whether the particular star has performed well or not, he or she will always get a big round of applause and screaming at the end of the show. This aspect suggests that one of the audience's primary roles is to support their favourite stars. Apart from pop stars, Virawan often chooses well-known television actors, who bring with them their reputations. For example, one of his main actresses is Nok Sinjai Plengpanich, known from his TV shows for

her talents. Merely putting her face on the poster affords the audience the expectation of detailed acting work on stage, on par with the shows she is known for.

These four strategies together set the expectations of the interpretive communities for Virawan's musical productions. The branding strategies of his productions invite the audience to invest in his cultural commodity, with the promise of cultural capital in return. Once gained, this kind of cultural capital serves as a token to maintain one's status as an aspirational consumer—to ensure that she is up-to-date with what is appraised to be a legitimate activity. Furthermore, as demonstrated, Virawan's musicals as hybrid products powered by local and global aesthetics serve as an attraction for interpretive communities with the stance of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism.

## **Conclusion**

Following the model of Anglo-American megamusicals, the musical works of Virawan constitute a new and pioneering form of mass and large-scale musical theatre in Thailand. Aiming to make his musical productions easily relatable and accessible amongst local Thai audiences, Virawan acquired marketing strategies to attract and shape the audiences' horizons of expectations. As demonstrated, such strategies are strongly driven by elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, dominated by Anglo-American megamusicals. With the interplay of local and global aesthetics, Virawan and his creative team sought to position Thai musical theatre within the musical theatre industry at large by producing local significance that transcends beyond its boundaries. The establishment of Rachadalai Theatre not only enabled the Thai audience to watch international tours of big-scale musicals from the West more often but also raised the potential for the technical advancement of Thai musical productions to be on par with Western megamusicals. Such strategies driven by the interplay of global and local flows, in turn, elevated his musical productions as cultural capital to be acquired, creating aspiration amongst consumers who wished to experience local culture in a global entertainment form. In this way, as Virawan's musicals are produced using global aesthetics in the guise of local products, they help create and maintain, if not strengthen, Thai audiences' increasingly cosmopolitan worldviews. As commercial entertainment companies began to recognise the potential of theatre, they became more confident in sponsoring and investing in new productions. With the popularity of Virawan's musicals, there was a noticeable growth in new commercial musical productions

by other theatre companies such as Selladoor, Be Musical, Dreambox and Toh Klom as well as theatre venues such as The KBank Siam Pic-Ganesha Theatre and the M Theatre. There have also been some Thai productions of Western musicals including *Miss Saigon* by Scenario and *Little Shop of Horrors* by Selladoor and *Dreamgirls* by Dreambox, which follow their original models and are translated into Thai. In this way, it can be said that Virawan's musicals sparked both commercial and national interest in the art form of musical theatre in urban Thailand.

## Chapter Five—The Original *Four Reigns*

This chapter examines the source text of *Four Reigns The Musical* and serves as the first part of the analysis of the musical. The objectives of this chapter are twofold. Firstly, it provides an overview of the novel *Four Reigns* by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, investigating its key messages and significance in Thai society. Secondly, it traces elements derived from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism embedded in the author's disposition and his endorsed ideologies, which are manifested in the novel's narrative, the use of language, and characters. Combining these aspects, it seeks to show how the source text of *Four Reigns* forms a pre-cosmopolitan condition for its musical adaptation and is imbued with the cultural power to support dominant ideologies and the cosmopolitan imaginary amongst Thai subjects.

As one of Thailand's most popular books, the novel *Four Reigns* plays a substantial role in shaping the perspectives of Thai subjects. It is often praised for its exceptional ability to depict and promote Thai cultural identity and society from 1910 to 1946 (Chiangkul 67). It enjoys huge success and, as of 2021, has been republished sixteen times by major publishers and adapted into five large-scale television series and four musical productions by Scenario (examined in Chapters Six and Seven). There are also countless other smaller productions including radio and stage plays. *Four Reigns* has also been translated into foreign languages including English and Japanese and is regarded as “a true gem of Thai literature” (Thammanachote 42).

Furthermore, it is on the list of *100 Books that the Thais Should Read* funded by the Thailand Research Fund, as well as *50 Books That Should Be Read Before Growing Up*, organised and funded by the ThaiHealth Foundation and the Ministry of Culture. The number of reprints and adaptation together with its inclusion on these official lists indicate the high regard and popularity that the novel commands among Thai readers. Its themes and literary refinement align with Thailand's dominant ideologies (e.g., patriotism, religion, loyalty to the monarchy) and collective cultural norms (e.g., behavioural and ethical codes) upheld by the state apparatus and national institutions' moulding pattern for its citizens.

This chapter is divided into three sections, which are (1) an overview and significance of *Four Reigns* and its author; (2) the key theme; and (3) aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism in the narrative. Section one aims to demonstrate the novel's objectives and significance in Thai society which have enabled it to become an influential piece of writing

that is still relevant to Thai readers until the present. The ideologies presented by the author, whether intentionally or not, bring to light the tension between the old world, defined here as Thailand under absolute monarchy, and the new world, defined here as Thailand under democracy, which serves as the core of the novel and grounds the author's perspective. Section two further illustrates such tension through the novel's key theme in order to decode the message that the novel conveys. Section three examines how the author's cultural disposition and the tension in his perspective discussed in section one are manifested in three selected moments in the narrative of *Four Reigns* via the use of language and particular social norms that propel the characters' actions. In my own words, these three moments are (1) social participation (Pramoj 437- 449, 493 - 503); (2) parting with the children (ibid 483 – 492); and (3) An's return (ibid 573 – 585). These three moments will also serve as the main case analysis for Chapter Seven. The analyses of such social norms are signs of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism and, thus, serve as an essential indicator of the rise in the cosmopolitan sphere in Bangkok at the time.

### **Overview and Significance of *Four Reigns***

*Four Reigns* or *Si Phaendin* is a historical novel written by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj in 1951-52. Initially published daily as a serial novel in the Siam Rath newspaper, it was combined and published as a duology in 1953 (Pramoj, n.a.). Using a limited third-person point of view mode<sup>39</sup>, the author narrates the entire story and all characters from the perspective of Phloi, the heroine. It tells the story of Phloi's life through four reigns in Thailand, from the late reign of King Chulalongkorn Rama V to the end of King Ananda Mahidol Rama VIII's reign (1910-1946). The period represents Thailand's transformation into the new world as a result of modernisation, closely linked to westernisation, as driven by the monarchy and global forces.

The objectives as stated by Pramoj, and later his daughter, reveal his intention in creating the novel as part of historical sources. Pramoj stated the objective of his novel in the preface of his first edition:

---

<sup>39</sup> A storytelling method in which readers know about events and characters in the story through a single character's point of view (Wiehardt 2019).

[...] to record historical details behind events occurring from the reign of King Rama V to the end of King Rama VIII [...] Such events and changes have been recorded in the history and are made known to everyone. However, what has not been recorded in the history are details of lives, ways of life and opinions of those who have experienced such events and changes. These things are considered details behind the history and, no doubt, hold substantial significance. This is because teachings, traditions, and such minor details in people's ways of life can lay a foundation for their perspectives, leading them to various reactions. [...] If we do not know these details, we will not be in a position to explain the causes of past events clearly nor can we understand why specific reactions occurred after such events.

(Pramoj n.a.)

He further stated that the settings in *Four Reigns* are based on real historical events and locations, but the characters are imaginary (quoted in Rutnin, 274-275). This was later confirmed by Pramoj's daughter, M.L. Visumitra Pramoj, who stated that:

The most important content of *Four Reigns* is the [Thai] history and various changes occurring in the early reign of King Chulalongkorn to the end of King Rama VIII's reign. The actual history serves as the setting of the play while the characters, which are a second priority, are made up from stories told by his mother and many seniors. These characters function as a vehicle that brings us back to the past.

(Scenario 2011)

Both statements indicate that the work's priority is, above all else, to provide Thai historical knowledge for Thai readers. They also imply that *Four Reigns* should indeed be used as a credible historical source, as the featured historical events are real and the characters are based on memories of those who lived during the historical era. Nevertheless, as its overall message represents Thai virtues and their love for the monarchy, it is often seen as a promotion of the Thai monarchical institution (Chiangkul 65) or is even condemned for being "a mouthpiece of the Thai royalist elite" (Rutnin 279).

When confronted about the political intentions behind *Four Reigns*, Pramoj often denied having a hidden agenda. Instead, he claimed that he was not "among the social revolutionist writers or those who want to create a new society to fit their perspective" (quoted in Phukarn

124). Rather, he believed “a whole society needs to consist of diverse thoughts” (ibid). Whether or not Pramroj had any hidden motive at the time he wrote *Four Reigns*, it was evident that his written work in the Siam Rath before and around the time he published *Four Reigns* had an impact on shaping the perspective of Bangkok’s readers. This suggests that, even if Pramroj did not intend to voice his political views via *Four Reigns*, the novel likely contributed to certain ideologies and views amongst his readers anyway. To demonstrate the influence of Pramroj’s written work, I briefly address the significance of the Siam Rath newspaper in Thai society and the impact of *Four Reigns* when published in the newspaper below.

Founded by Pramroj and Sala Likitkul, the Siam Rath daily newspaper was first published on 25 June 1950 with no big headline and no advertisements (Ngamthin 1). The newspaper composition supported Pramroj’s initial objective of providing news, opinions, entertainment, and knowledge for a group of like-minded readers, whom he called the “Siam Rath readers” (ibid 5). According to Chiangkul, this group of readers tended to be educated individuals whose political views leaned towards liberalism and conservatism (44). Such views could be seen in Likitkul’s interview when he stated the newspaper’s aspiration for endorsing democracy, maintaining common interests for the Thai people, and protecting the monarchy (Ngamthin 5-6). Apart from a variety of news and articles presented in the newspaper, the rise in its popularity was due to Pramroj’s witty and humorous writing style and his extensive repertoire of knowledge. These factors established the Siam Rath as one of the most influential newspapers in Thailand by the end of 1947 and earned Pramroj his recognition as a famous writer (Chiangkul 45).

During the period when *Four Reigns* was still published daily in newspapers, it gained high popularity amongst Thai readers. Phukarn, who was a columnist at the time, stated that “people queued up in front of the publishing company to buy just the novel pages, as they wanted to know how Mae Phloi would deal with unresolved problems from yesterday’s edition” (367). This statement shows that Pramroj’s lifelike characters and the captivating story caught the imagination of local audiences and, no doubt, contributed to an increase in the number of Siam Rath readers. Kor Surangkanang, a renowned Thai author, remarked how the author was like “a palace doll,” as he was able to describe in detail life behind the palace



wall so meticulously and accurately (8).<sup>40</sup> These two statements underline the relatability and credibility of *Four Reigns* amongst Thai readers.

The believability of Pramoj's characters against the backdrop of actual historical events led many readers to believe that the story was not fictional but, in fact, someone's biography. Many attempted to guess who Phloi was in real life. Others believed Phloi to be one of their relatives or even that they themselves were Phloi.<sup>41</sup> Pramoj later revealed two notable cases, which clearly demonstrate the impact of *Four Reigns* on readers at the time. The first was Chao Chom Ab who sent raw mangoes to the publishing company out of concern for Phloi's craving during her pregnancy (Pramoj n.a.). The second one was Khun Ying Chamroen, who was sure that she herself was the source for the character Phloi. In her will, she asked her family to hand out *Four Reigns* as a part of her funeral gift. Awkwardly, Pramoj had to explain in the preface of this edition that, unfortunately, Phloi was just a fictional character (ibid).

Here, Benedict Anderson's concept of print capitalism can help explain the impact of the Siam Rath newspaper on Thai readers. As Anderson demonstrates in *Imagined Community*, the concept of print-capitalism refers to print-as-commodity, which is circulated widely and enables readers across the country "to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (36). The interplay between printing technology and capitalism leads to print language (Central Thai in this case) and the rise of an imagined national consciousness through readership (ibid 43).

Building on this concept, suffice it to say that such a widely circulated newspaper as the Siam Rath would strongly affect readers' perspectives, enabling them to imagine themselves as a part of a wider Thai community. In this case, the power of the press and the collective consciousness would be strengthened by the popularity and relatability of *Four Reigns*, which utilised Thai cultural memory<sup>42</sup> as its main storytelling device. Given its impact on the fans

---

<sup>40</sup> *Tukkata chao wang*, or palace dolls, are miniatures built from clay depicting Thai traditional ways of life, games, and ceremonies. Initially, they were toys made and played with by those who worked in the palace. In this context, Surangkanang compared Pramoj to a palace doll, as his descriptions of the palace life were so detailed it were as if he was there to witness everything himself.

<sup>41</sup> This is mainly because, in the story, Phloi's family is described as being "on the other side of the riverbank," which signifies that she is a member of Bunnag family, one of the most prosperous family in the early Rattanakosin period (Witnitchaikul 12).

<sup>42</sup> Defined as the knowledge that guides or dictates how one should navigate the world, cultural memory is human's heuristic process in maintaining their species through the generations (Assmann and Czaplicka 126).

as illustrated in the examples above, it suggests that reading *Four Reigns* was an activity employed by (mostly educated) Bangkok readers around the same time every day. This would, undoubtedly, contribute to the formation of national consciousness amongst communities of people joined by their collective sentiments for the story.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, although Pramoj denied having any political intention behind *Four Reigns*, the novel, as first serialised in the newspaper, was indeed capable of promoting certain ideologies and perceptions amongst its readers. Having been published as a duology, reprinted many times, and circulated across the country right up until the present day, *Four Reigns* continues its role of representing Thai cultural memory and dominant ideologies deemed most meaningful to Thais.

The ideologies endorsed by Pramoj, whether intentionally or not, usually contained some degrees of logical tension. While Pramoj's interviews on society indicate his support of liberalism<sup>44</sup>, many of his articles written in the *Siam Rath* reveal his firm belief and love for the Thai monarchy.<sup>45</sup> As noted earlier, such approaches formed the foundation of the newspaper as well. These two approaches led many academics and critics to describe him as having two worlds that overlapped within himself—the old world of peace and serenity under the monarchy's ruling and the modern world of freedom and democracy (Sudbantad 53). However, overall evidence based on his work and interviews suggests an asymmetrical relationship between these two worlds, for the old-world rooted firmly in his mind. Hence, his approach is often called “liberal conservatism” (ibid) or “a conservative who is smarter than most conservatives” (Chiangkul 131). These names highlight how Pramoj's perspective travels between conservatism and liberalism, seeking to utilise the latter to enhance and continue the former. As shall be demonstrated throughout this case study, the tension between the two worlds grounds Pramoj's perspective and the story of *Four Reigns*, which is carried over to its musical adaptations. To further examine the tension of the two words in

---

Such cultural memory has its fixed point in the historic past, which means it needs to be preserved, maintained and reconstructed by various forms of reproduction and reinvention in society (ibid 128). These include invented traditions that endorse particular social values and ideologies in order to establish continuity with the past (Hobsbawm 1). Through the use of historical resources (e.g., history, language, culture), those who share such collective knowledge and behavioural conduct become aware of their unity and characteristics, which can be defined as an ongoing process of “how self perceives itself and labels itself” (Hall 4, Assmann and Czaplicka 130, Matthews 16).

<sup>43</sup> See “Sentimental Communities” by Margaret Cohen in *The Literary Channel: The International Invention of the Novel* (2002).

<sup>44</sup> See *Kukrit Phut: Wannagam gub sangkom* by Kukrit Foundation 80 (2010).

<sup>45</sup> See “Nak nang seuh phim cheu Kukrit” by Sukanya Sudbantad in *Khon Thai Gub Bukkon Samkan Khong Lohk Cheu Kukrit* (2010).

Pramoj's perspective, I focus on Pramoj's background and his cosmopolitan orientation, which construct the narrative and characters of *Four Reigns* examined in sections two and three.

### **Pramoj's Background**

Mom Rachawongse (M.R.)<sup>46</sup> Kukrit Pramoj (1911-1995) was recognised in Thailand and beyond for his remarkable work in various fields, particularly in literature. In Thailand, he was praised as “the Philosopher of Thailand” due to his insightful comments and opinions in his written work, and “Master of the Language” due to his witty yet easy-to-understand writing style (Kukrit 80 Foundation 1). He was also given the title of Thailand's National Artist (Literature) in 1985 (ibid 36). In Asia, he was given the name “Asia's Winston Churchill” due to his versatile achievements and recognition as a prime minister, a historian, and a writer, all similarities he shared with the former British prime minister Winston Churchill (Phu-ngamdee 53-54), and “Power and the Pen” by the international press, indicating the refinement of his written work and its influence on Thai readers (Kukrit 80 Foundation 8). Globally, he was on UNESCO's list of the anniversary celebration of historic events and eminent personalities in 2011 in the fields of education, culture, social science and mass communication (Bahn M.R. Kukrit 35). During his extensive career, Pramoj was arguably most prolific and influential as a journalist/writer. As demonstrated above, his written work has shaped the perspectives of Thai readers up until the present day (Chiangkul 67-70).

Pramoj's childhood demonstrates his strong ties to traditional Thai culture and the traditional ways of life of the upper social class in Thailand. He was the fifth son of H.R.H Prince Khamrob, who later became Thailand's first Police Department Director, and Mom Daeng (Figure 6).<sup>47</sup> His father's family was a descendent of King Rama II and his mother was of the Bunnag family (Van Beek 12), a wealthy and influential family in the early Rattanakosin period. Born in the reign of King Rama VI, he was exposed to various types of classical Thai performing arts and music, especially *khon* (Thai mask dance) and *ranat ek* (a high-pitched Thai xylophone) since a young age, which functioned as “a thread running through his entire

---

<sup>46</sup> A title for a royal descendant.

<sup>47</sup> *Mom* is a title for a commoner married to a prince.

life”, even during his time in England (quoted in Van Beek 15). Pramoj stated that he got hands-on experience in palace life due to his relatives, and they continued to have conversations about it even when these relatives left the palace. Therefore, suffice it to say that Pramoj’s childhood had been strongly attached to the refined ways of life in the palace and Thai classical music and dance.



Figure 6: Young Kukrit Pramoj (centre) with his family. (From left) M.R. Tuantaoneuk Pramoj, Mom Daeng Pramoj Na Ayutthaya, M.R. Boonrub Pinijchonkhadee, M.R. Auraiwan Pramoj, Police Lieutenant General H.R.H Prince Khamrob, M.R. Seanee Pramoj (Khomchadleuk 2021).

His years in England exposed him to various cultural products in the West which he actively consumed and participated in. At the age of fifteen, he was sent to study in England, starting his pre-university at Trent College. He then went on to obtain his Bachelor with Honours degree in Modern Greats (i.e., Philosophy, Politics, and Economics) from Queen’s College, Oxford University (ibid 16). The intensity level in which he immersed himself in foreign cultural capital and became reflexively transformed by it is best encapsulated in his journal-style books titled *Lohk Suantua Khong Phom (My Private World)*, which related his worldviews. Apart from his extensive knowledge of world literary works and music repertoires (Siam Rath 1995, Phukarn 193), two notable points underline his aesthetic cosmopolitan disposition. Firstly, he stated that he “changed to another man” in each city that he lived in or travelled to (Pramoj 119, 337). Based on his lifestyle during his college years and overseas trip, it is evident that Pramoj immersed himself in foreign cultures via consuming and participating in cultural activities such as performing in the university’s

musical activities, going to the theatre and joining social clubs, learning European languages by spending a school vacation with host families, and learning the art of cooking foreign cuisines. For him, participating meant attempting to find out their stories and cultural connotation whether directly from local people or from secondary sources.

Secondly, his perspectives and taste were affected by the cultures he came into contact with, while Thai culture still functioned as his core system. For example, once he got used to the English way of life, he realised that he became fond of and addicted to English food and even the weather (Pramoj 125). The thriving theatre scene and the legitimate stage<sup>48</sup> in England always fascinated him and, consequently, made him long for a similar theatre scene in Thailand with Thai classical drama (ibid 257-263). This idea led him to establish Khon Thammasat<sup>49</sup> and Thai Khadi Research Institute<sup>50</sup> in the following years. Taking the model from the British legitimate stage, which presented plays approved by the state, his choice indicated that he deemed *khon* a legitimate art form, suitable for representing Thailand's national culture. This point reveals his stance of aspirational cosmopolitanism in striving to create a legitimate national theatre in Thailand, just as he had experienced in England. This was evident in his remark that he was disappointed when he struggled to tell his Western friends where to catch a national performance, as there were not many places to do so (ibid). His decision in establishing entities to carry out his aspirations reveals how he harnessed his aesthetics, which were transformed by coming into contact with foreign cultural capital, to enhance and continue his local cultural capital. Interestingly, this method is similar to *Four Reigns*' key message discussed in section two, using elements from the modern world to modernise and continue the old ways of life.

His transformed perspective from deep immersion in both foreign and Thai cultural products, as I contend, significantly contributed to the tension between both worlds in his view. Based on his background, it is likely that his ties with the royal family and Thai classical music and traditions lay an unwavering foundation for his preference for the old world. His direct experience with palace life also helps to explain his deep appreciation of the Thai monarchy, which is strongly expressed via several characters in *Four Reigns*, particularly Phloi and Khun Prem, the two lead characters. At the same time, his years in England and his

---

<sup>48</sup> The term "legitimate theatre" refers to official British playhouses that usually present "serious non-musical drama" (Grantley 250).

<sup>49</sup> A *khon* troupe practised and performed by students and staff in Thammasat University for the public.

<sup>50</sup> A research institute under Thammasat University that aims solely to study and research about Thai society, to maintain and preserve Thai arts and culture and to disseminate such knowledge to the public.

enthusiasm for participating in European cultural activities suggest his interest in and transformation by the modern world of Western influences (i.e., the new world). In this sense, it can be said that Pramoj had a comprehensive understanding of and preference for both the old and the new worlds, resulting in the overlap between the two within himself. This is also a manifestation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, in which the subject interrelates aesthetics from the local and the otherness, thus bringing the two spheres to interact with each other more actively. As Delanty explains, this does not necessarily always lead to the mixing of cultural entities or the eradication of one entity as it can lead to the co-existence of both entities through the frameworks of solidarity and integration (31).

However, since his target reader was, above all, Thai, such co-existence manifested in a form of tension between such aesthetics. This tension between the two worlds in Pramoj's orientation is strongly manifested in *Four Reigns*, notably in the form of conflicts between generations. Such tension also functions as one of the most important cores of the novel (see synopsis in Appendix III), which will be illustrated by the examination of the key theme in the next section.

### **Key Theme in *Four Reigns***

#### **The Old World versus the New World**

While there are various themes featured in *Four Reigns*, in this section, I will focus on the one I find most significant for this case study. This is the interplay of two worlds—the old world of absolute monarchy and the modern world of freedom and democracy. This theme is important because it foregrounds the core of *Four Reigns* and indicates the formation of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism amongst the characters and their communities, serving as a pre-cosmopolitan condition for the musical adaptation. Just as Pramoj negotiated between the two worlds in real life, his characters in *Four Reigns* also go through similar processes. Some characters experience a strong clash between two worlds while others manage to float through them with ease. The changes and conflicts arising from such interplay have been present in Thai society even until now. This is why, as I contend, despite having been written over seventy years ago, the conflict and tension featured in the story are still relevant to modern readers and audiences.

The three examples below illustrate the impact of such tensions on lead characters and how they cope with them. The ways these characters manage the tensions are crucial to understanding the moral behind the story—choosing elements from both worlds and hybridising them with caution.

Born towards the end of the Fifth Reign, Phloi and Khun Prem have grown up witnessing the results of the ongoing modernisation process set forth by King Rama V. While their environment is gradually changing, Phloi and Khun Prem, who are strongly rooted in Thai traditional ways of life, need to keep up with new ways of life accompanying this modernisation. As she grows older, Phloi is confronted with more intensified changes, ranging from watching King Rama VI starring in public plays (discussed in section three) to seeing her daughter going out in public with her suitors in a care-free manner.<sup>51</sup> On the one hand, Khun Prem is eager to take on new fashions (e.g., participating in a social club, horse riding) set forth by the kings, particularly King Vajiravudh. On the other hand, Phloi often follows these fashions mostly due to Khun Prem's strong persuasion and the desire to avoid any conflict with upper-class society and the government. Although both manage to get through most changes in their time, they follow practices and opinions that the kings advocate without questioning them.

Looking from Phloi's perspective, it can be said that the new world of modern thinking brings chaos and difficulty to her life. In the end, the losses of King Rama VI and King Rama VIII shatter Khun Prem's and Phloi's worlds respectively. Such blows strongly affect their sense of hope and purpose in life and, with it, their will to live, eventually bringing an end to their lives. This point indicates the couple's strong attachment to and undying love for the monarchy and how the monarchy indeed functions as the main pillar in their lives. In other words, they generally dwell in the old world. Their consumption of foreign cultural products in the cultural supermarket remains at a superficial level and does not lead to any substantial transformation in their perceptions. Drawing on Octobre and Cicchelli's research on cosmopolitan taste, Khun Prem and Phloi can be categorised as inadvertent cosmopolitans—those who are swept by the tides of globalisation, often without much interest in getting to know the cultures of the particular ethno-national cultural product (9). In this way, Khun

---

<sup>51</sup> The courtship in Phloi's younger years is much more conservative in that the woman takes a more passive role, and the idea that a good lady should not go out with a man unchaperoned prevails.

Prem and Phloi, particularly the former, also display their stance of aspirational cosmopolitanism through their desire to grasp what is deemed as globally valid as told by the king and other Western-educated elites. As discussed in Chapter Two, in the reigns of King Rama V to VII (1868-1935), cultural products from the West were deemed as cultural nobility due to the political power of Western European countries.

In contrast to Phloi and Khun Prem, their westernised and idealist son, An, determines to bring the new world (i.e., the modern world dominated by Western influences) to Thailand without an understanding of the old world. Born in the Sixth Reign and having spent most of his youth being educated in European schools, An finds it easy to adapt to European culture and schools of thought.<sup>52</sup> His association with like-minded scholars and his intimate relationship with the local French woman, Lucille, strongly contribute to his absorption of Western political ideologies and events, especially democracy and equality. Gradually, such ideologies, and his preferences for French culture, replace his Thai upbringing, as he begins to look at his native culture and his family's traditions with disdain.

An's westernised mindset in opposition to dominant Thai ideologies and his preference for Western ideologies are best reflected in his letters to Thailand. Through Phloi's words, we find out that An's letters are mostly about changes that should take place in Thailand for the sake of making the country more 'civilised' like France. Upon his return to Thailand with Lucille, whom he married without informing his parents, An refuses to touch any Thai food or the lounge clothes (e.g., cotton shirt and silk trousers) that Phloi prepares for him.<sup>53</sup> Rather, he insists on having only coffee and toast for breakfast<sup>54</sup> because "that is what the French have" (Pramoj 595) and describes Phloi's lounge outfit—a breast cloth and a *jong grabehn* (i.e., sarong-style trousers)—to his wife as an exotic object (ibid). Even when Lucille hugs and kisses Phloi and shakes Khun Prem's hand, making both Phloi and Khun Prem extremely uncomfortable due to the difference in personal boundaries in Thai culture, An does not stop his wife. Instead, he tells his parents that "this is their way of being polite" (ibid 576-578). In this way, An's consumption of French cultural products leads to such a

---

<sup>52</sup> Although the names of such schools are not specified in the novel, An's ideologies tend to lean towards Marxism.

<sup>53</sup> A wedding ceremony in Thailand consists of various steps involving the presence of both a man and woman's parents. Before the process can take place, it is considered auspicious for both parties' parents to give consent for and approve the marriage.

<sup>54</sup> Thai breakfast usually consists of rice or boiled rice with a variety of side dishes.



substantial transformation in his aesthetics that it leads to a newfound perception of his native culture as backward. His altered aesthetics are demonstrated in his view of Thai culture as inferior and his aspiration of making Thailand more civilised like France, especially in terms of the system of governance.

Being influenced by and looking up to Western political ideologies, An comes home determined to change Thailand for the better without compromising his Western preferences or trying to comprehend his cultural roots. However, when his attempt at a political revolution backfires (i.e., the assassination and capture of royal family members and forcing the king to abdicate the throne) he reveals his core values attached to the national pillars of Thailand—nation (*chat*), religion (*satsana*, referred to Buddhism), king (*phramahakasat*). In this way, An initially resides in the new world and tries to negate the old one, but later in life, he comes to understand the significance and viability of the old world. At first glance, An's situation may represent Pramoj's opposition to democracy and its negative impact on Thailand. However, on a deeper level, An's downfall emphasises the danger of a lack of understanding and interest in the old world where the foundations of Thai cultural identity lay.

The violent collision between the two worlds, particularly in terms of politics, has been reflected in the reality of modern society in Thailand. To give a recent example, ever since King Vajiralongkorn Rama X was crowned in 2016, Thai people seem to be separated roughly into two sides—those who support the monarchy and those who seek to reform the monarchy (in a sense that they want to decrease the institution's power). The clash has been intensified by political and non-political groups on both sides, leading to a number of protests and violent incidents in Bangkok since 2019.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, based on my observations, the majority of the group in support of the monarchy tends to be those who were born before and during the baby boomer generation. These people generally grew up witnessing concrete positive results brought about by the monarchy, especially by the late King Bhumibol. The opposite group, however, tends to consist of younger generations. Their mouthpieces are generally those who are in their twenties to thirties and have been educated in Europe or studied Western politics. The current political unrest indeed mirrors the conflict arising from

---

<sup>55</sup> Further news on protests in Thailand can be accessed via the *Thai PBS* websites ([www.thaipbsworld.com](http://www.thaipbsworld.com) and <https://news.thaipbs.or.th/news>).

two worlds featured in *Four Reigns*, accentuating its relatability to contemporary Thai readers.

The characters that seem to find a balance between the two worlds and sail through them most easily are Ot and, in a different way, Choi. Like An, Ot has been educated in the West and enjoys the new world of freedom and modern thinking. Nevertheless, Ot's letters to Thailand show his understanding and comparative views of Thai and English cultures. For instance, in one of his letters, Ot tells Phloi that he will not get a *farang* wife because he does not want her to feel tricked by him. He explains the myths caused by orientalism in Europe, which lead some women to believe that all Southeast Asian scholars in the country are royalty and, thus, extremely wealthy. However, due to different ways of life and aesthetics, those women are likely to find a simple Thai lifestyle unpleasant and austere (ibid 569-570). His other letters also reveal how he willingly immerses himself in English society, ranging from the upper class of his noble English friends to the lower social milieu of servants and school guards in order to get to know their ways of life. Unlike An, Ot understands that some Western ideas, particularly democracy and a constitutional monarchy, can be too radical for the old world of Thai society, particularly for those who are not well-educated. Therefore, such ideas should be introduced slowly across the community. Furthermore, these introductions have been gradually advocated by the kings (Rama VI-VII) themselves, so he opposes the aggressive actions carried out by An's group. This point is illustrated when he says that the word 'democracy' has not even been defined in the Thai language. Then, he challenges An to try to explain the concept in Thai, which An finds difficult to do so without borrowing English terms.

Another character that can represent the balance of both worlds quite well is Choi, Phloi's best friend. Choi is witty and resilient. Although she belongs to the old world and shares many common perspectives with Phloi, she is highly adaptable to the new world without losing touch with her preferred old ways of things. For example, when women are required to wear a Western-style skirt, Choi follows the rule while wearing her *jhong graben* inside (ibid 496). When women are required to wear a hat outside, she makes her own style by utilising her meticulous *chao wang* skills.<sup>56</sup> Above all, Choi and Ot have the ability to comprehend

---

<sup>56</sup> The government scheme of westernising the people's personal attire to make them look more 'international' (*sakol*).

and accept changes in the world while staying true to themselves. Despite the gradual decline of the Royal Palace during each reign, Choi manages to remain happy with her life and find joy in every opportunity. Pramoj also spoke highly of these two characters rather than the heroine, commenting that Phloi was so “old-fashioned” and “has neither voice nor right of her own” (quoted in Thanonnangseuh 1985).

Looking at these characters, we can place them in a continuum, with the old world and the new world situated at each end. On one side, we have Phloi and Khun Prem, who hold on strongly to the old world, resisting the pressure to change and adapt. On the other side, we have An, who insists on staying in the new world, refusing to understand the ways of the old world. In the middle, we have Choi and Ot who travel between these two groups and, at least in the narrative, seem to be most content. As such, I contend that one of *Four Reigns*' key messages is that one needs to be mindful of taking on foreign cultural capital, whether this involves fashions, pop culture, or schools of thought, and should instead hybridise them wisely with dominant ideologies while respecting the ways of life preceding them. In this way, the narrative suggests that by truly understanding and hybridising elements from both worlds without going to each extreme, Thai society shall be able to grow stably. If we look at Ot and Choi, it is obvious that Pramoj endorses extending one's cultural repertoire so long as one accepts the changes wisely rather than falling victim to their influences or turning against one's cultural roots. In other words, as a ‘smart conservative’, Pramoj may be suggesting that one needs to understand his or her national history and harness foreign cultural capital to continue and modernise one's culture in keeping with the stability of the national pillars. The narrative and the characters in *Four Reigns*, thus, compel readers to view it as a historical source while shaping their perspectives towards modern society at the same time.

### **Aesthetic and Aspirational Cosmopolitanism in *Four Reigns***

As pointed out earlier, the interplay between the old world and the new world, which is strongly present in Pramoj's orientation and the core of the story, is a sign of the development of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism—dominated by Western cultural imperialism—in Thailand at the time. These elements in the source text are mostly in the form of social norms, which propel the characters to consume cultural products and participate in cultural activities from the wider shores. Such elements are significant because they shape a pre-cosmopolitan condition for the musical adaptation of *Four Reigns*. The

following three moments in the narrative can precisely demonstrate elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism: (1) social participation (Pramoj 437- 449, 493 - 503), parting with the children (ibid 483 – 492), and (3) An’s return (ibid 573 – 585). These moments will be analysed from two aspects, which are (1) the collective and descriptive norms in lifestyle (i.e., popular cultural activities) and fashion (i.e., attire and hairstyle for both men and women) and (2) the use of language in the narrative. Prior to analysing these moments, I will briefly introduce the concept of social and collective norms as relevant to the narrative analysis. Since the elements in the analysis are mostly social norms, this concept helps shed light on the characters’ decisions in following and consuming social norms and the social agents who set these norms in the historical context of the time.

### **Social and Collective Norms**

Drawing from the works of Lapinski and Rimal, norms are social phenomena that, at the collective level, serve as prevalent codes of conduct for group members (129). One of the sub-groups occurring in collective norms can be described as descriptive norms, which refer to the beliefs of how most members in the group actually conduct themselves in certain situations (130). Such norms tend to be manifested at the social level and align with the dominant ideologies of that particular group. These ideologies are often shaped by and deployed as apparatus by national institutions. In Thailand’s case, particularly during the period in which *Four Reigns* is set, these social norms were determined by the monarchy and their changes were the result of Thailand’s active participation in global relations, again propelled by the monarchy. The aim was to hybridise Western norms with Thai culture at an appropriate level to make the country more *sakol*<sup>57</sup>, leading to cultural syncretism (Santiratphakdee 138).<sup>58</sup>

Lapinski and Rimal list three moderators which influence descriptive norms. The three moderators are (a) outcome expectations; (b) group identity; and (c) ego involvement (134). In short, firstly, outcome expectations refer to an individual’s belief that they will gain benefits from following collective norms in her society. Secondly, group identity means that

---

<sup>57</sup> *Sakol* means universal or international. As explored in Chapter Two, the term is usually dominated by Western norms, which indicates an asymmetrical relationship to the world order.

<sup>58</sup> See Peleggi’s *Lord of Things* for social norms and the role of the monarchy in the Fifth Reign. See Santiratphakdee’s *Chak Chiwit Si Phaendin* for social norms in the Fifth to Eighth Reigns as featured in the novel.

individuals follow such norms in order to display their valid membership and identification within their group. Thirdly, ego involvement refers to their need to consume such norms to form and maintain their consciousness of self-identity (ibid). Below, I demonstrate collective norms arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism via three selected moments in *Four Reigns* and the agents which influence them.

## 1) Social participation

### Narrative

After Phloi gives birth to her youngest daughter, Prapai, with the help of a *farang* doctor, her health gradually gets better. Phloi notices that Khun Prem takes on new activities in accordance with King Vajiravudh's preferences. After participating in social clubs and horse riding, Khun Prem wishes to practise *khon*, again because the king likes it (Pramoj 446). Having tried the dance for a month, he moves on to *lakhon phut*, Western-style spoken plays. Once more, the reason for his idea is that the king likes it. Not understanding what a spoken play is, Phloi doubts whether such a performance with no music and dance can be entertaining for anyone. Teasing that Phloi is "old-fashioned" and "not keeping up with the trends", Khun Prem then says that a spoken play is fun "if you know how to watch it" (ibid 448). Later, he urges his wife to grow her hair long so that when they have an audience with the king, the king will be pleased.

After World War I, the king announces his betrothal to Phra Worakunya, who will later become the queen. All well-to-do ladies start to copy her *maem* fashion style.<sup>59</sup> Khun Prem asks if Phloi wants to request an audience with her like other ladies. Phloi refuses and says that she does not have to hurry because the king will have more wives anyway. However, Khun Prem assures Phloi that she misunderstands the king because the king has gone to study abroad since a young age and that polygamy is not practised amongst "*phudii ang-grid*" (i.e., noble Englishmen) (ibid 479). Khun Prem also tells Phloi that the king and his fiancée are performing a play together for the general public. This shocks Phloi as both the idea of a man and a woman acting together and the general public being able to see the king are too progressive for her. Later, Khun Prem takes Phloi to see the play, *Phong Phang*, written by

---

<sup>59</sup> *Maem* is a Thai term which refers to female Caucasians.

the king himself. Phloi is fully dressed up, as though she is about to have a formal audience with the king. However, she dares not look at the stage for the entire performance, as she feels that it is inappropriate to look at the king. Khun Prem, on the other hand, enjoys the play very much and comments that the king is the best actor on stage (ibid 501).

### **Lifestyle norms**

Notable norms arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism in this context are the activities in the social club and the theatre. I will address these two points in their respective order.

The following excerpt indicates the importance of socialising in a club after work:

Khun Prem explains that nowadays those who wish to prosper in life need to know how to participate in a *samakom* (social club). As far as Phloi understands, what Khun Prem means by ‘participating in a *samakom*’ is coming back home late with the smell of liquor and cigarettes. Alternatively, he does not come back home at all on that night. It also means carrying tons of money each time he leaves the house to gamble in the club, then come back empty-handed as well as indulging himself with such extravagances.

(Pramoj 430)

It is not surprising that Phloi does not know the meaning of a social club because this type of social gathering was only established during the reign of King Vajiravudh, which is the second reign in Phloi’s life. As a “reign of young men” (ibid 415), this reign adopted many Western practices amongst the educated elite. This was mainly due to the king’s personal preferences, which derived from his years in England. Along with such clubs, there came other Westernised norms such as dressing up in Western-style attire, drinking imported liquor and smoking European cigarettes. Many brands of European cigarettes were imported into Thailand towards the end of King Rama V’s reign and became highly popular in the following reign. These cigarettes were often expensive and required a specific pipe to smoke (Santiratphakdee 119-120), signifying the buyer’s higher financial status. This indicates that the expansion of the cultural supermarket in Thailand was dominated by Western cultural

products, which created opportunities for local Thai subjects to encounter them without having to leave the country. In this sense, the local sphere was permeated by a greater number of cultural products from the West.

It is interesting to note how Western cultural activities and products here are labelled not only as aspirational but also as conspicuous and rather corruptive. In this way, by aspiring to be cosmopolitans, individuals in this reign needed to use the money to buy their identity and enter the group they wished to be associated with. This type of group entry suggests its members' conspicuous and superficial consumption of foreign cultural norms. Presenting these aspirational cultural activities as both noble and corruptive may suggest that one needed to consider both sides of a coin when adopting certain norms as Thai society became more modernised. In this context, Khun Prem mostly sees the positive side of consuming such norms and immerses himself. His discernment may be clouded by his determination to follow the king's preferences as well. This, nevertheless, leads back to the novel's core message of mindful cultural hybridisation, which asks an individual to consider their own decisions and aspirations.

The fact that Khun Prem stresses that participating in such activities confers benefits for his career advancement indicates that he is strongly driven by the outcome expectations from following the collective norms. Since consuming Western cultural products endorsed by the king and other noblemen is a mark of membership in the educated elite, Khun Prem willingly adopts such norms to display his membership with the group. Furthermore, once a part of this elevated sphere, he needs to spend on more extravagances to maintain his membership and reassure his constructed identity. In this way, Khun Prem displays a stance of aesthetic cosmopolitanism by actively consuming such foreign cultural products, but such consumption remains at the surface and does not lead to concrete transformation in his perspectives or taste, as he merely follows the king.

Apart from the activities demonstrated above, this reign enjoyed prosperity in various types of performing arts ranging from Thai classical music and dance to translated and adapted plays from the West. Spoken plays were arguably the most popular and influential type of performing art in this reign due to the king's preference for European playwrights (e.g., Shakespeare and Molière) and their Western aesthetics. As an art form derived from Western performing arts, those who were familiar with spoken plays tended to be Western-educated

individuals, who were usually limited to those belonging to affluent families. Therefore, as Khun Prem says, a spoken play can be pretty fun “if you know how to watch it” (Pramoj 439). This statement implies that seeing a spoken play, a cultural product from the West, is a matter of good taste and one needs to learn how to appreciate it. Given the popularity and availability of spoken plays in Thailand at the time, the Thai theatre was shaped by aesthetic cosmopolitanism dominated by the king and his peers whose aesthetics were influenced by Western forces. Consequently, the Thai theatre shaped by the global aesthetic attracted audiences who belonged to the higher classes or wished to be associated with them, whether they followed the king’s taste for subsequent benefits or wanted to flag their membership.

### **Fashion norms**

The fashion norms influenced by aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism in this context are exhibited through Phloi and Phra Worakunya, the king’s fiancée. In keeping up with the current fashion norms, Khun Prem asks Phloi to grow her hair long instead of keeping it short and trimmed in the style of *dok krathum*. This short and trimmed hairstyle signifies women’s fashion in the previous reign of King Rama V (Figure 7). When asked for the reason behind his request for Phloi to change her hairstyle, Khun Prem simply replies that it is because “the king does not like women with short hair” (ibid 492). Although Khun Prem does not explain the reasons behind the king’s dislike, two possible factors come into play. The first factor, which is of more importance, is the king’s familiarity and preference for the beauty standards set by European countries. Since the king wished to continue his father’s policy of modernising Thailand and bringing in a variety of Western cultural norms and practices, it is not surprising that women’s fashions in Thailand were also transformed by Western fashion style. In parallel with this, the Westernised fashion style denoted that Thailand was modernised just like other European countries. This policy of westernising attires in Thailand to present the country alongside imperialist countries had also been carried out by King Rama IV and V (see Chapter Two). In this sense, the modernised fashion style features the aspiration to belong to the wider sphere of Western fashions.





Figure 7: *Dok krathum* hairstyle in the reign of King Chulalongkorn Rama V (Silpa-Mag 2021).

Aside from hairstyles, Western-style attire is also a popular norm. In this context, it is notably advocated by Phra Worakunya, the king's fiancée. Her fashion is, in fact, a hybrid between Thai and Western attires (Figures 8 and 9). Her favourite fashion style consists of a *jhong grabehn* bottom and a long top covering the *jhong grabehn*. The long top with a belt to accentuate the waistline, derived from Western fashion style, is designed to assimilate the look of a *maem*'s long skirt. The look is complete with socks and shoes (Santiratphakdee 144). Through Phloi's words, readers find out that portraits of Phra Worakunya in her fashionable attire are displayed and sold in many photography studios. The distribution of her portraits and her status as the king's fiancée undoubtedly shaped the perspectives and aspirations of the general public to follow her style influenced by aesthetic cosmopolitanism.



Figures 8 (left): Phra Worakunya, or Her Royal Highness Princess Wanlapha-thaewi, and King Vajiravudh Rama VI (Mejubot n.a.).

Figures 9 (right): Phra Worakunya in her fashionable attire (Silpa-Mag 2021).

## Use of language

In this context, the author introduces several buzzwords of the novel era. All of these words are associated with Western influences. For example, the words ‘*samakom*’ and ‘*lakhon phut*’ are Thai terms created to describe cultural norms brought about by Western forces. Both of these terms became popular in the reign of King Rama VI due to the king’s familiarity and preferences for Victorian cultural norms. The fact that the words ‘*farang*’ (a Caucasian), ‘*maem*’ (a female Caucasian), and ‘*phudii ang-grid*’ (English noblemen) are used openly by Phloi and Khun Prem suggests that people in the middle class and above have become somewhat familiar with terms used to describe Western forces. It is interesting to note that all of these terms are employed to denote higher cultural status and the benefits of associating with such norms and people. Phloi expresses that she can get through the complications of her birth because of a Western doctor - no Thai midwives and traditional Thai treatment can help with her issue. For Khun Prem, participating in a social club and seeing a play possess high cultural values because the king likes them, and they can lead to advancement in his career. On the other hand, as he tells Phloi, those who do not follow such norms will be deemed old-fashioned and will not prosper in life. His statement regarding how noble Englishmen are against polygamy, just like King Rama VI, implies that Khun Prem puts the two into the same sphere. As Khun Prem perceives the king as his role model and sees everything he does in the highest light possible, his statement also suggests the cultural nobility of the English way.

## 2) Parting with Children

### Narrative

Khun Prem decides to send their two sons, An and Ot, to study abroad. Thinking that her sons are still young, Phloi feels saddened and worried by her husband’s decision. However, Khun Prem warns Phloi that providing them with a good education at a young age is a way of expressing love for their sons. In preparation for their trip, Khun Prem takes An and Ot to get their photograph taken for their passports. The whole family sees this as an excellent opportunity to take a family photo as well. Then, Khun Prem takes the boys to the tailor at

the Badman shopping mall and to buy pyjamas and essentials at Yon Samson mall. Seeing her children dressed in a *farang* style for the first time, Phloi finally realises how quickly their sons have grown up. On the day of departure, the boys travel on a steamship to Singapore before boarding another ship to Europe. To Phloi, the figure of a big steamship releasing its smoke and smelling of coal looks like a ferocious animal trying to take her sons away. Once the children are aboard, Phloi hears people shouting in *farang* language from the ship, indicating that the ship is ready to depart, and away it floats.

After a few weeks, Phloi receives a postcard from her sons. An's message is brief, stating that the hotel on the front of this postcard is where they are staying before boarding another ship to Europe the next day. Ot, on the other hand, describes sea animals and foreign people during their trip. Subsequent letters from them proceed in a similar manner where An writes about their formal plan and their whereabouts while Ot relates their life experiences in detail, particular stories that he perceives to be foreign to his culture. While Phloi loves reading Ot's vivid description of his life, Khun Prem prefers An's formal letters and boasts about them to his colleagues.

### **Lifestyle norms**

Two notable norms present at this moment are studying abroad and photography. In the reigns of King Rama IV and Rama V, royal descendants and elites were often sent to study or observe work abroad in order to return with such knowledge to help modernise Thailand. This increased the number of foreign-educated elites who dominated national institutions in the reign of King Rama VI. Khun Prem assured Phloi of the necessity of sending the boys to study abroad by saying that keeping them here would be “impeding their progress” and mocking that his English “is so inadequate that sometimes when His Majesty speaks it I can't follow him at all. When he says something and people laugh I just look blank” (ibid 293).<sup>60</sup>

The above not only stresses the necessity and high value of a Western education but also reveals that the aesthetics of the king and his peers are shaped by their familiarity with Western cultural capital. Although Khun Prem comes from an elitist class in Thailand, he

---

<sup>60</sup> This passage is taken from Tulachandra's English translation of *Four Reigns* (1998).

does not study abroad, making him feel somewhat inferior to other foreign-educated individuals. This may also be the reason why Khun Prem strives to consume cultural capital imported from the West, as discussed above, and his determination to send his sons abroad to ensure his membership in the Thai elite as well. The fact that he boasts about An's letter also suggests that the norm of sending one's children to study abroad contains an element of aspiration that smart and well-to-do individuals should follow.

Another norm in this scene is the norm of photography. According to Peleggi, this norm is an importation and promotion of Western culture in Thailand by King Mongkut Rama IV and King Chulalongkorn Rama V (10). Before King Mongkut's photograph, a camera was perceived as a soul-suction tool in Thailand. With King Mongkut's and King Chulalongkorn's keen interest in photography, the norm of photography had slowly become accepted and adopted by Thai elites and, later, middle-class individuals (ibid 15). In this context, photography in the reign of King Vajiravudh Rama VI was no longer referred to as an activity limited to royalty but one accessible to well-to-do commoners as well. This point suggests that the people in the middle to high social milieu in Bangkok had, to a certain extent, been transformed by this Western norm and adopted it as part of their culture.

### **Fashion norms**

Although fashion attire is not described in detail in this context, readers find out that Khun Prem takes their sons to shop at Badman and Yon Samson malls. Historically, these two malls were amongst the first *farang* shopping malls in Thailand established during the reign of King Rama V. The name Badman mall stood for Harry A. Badman and Go., and it sold a variety of imported goods from the West. The mall was especially known for selling luxurious goods and fashionable clothes from the West. The Yon Samson was a common name amongst Thais to refer to The John Samson & Son, a shopping mall specialising in fabrics imported from the West and tailored Western-style suits. Based on this evidence, it is likely that Khun Prem takes the boys to get their suits tailored and buy other attire worn in the West. This is supported by Phloi, who states that she sees her sons dressed in *farang* attire.

### **The use of language**

This moment is overall painted by terms that reflect foreign influences in Thailand, starting from the names of the foreign countries that An and Ot will travel to, the names of the malls owned by English companies in Bangkok, and the boys' letters about their experiences abroad. From their letters, Phloi gets to familiarise herself with new cultural references such as hotels in Singapore and Colombo, and a range of Western menus. The terms related to the West convey excitement (e.g., the preparation for the boys), formality (e.g., passport, formal attires for the children, Western table manners), and modernisation (e.g., photography, fashionable gadgets at the malls, steamships). Combined with the benefits and necessity of Western education stated by Khun Prem, the use of these terms may be interpreted as a signifier of a movement toward the modern world. However, such progressive movement is counterbalanced by the figure of the steamship, signifying the frightening side of the Western world. To Phloi, it can be said that the Western world brings worries and difficulties into her peaceful life. Again, the ambiguous representation of the West in the novel underlines its message of understanding the old world and the new world in order to find the balance between the two.

### 3) An's Return

#### Narrative

Upon returning to Thailand from France, An brings his French wife, Lucille, with him, causing awkwardness amongst his family members. The following day, An asks Phloi to meet Lucille, who is getting ready in her room. Phloi does not quite comprehend why Lucille has to put on so much makeup as if she is about to perform in a *lakhon*, but she does not say anything. When Lucille asks her to choose an outfit for her, Phloi sees various accessories unknown to her and revealing dresses. This is the first time Phloi sees a Caucasian woman with wavy auburn hair and light blue eyes. She finds that Lucille is "pretty like a doll," but her skin is not as delicate as Thai women's (ibid 575). As a polite gesture, Phloi tells An to let Lucille know that she thinks Lucille is beautiful. Delighted, Lucille immediately embraces Phloi, making Phloi extremely uncomfortable due to a difference in personal boundaries in Thai culture. Phloi hopes that Lucille will not display such behaviour in public; otherwise, it will bring shame to the family. Lucille becomes interested in Phloi's breast cloth and keeps touching it. Phloi learns from An that Lucille is amazed by how Phloi's top is made of a

single cloth wrapped around her torso. An encourages his wife's curiosity while Phloi leaves the room feeling like the couple has exoticised her.

Having found out more information regarding Western food, Phloi buys lots of bread, milk, and butter for breakfast, hoping that it will suit Lucille's taste. An tells Phloi that they only have some toast and coffee for breakfast because "that is what the French have" (ibid 579). During breakfast, Lucille dips her toast in the coffee before putting it in her mouth, which puts Phloi off. However, she says nothing because An also does the same. The family member who seems most excited about having Lucille at home is Prapai, Phloi's youngest daughter. Prapai takes the opportunity to learn and imitate Lucille's body gestures, language, and fashion. One day, Prapai is caught wearing Lucille's makeup, so Phloi tells her to wipe it off. Prapai disagrees with Phloi, saying that "in *meuang nok* (i.e., Western countries) everybody does it," making Phloi angry (ibid 584). When An finds out about this matter, he assures Phloi that all ladies in France do put on makeup, so Phloi should let Prapai do the same.

### **Lifestyle norms**

In this context, the lifestyle norms are exhibited via Lucille, while An and Prapai signify those who aspire to grasp such norms and are transformed by them. Lucille functions as a disseminator of Western cultural norms in the house, which has an impact on the family members. As soon as she arrives, she insists on giving hugs and kisses to Khun Prem and Phloi, who find such gestures uncomfortable. Khun Prem's remarks and his grumpy behaviour clearly show that he disapproves of such norms. For example, when Lucille shakes his hand, he says, "if she is this polite, I am afraid she will break my hand anytime soon" (ibid 478). At first glance, Khun Prem's behaviour may seem to go against his enthusiasm for pursuing Western norms as demonstrated throughout this chapter. Given the atmosphere of the Sixth Reign, which is strongly infused with Western influences, it is doubtful that Khun Prem does not understand Lucille's polite gestures. His disapproval of her gestures, however, confirms the main reasons behind his consumption of those norms. He consumes them to show his devotion to the monarchy and, thus, establish his association with the ruling classes. Therefore, he consumes those norms only on a superficial level to gain benefits in his career and be a part of the social group. This is not to say that Khun Prem is inherently a shallow

character. Rather, his disapproval highlights that he is firmly grounded in the traditional Thai ways, which are triggered by coming into close contact with Lucille's Western ways.

Feeling equally uncomfortable about Lucille's gestures, Phloi deals with this matter differently. Noticing that Lucille finds Thai food unappetising, Phloi seeks information about Western cuisine, which she does not know much about. From taking care of Lucille, Phloi gradually expands her repertoire of cultural capital and tries to further her understanding of such norms though she does not adopt them. Similar to Khun Prem, Phloi is also firmly rooted in traditional Thai ways, but she allows her perception to be affected by such norms a little more easily.

An functions as both a mediator of Western norms and the character who is most transformed by consuming such norms. In this context, we can see that he and Lucille share many similarities in their gestures, manners, and views. He also approves of and supports Lucille's behaviour despite his family's discomfort. This point can be seen from the way he justifies Lucille's actions with his parents by educating them subtly. For instance, when Khun Prem expresses his annoyance towards Lucille's physical greetings, An often says that Lucille is simply being polite. When Phloi objects to Prapai putting on makeup like Lucille, An explains that Phloi should not stop Prapai because putting on makeup is common amongst French women. He even suggests that Phloi should learn to do the same, just like French women of her age.

Interestingly, An's opinions about fashion, family, and politics, to name just a few, are often supported by examples in France or Europe. This point reveals that his perspective has been substantially transformed by his immersion in French and European cultures. His justification also suggests that, at least at the beginning of his return to Thailand, he either perceives himself as closer to the French people than the Thais or tries to conceal his Thai cultural identity which he perceives as inferior. This point is illustrated by his entertainment of Lucille's curiosity about Phloi's outfit. He does not stop Lucille from touching and pulling Phloi's breast cloth despite Phloi's obvious uneasiness. Furthermore, he joins her in discussing Phloi's outfit as if it is an exotic object. An's transformation leads him to become a mediator of such norms, contributing to the shaping of aesthetics and aspirations amongst his circle of friends and family, particularly Prapai.

### **Fashion norms**

The fashion norms in this context are mostly exhibited via Lucille and, later, Prapai. We learn from Phloi that Lucille's cosmetic and makeup styles are not common amongst Thai women of her age. While this makeup style is considered normal for Lucille, Phloi associates it with that of a *lakhon* performer, indicating its excessive amount for an everyday look in Thai society. Apart from her makeup, Lucille's dresses and accessories are perceived as revealing and alien to Phloi. From observing Lucille, Phloi learns first-hand about the fashion styles practised in the West (whether or not this is truly a common practice among ladies in the West). Once again, Lucille functions as a mediator of Western fashion norms, which affects Phloi's perception of the world at large.

Although it is unclear in the context whether Prapai is familiar with Lucille's style, it is apparent that she aspires to achieve it. From Phloi's observation, Prapai learns from Lucille and copies her behaviour eagerly "like a parrot" (ibid 584), indicating her level of intensity in pursuing these norms and, at the same time, her lack of judgement. Another notable moment that demonstrates Prapai's view about adopting such norms is her explanation that all women in the West wear makeup and, thus, she should do the same. Her reason suggests that Prapai willingly exposes herself to such norms and is aesthetically transformed by them.

Furthermore, she perceives the fashion norms practised in the West to be legitimate. Hence, she aspires to adopt them in order to be a part of the same (imagined) group of fashionable women.

### **Use of language**

The norms arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism are treated in two ways. The first way is expressed by An and Prapai and the second way is expressed by Phloi and Khun Prem. By An and Prapai, these norms are mentioned in a positive light. The norms represent civilisation and aspiration amongst young people. An and Prapai often claim that these norms are practised in the Western world and, therefore, the Thais should adopt them. Reading this point in combination with An's determination to make Thailand more westernised suggests their view of the underdevelopment of Thai society and that such norms are an emblem of modernisation.



However, these norms are perceived with doubts, irony and frustration by Phloi and Khun Prem. To the couple, these norms bring inconvenience into their domestic life as they affect their usual ways of life. For instance, they need to provide a separate set of food for Lucille and An, and they have to worry about Lucille displaying her manners in public, which is perceived as inappropriate for women in Thai culture. Moreover, they have to keep a close eye on Prapai, who aspires to be like Lucille. Phloi gradually comes to terms with Lucille's behaviour, as she understands that it is due to Lucille's cultural background. However, she worries that Prapai will be perceived as pretentious by her Thai peers, bringing humiliation to herself and her family.

The two ways of treatment denote the tension between the old world and the new world, which forms a foundation for subsequent conflicts in the novel. Meanwhile, Lucille, who is the main mediator of Western influences, is described as oblivious of her conduct in Thai society. Her obliviousness may be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is a sign of cultural imperialism in the sense that she sees no reason to learn and adjust herself to Thai culture, which she perceives as being inferior to French culture. The second interpretation, which I think fits the narrative and the novel's message better, shows that, on their own, Western forces are not as inherently positive or negative as painted by An and Khun Prem. Rather, their benefits and potential for harm depend on how individuals employ them, underlining the novel's message of mindful cultural hybridisation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the source text of *Four Reigns* is infused with elements derived from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, establishing a pre-cosmopolitan sphere for its musical adaptation. I have supported my argument by outlining the significance of M.R. Kukrit Pramoj's *Four Reigns* in relevance to Thai society. By exploring the role of Siam Rath and the novel's popularity amongst Thai readers, I have shown that *Four Reigns* engages Thai cultural memory as its main device to produce collective sentiments amongst Thai readers and, thus, shapes their perspectives towards dominant ideologies in Thailand. Such dominant ideologies are in parallel with the three pillars of Thailand (nation, religion, king), which has made *Four Reigns* influential for Thai readers until the present day. I have also demonstrated how Pramoj's perspective is shaped by aesthetic cosmopolitanism, which, consequently, is manifested in his novel as demonstrated by the three selected moments in the

narrative. Therefore, it can be said that the source material of *Four Reigns The Musical* already consists of the tension between global and local forces, exposing its readers to elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism. In doing so, the narrative and characters' actions reflect the importance of finding the balance in cultural hybridisation for, if done carefully, it can yield benefits and, if done carelessly, it can harm society.

## Chapter Six—Process of Adaptation

Having demonstrated how the novel *Four Reigns* was substantially shaped by aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, this chapter further investigates how aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism manifests in and influences the adaptation process of *Four Reigns The Musical*, known in Thai as *Si Phaendin The Musical*. It seeks to examine the intensity of ideological transaction conveyed by the musical, which brings to light its objective and political role in Thai society. I contend that the narrative adaptation process is strongly driven by the promotion of national ideologies manifested in the selected narrative, the multi-functional role of Phloi, and the stereotypical portrayal of lead characters. Furthermore, this chapter investigates how social norms and cultural activities shaped by aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism in the source text are transformed into and further enhanced as music and choreography in the musical production. In tandem with Chapters Five and Seven, this chapter argues that the key steps in making this musical—the source text, the process of adaptation, and the realisation—are infused with elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, which geared the musical towards its commercial success and popularity amongst local audiences.

This chapter is divided into two sections, which are (1) the compositional structure of *Four Reigns The Musical*; and (2) the development of music and choreography in the musical. Section one offers an overview of the musical productions and how the narrative of the novel was adapted into a musical. The analyses of the compositional structure of the musical, selected and musicalised narrative parts, and employed storytelling methods seek to demonstrate how the creative team's decisions are driven by their endorsed ideologies, and how such ideologies are conveyed more transparently and intensely than the source text; thus, highlighting the musical's role in shaping the audience's perspective of Thai history.

The examination of compositional structure and the endorsed ideologies leads into the analysis of the development of music and choreography. This section traces the overall creation of the music score and choreography in each reign of the musical, underlining how the artistic choices in *Four Reigns The Musical* derive from the interplay between local and global aesthetics. To demonstrate such interplay, I examine the song "Bot Nam (Overture)" and the dance sequence in "Wang Luang (The Royal Palace)". These examples can aptly provide an overview of how the music and choreography of the musical are displayed

through an interplay of both aesthetics, aiming to fit the demand of large-scale musical theatre for local Thai audiences. It is important to stress that the overture and the dance sequence are investigated here to illustrate the overall development of hybridised music and choreography arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism examined in the previous chapter, which the creative team developed further. The hybridised performative elements in the musical will be thoroughly analysed in Chapter Seven.

### **The Compositional Structure of *Four Reigns The Musical***

*Four Reigns The Musical* is a two-act musical directed and produced by Takonkiet Virawan with music and lyrics by Sarawut Lerdpunyanut and Vichian Tantiphimolphan respectively. It was first staged in 2011 at the Rachadalai Theatre and ran for one hundred performances, making it Virawan's longest-running musical production (Figure 10). It was restaged again in 2014 and 2017 at the same theatre and ran for fifty performances and sixty-three performances respectively. Finally, the musical's latest revival was staged towards the end of 2019 at an outdoor theatre at Lhong 1919 (Figure 11). This time, the musical was branded as *Four Reigns The Legend Musical*, highlighting its even larger-scale production and continuous performance history.



Figure 10: Poster of *Four Reigns The Musical* in 2011 (ThaiPost 2021).



Figure 11: Poster of *Four Reigns The Legend Musical* in 2019 (One31 2019).

Based on the historical novel of the same name written by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, the narrative and overall portrayal of characters remain largely the same in each musical production. The differences lay in the celebrity cast, whose acting and singing styles no doubt affected the show's reception, and the pace of the show, which was altered by adding or removing a few songs and reprises. The production that contains the most obvious change is the latest one at Lhong 1919 due to its different performance space and more extravagant special effects. Below, in comparison with the source text analysed in the previous chapter, I examine the narrative parts that are retained and eliminated in order to determine how the novel is adapted into a three-hour-long musical and the possible ideological nuances presented by the musical adaptation.

### **Selected Narrative**

The narrative adaptation process of *Four Reigns* is driven by the ideological transaction evidenced in the selected narrative and characters. To illustrate this, I start by proving a broad structure of the musical narrative before examining the narrative parts and characters that are retained and removed. It is important to note that my observation here is not to point out the musical adaptation's inferior or incomplete narrative compared to the novel, but to highlight the musical's strong emphasis on promoting certain ideologies.

Divided into two acts, Act I begins when young Phloi and her mother leave their home in Khlong Bang Luang. It follows Phloi's journey in the palace and her young adult years (the reigns of King Rama V to King Rama VI), ending with adult Phloi and her four grown-up

children embracing the new reign of Thailand (the reign of King Rama VII). The first half of Act I focuses on how young Phloi adapts to a new life in the palace while learning about the sense of importance and achievements King Rama V and his family have established for Thailand. The second half of Act I focuses on the young adult Phloi learning about the world outside of the palace and going through changes that occur from the death of King Rama V, the rapid modernisation process of Thailand during the reign of King Rama VI and, in the end, the loss of King Rama VI.

Act II focuses on the different lifestyles and orientations of Phloi's four children, which indicate the clash between the old world and the new world, leading to conflicts amongst themselves and political uprisings in Thailand. After the revolution in 1932, Thailand goes through World War II and An discovers that his political aspiration turns out to be disappointing, making him repentant of his idealist actions (particularly for his actions against the monarchy). The second act ends with the sudden death of King Rama VIII and Phloi passes away soon after that. The finale consists of Phloi's children changing the portrait of the king in their home, finishing with all characters singing about their hopeful future for the next reign of Thailand.

The major characters in the novel (Phloi, Khun Prem and their four children: On, An, Ot, and Prapai) remain as lead characters in the musical. Choi (Phloi's best friend) and Perm (Phloi's older brother) are retained but mainly function as comic relief and moral support for Phloi and her family. Minor characters who play an important role in shaping Phloi's perspective, such as Khun Un, Sadej (the princess whom Phloi serves), and Khun Sai (the palace lady who trains the princess' young protégées) are portrayed very briefly while Khun Cheoi (Phloi's half-sisters) and Neuang (Phloi's first love) are entirely removed. When these roles are portrayed, they usually function as characters that deliver the 'faithful' moments of the literary text, enabling the novel's fans to recognise and relive memorable lines from the novel. Apart from this function and laying the context for Phloi's turning points in life, such characters are not given much weight and advance the plot very little.

The character of Khun Un exemplifies the above. She is portrayed very briefly when young Phloi and her mother depart their home. Standing on the wooden dock, Khun Un mocks the mother and daughter saying:

Now that you're leaving, make sure you don't come back. [...] Go! Go away! You're a child of your mother, a tiger's cup, a crocodile's cup, you can't be kept here.

(Pramoj 10)

Khun Un's remark remains the same as that written in the literary text, allowing novel fans to recognise it right away. After this scene, the character never returns in the musical, suggesting her primary function as a minor character (for the adaptation) that pushes Phloi into a new adventure and establishes a connection between the adaptation and the novel's fans.

The plot and the retaining/removal of the characters above demonstrate three points. Firstly, by reducing minor characters and retaining the ones that have a major and long-term impact on Phloi, the musical narrative seeks to encapsulate Phloi's life cycle, which consists of several turning points. Such turning points play with the metaphor of the ever-changing river flow, highlighting the idea of impermanence in life embedded in Buddhism. In short, this concept refers to the fact that life is constantly changing, so nothing lasts forever (Berzin 2002, Rinpoche 1980). This indicates the musical's alignment with the national religion, which is one of the three pillars of Thailand—nation (*chat*), religion (*satsana*), and king (*phramahakasat*). Given the strong emphasis on the metaphor, evidenced in songs like “Bahn Khong Chan (My Home),” “Sai Than Cheewit (The River Flow of Life),” “Phab (Photograph)” and “Saithan Thee Tang Kan (Different Tides)” and their reprises throughout the show, it can be interpreted as the musical's promotion of national ideologies regarding the Buddhist way of life.

Secondly, the fact that Act II mainly focuses on political unrest and the clash between generations and different political orientations suggests the musical's political voice. Although Virawan never explicitly stated the political intention of staging *Four Reigns*, the correlation between each musical production and the socio-political situations in Thailand bring to light the musical's role as a response to real-world political situations in Thailand. The first production of *Four Reigns* was staged at the end of 2011 to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the novel's author as well as His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's seventh cycle birthday anniversary. Due to its high demand for tickets, the team extended the run, finishing at one hundred performances, which was considered a long run for a Thai musical production. After a successful run with positive

audience feedback in 2011, it was brought back in 2014, which coincided with political unrest in Thailand. The protesters were generally divided into two sides, the ‘red shirts’ in opposition to the monarchy versus the ‘yellow shirts’ in support of the monarchical institution. Thus, the show took on an increasingly political aspect as real-world tensions were mirrored in the musical itself; indeed, lines from the show were even used in the discussion of the situation on various platforms, from news reports on television to online platforms. Then, it was brought back again in 2017 when the late King Bhumibol was severely ill and had to pause for one month to honour the Royal Cremation Ceremony of the king himself. According to the review in *The Standard*, an influential online magazine, the performance was even more moving for the audience, as they finally understood Phloi’s losses of the kings (Salehte 2017). This indicates local audiences’ strong connection with the monarchy and that the ideologies in the musical remained relevant to modern Thai society, at least for those who attended the musical.

The relationship between contemporary politics and the musical was made abundantly clear when, towards the end of 2020 and in early 2021, Scenario streamed some of their most popular musicals on Channel One (of which Virawan currently serves as a director) and later on one of Thailand’s biggest streaming platforms, TrueID. *Four Reigns* was not on the list despite being the longest-running musical in Thailand and Virawan’s most revived musical (Nongpol 2019). I speculate that the decision on excluding *Four Reigns* was made because the company did not want to aggravate tensions during a time of political unrest involving the monarchy (discussed in Chapter Five). This point was later confirmed when *Four Reigns* was put on TrueID towards the end of August 2021 where it remains until now (as of 2022). This was around the same time that many public figures, including Virawan and celebrity performers in his musicals, voiced their opinions against the protesters who sought to reform the monarchical institution in Thailand. The correlation between *Four Reigns* and Thai politics only stresses the musical’s strong ties with the monarchy and national ideologies, which are in alignment with the national pillars.

The third point derived from the adapted plot is that the musical features scenes and musical numbers with explicit references to the monarchical institution and their achievements for the country (see Table 1 in Appendix IV). Examples of such scenes include the slave emancipation by King Rama V, the omen before King Rama V’s death, civilians welcoming the kings, their mourning of the kings’ deaths, and King Prajadhipok’s statement to resolve



the 1932 revolution. All these scenes stress the centrality of the monarchy for the Thai people and distribute historical information about their achievements, thus endorsing the national pillars and continuation of people's faith and loyalty towards the monarchy. Based on the three points, *Four Reigns The Musical* sought to distribute ideologies supporting the national pillars of Thailand, enabling the musical to become a political tool in the given socio-political context.

Such endorsed ideologies are not only manifest in the selected narrative parts and characters but also in the selected moments that were turned into songs and dance, strengthening the musical's highlighting of ideological transactions.

The function of songs in both acts (see Table 1 in Appendix IV) aligned with the national ideologies endorsed in the narrative against the historical backdrop which mirrored the current political situation in Thailand. Most musical numbers in Act I serve to reinvent the nostalgic past and the glory days of traditions under an absolute monarchy. Using notable forms of Thai cultural memory (e.g., ways of life integrated with the river, closer communal relationships, dated language, and mannerisms), most musical numbers, particularly "Wang Luang (The Royal Palace)", "Nai Luang Khong Phaendin (The King of the Land)", and "Tai Rom Phra Bharami (Under The King's Prestige)", convey the importance of the Thai monarchical institution, leading to the promotion of patriotism and royalism. At the same time, numbers like "Bahn Khong Chan (My Home)", "Sai Than Cheewit (The River Flow of Life)", and "Phab (Photograph)" establish a metaphor of life and river, underlining the impermanence in life embedded at the core of Buddhism. Towards the end of this act, the song "Saranrom" and "Khon Roon Mai (New Generation)" illustrate the rapid modernisation, closely linked to westernisation, of Thailand, portraying Western influences in terms of cultural products and their impact on the upper social milieu in Bangkok at the time. Although the musical numbers in Act I help to advance the plot, most of them tend to be sentimental ballads describing heightened emotions regarding the three pillars and the romantic relationship of Phloi and Khun Prem.

In Act II, the musical numbers generally focus on Phloi's children, particularly the conflicts amongst them and between the older and younger generations (i.e., Phloi's generation versus Phloi's children's generation) in Bangkok, leading to political events in Thailand such as the

Woradet Rebellion<sup>61</sup> musicalised in “Phaendin Look Pen Fai (The Land Is Set Aflame)”. The songs “Phid Wang (Disappointment)” and “Patiyan (Take An Oath)” represent An’s Western orientation towards democracy and On’s orientation towards royalism respectively. Their different political orientations come to a strong clash in the song “Taek Yaek (Falling Apart)” as Thailand went through political uprisings in 1932 and World War II. Towards the end, the musical numbers circle back to the early sentiments in Act I, where there was hope and peace under the new monarchical reign. The joyful atmosphere is disrupted by the sudden death of King Rama VIII, once more underlining the centrality of monarchy amongst Thai subjects. Most songs in the second act serve to advance the story actively and intensified the conflicts. Given the musical’s emphasis on the political events in Act II, which mirrored the current political situation in Thailand, such monarchy promotion might be seen as a suggestion that the audience should adopt such ideologies and perspectives. By portraying An’s repentance, the musical seems to attempt to remind the audience of the importance of the national pillars as a way out of this clash.

The musical’s attempts to distribute and reproduce national ideologies are strengthened by the multifunctional role of Phloi. Unlike prose literature, which often uses an author’s voice as a tool for shaping readers’ consciousness (Babbage 15), the novel *Four Reigns* frames its narrative and characters through Phloi’s voice. In parallel with the novel, the musical deploys Phloi’s voice to tell the story and intensifies the role of Phloi by making her a multifunctional character— as a character experiencing the events and a narrator talking directly to the audience. In the musical, the role of Phloi is played by three different actresses based on age—young, young adult, and adult. The adult Phloi (played by Sinjai Plengpanich in every production) takes on the role of narrator from the beginning and progresses and comments on the story in her younger years until the end of Act I where she takes up her role as an adult version of Phloi in the story, leading to fewer appearances as narrator.

The role of adult Phloi is central to *Four Reigns The Musical* not only because she is the heroine, but also because she functions as a storyteller and a character simultaneously. By taking on a double role, adult Phloi establishes two co-temporal spaces: a linear narrative and another that directly connects with the modern audience and, thus, disrupts the first temporal

---

<sup>61</sup> Woradet Rebellion or *kabot woradet* refers to a group of soldiers who attempted to take down the People’s Party and restore the throne to King Rama VII.

space. When Phloi is in the first temporal space, she experiences each event just like other characters, not knowing their future and unaware of being in a show. When Phloi is in the narrator space, she is usually at the far end of stage right or left, dimly lit, observing her younger selves in the story and talking to the audience directly about such events (Figure 12). Her comments on such events indicate her knowledge of their consequences, which makes sense given that she is the adult version of young Phloi and young adult Phloi. By breaking the fourth wall, the narrator Phloi disrupts a linear narrative by providing the audience with a summary and explanation of each event in the story, including the historical ones. In this way, Phloi's eloquent speeches shape the audience's understanding of such events and reinforce important themes and ideologies featured in the musical. The narrator Phloi, then, functions as a bridge between the fictional world and the audience in modern times.



Figure 12: Adult Phloi observing her younger self going through changes in the 2017 production of *Four Reigns* (mamminnie 2017).

Based on all the performances I attended, Phloi seemed rather successful at taking the audience on board with her, leading to their strong engagement and emotional responses. Phloi's influence on the audience was especially apparent in her two monologues. The first was her opening monologue in Act I:

My name is Phloi, and I love the king. If you ever wonder what makes me utter such words, I will tell you my story.

The second was her monologue before the song “Nai Luang Khong Phaendin (The King of The Land)” also in Act I:

On that day, when I saw *nai luang* (i.e., the king) for the first time, the upbringing from my ancestors, which taught me to be faithful and loyal to the king, made me face down the ground, staying still in my prostration. However, when time passed by, when I grew up and got to see what the king had done for us, so that our lives could be peaceful, my prostration to the king ceased to be an act learnt from my upbringing. Rather, it occurred from my understanding and my realisation of His Majesty’s utmost kindness.

Such simple monologues delivered so skilfully by the adult Phloi (as a narrator) brought tears to many people. As she went on to provide further explanations, the sound of collective weeping was clearly audible throughout the auditorium. This phenomenon demonstrates three points. Firstly, Phloi successfully established a meaningful connection with the audience, making it easy for her to convey certain ideas and justify her position from this point onward. Secondly, the impact of this statement, which bore obvious signs of monarchy promotion, indicates its strong connection with the dominant ideologies of patriotism and loyalty to the monarchical institution. Thirdly, based on the works of theatre scholar Susan Bennett in *Theatre Audiences*, the homogeneity in response within the audience (weeping in this case) validated individuals’ decoding of the message and, thus, suppressed any alternative responses (164). Such collective activity occurred within the same temporal space bridged the fictional world (i.e., the stage) with reality (i.e., the audience) by deploying their shared cultural memory. This activity, then, contributed to the formation of collective consciousness amongst Thai audiences in their imagined national identity. Therefore, *Four Reigns* employed the character of Phloi as a method of communicating dominant ideologies - particularly those relating to patriotism and royalism - to the modern Thai audience and thereby seeking to shape their perspectives.

### **The Transparency of Ideological Transactions in the Musical**

The endorsement of national ideologies, particularly the national pillars, is also embedded in the source text, and is carried over to the musical adaptation. However, with the musical's strong focus on the great achievement of the monarchy, the political clash which brought chaos to the lives of lead characters, and the correlation with contemporary political situations demonstrated above, I contend that the musical adaptation conveys such endorsement more transparently and that this overshadows the core message of the novel—the importance of finding the balance between the old world and the new world and being mindful of adopting foreign cultural capital and using it wisely without abandoning local cultural trappings (see Chapter Five).

The intensity of ideological transaction sheds light on the objective of the musical. The producer and director Virawan's statement in my interview with him reveals his and the creative team's shared feelings while working on *Four Reigns*. Considering the musical to honour the institution of the Thai monarchy, something that he felt passionately about, Virawan explained:

Everybody shared the same goal; everybody shared the same perspective towards *nai luang*.<sup>62</sup> Everybody had wonderful feelings and felt honoured to be acting in this production, to be working on it. Everybody could feel the central pillar of it. When everyone shared the same goal, the work then became fun.

(Virawan 2015)

His statement indicates that he and his team shared a collective ideology of supporting the monarchical institution, which served as the core of staging the musical. By sharing the same 'goal', it can be said that the objective of the musical was to honour the institution of the Thai monarchy and, in turn, strengthen such collective ideology amongst local audiences.

Virawan's interview on the television programme titled *Rheung Khong Rheung* supports this objective by stating that "we, the creative team and the cast, make this musical because we love the king" (2012). He also reiterated this point in the musical programme by expressing the necessity of developing *Four Reigns The Musical* to promote Thai history and traditions

---

<sup>62</sup> This interview was conducted in the reign of King Rama IX, so the king in this context referred to King Bhumibol Adulyadej Rama IX.

to a younger audience in Thailand (Scenario 2011). These statements highlight the musical's strong link to the Thai monarchical institution and its aim in distributing the knowledge of Thai history (as written in the story of *Four Reigns*) and national ideologies in order to promote patriotism and loyalty towards the monarchy. In this way, Pramoj's objective in treating *Four Reigns* as a historical resource of Thai ways of life was also embedded in and propelled by the musical adaptation, underlining *Four Reigns*' capacity in shaping the perspectives of contemporary Thai subjects.

Apart from the selected and musicalised narrative as demonstrated above, notable heuristic approaches in honouring and promoting Thai national pillars were the wide circulation of the song "Nai Luang Khong Phaendin (The King of The Land)," the ending scene, and the stereotypical portrayal of lead characters. Let us start by examining the song.

The wide distribution of the musical's signature song "Nai Luang Khong Pan Din" as a stand-alone piece on social media, television, and radio could be seen as part of the active ideological transaction propelled by the creative team. Although, in the show's context, the 'king' in the song refers to King Chulalongkorn Rama V, the song became a tribute song to King Bhumibol Rama IX for modern audiences. Even Lerdpunyanut, the composer, stated that he was inspired by King Bhumibol's incredible achievements when writing the song (Lerdpunyanut 2017). He further explained that the continuous rise in the melodic scales of the song signified loyalty towards the king (Rheung Khong Rheung 2011). This interchangeability is mainly due to the similarities between King Rama V and IX in terms of their amount of concrete achievement for Thailand, their extensive reigns, and their statuses as fathers of all Thais. On the one hand, the circulation of the song was a part of the company's marketing strategies for the musical, which Virawan adopted from Anglo-American megamusicals (see Chapter Four). On the other hand, the song served as an important tool for reproducing patriotism and loyalty to the monarchy amongst modern Thai people. By having famous celebrities—some of them starred in *Four Reigns* and some who did not—perform the song in the music video suggests the creative team's intention in making the song meaningful to modern-day audiences and advocating the significance of the monarchy through famous public figures which could arguably lead to a more substantial impact than playing the song as an advertisement of the musical alone.

The ending scene of the musical further illustrates the intense reproduction of national ideologies. In the novel, the story ends with Phloi on her deathbed after battling with her illness and the sudden death of King Rama VIII. In the musical adaptation in 2011, after Phloi passed, Aon, Prapai, and the repentant An were seen changing the portrait of King Rama VIII in the house to that of King Rama IX. Then, they turned to face his portrait with their backs to the audience and paid respect to him in prostration. By turning their backs against the audience, the audience were automatically included in the scene as they shared the same view and, possibly, the same gratitude towards the institution of the monarchy. This ending scene signifies the characters' continuous faith and love towards the monarchy and conveys the message that the audience should adopt the same view. The promotion of such ideology was taken to the next level in the latest production at Lhong 1919. Instead of displaying the portrait of the late King Bhumibol Rama IX (which would be accurate for the story's timeline), images of all kings in the Chakri Dynasty, including the current King Vajiralongkorn Rama X, were projected onto the big screen. All the cast turned to face the projected images and prostrated to pay respect to them. By presenting images of all kings in the Chakri Dynasty, the ending scene in this production emphasises the continuous history of Thailand, which has always had the monarchy as its central pillar. Thus, it intensifies the imagined national community amongst the local audiences, underlining the musical's role in shaping the audience's consciousness regarding Thai history. The ideological transaction is also enhanced by the role of Phloi and the portrayal of the monarchy's achievements examined earlier, making this message seem rather impactful as evidenced in the audible weeping sound in both performances I attended live.

Apart from the ending scene, another important approach that contributes to the intense ideological transaction is the stereotypical portrayal of certain characters. By playing character stereotypes, I mean the characters are often portrayed as non-complex and usually represented using specific and straightforward ideologies. In the novel, most lead characters are quite complex, and the author shows their good and bad sides rather than presenting them as a hero or a villain. For instance, although the character Phloi is a heroine, the author clearly shows her indecisiveness and slow adaptation to the outer world. Additionally, Khun Prem is presented as a fashionable and highly accomplished man, but he is also vain and self-centred at times. In the musical, however, both characters are portrayed with a strong emphasis on their sentimental and virtuous sides, common characteristics of a heroine and a hero. In other words, they are portrayed by their stereotypes rather than showing their internal

complexity which shapes them as rounded characters (at least not as rounded as written in the novel). In this sense, the characters' intentions and feelings are easily recognised and understood by the audience. Subsequently, such characters can be manipulated to show the messages intended by the creative team. I suspect that the choice of portraying stereotypes may be more strongly linked to Virawan's insight that local (mass) audiences prefer to be spoon-fed (Lim *et al.* 2009) rather than a simple ideological transaction or the abilities of the cast and creative team. Below, I demonstrate how playing the character An as a villain contributes to the musical's active ideological transaction.

Although An's political orientation in the novel does not align with that of Phloi, Khun Prem, and On (who are more conservative), An is not an anarchist or a violent rebel. An is, in fact, a rather complex character who fights many conflicts within himself in terms of his personal preferences and values for Thai and Western cultural norms. Despite his substantial transformation by Western cultural capital during his time in Europe, An gradually finds himself taking pleasure in Thai cultural capital even though he does not like to show it. Throughout the story, An slowly learns to understand his local culture and adapt his Western ideas to modernise Thai society. Therefore, the character An initially dwells in the new world and gradually tries to balance the old world with the new world. In this way, this character serves as a reminder for the readers to take into account the constructive and deconstructive sides of the cultural capital in question.

By contrast, in the musical, An is portrayed as a villain who brings chaos into the family and Thailand due to his extreme Western thoughts. An's verses, particularly in the songs "Phid Wang (Disappointment)" and "Phid Kham Saban (Break the Vow)", indicate his condescending attitudes towards Thai society and his determination to change Thailand based on his Western education. Nevertheless, having strived for his idealist goals, he finds that his determination has been manipulated and taken advantage of by other foreign-educated elites who possess higher power. In the end, he realises that his intentions are wrong and that he has forgotten to appreciate his cultural roots and the achievements the monarchy has delivered for Thailand. Although these elements are present in the novel, too, the musical accentuates An's villainous side and his remorse for trying to change Thailand. Using the revolution in 1932, which changed Thailand's ruling system from absolutism to a constitutional monarchy as the main conflict, An's remorse suggests that his downfall is due to his actions against the monarchy and the nation, two of the three national pillars.



The first verse of An's solo titled "Saeng Thee Ther Sadtha (Your Light of Faith)" towards the end of Act II, clearly demonstrates the reason for his remorse:

I am the wrongdoer,  
 I'm the one who ruins and does all wicked things.  
 The candlelight that you've given me,  
 To guide my way,  
 I've never seen its value.  
 I've extinguished your hope,  
 Extinguished that candlelight,  
 Extinguished the light of your faith.  
 Until I'm surrounded by darkness,  
 Then I realise that I've destroyed a valuable thing,  
 Bringing it to an end.

In the musical context, the candlelight and the light of faith refer to Phloi's loyalty and understanding towards the monarchy, which she has passed on to An since a young age. The lyrics indicate that An does not see the value of the monarchy until he seeks to destroy them by joining hands with the group that forces King Prajadhipok Rama VII to abdicate the throne and grant a constitutional democracy. The lyrics also show An's apparent repentance for his wicked actions against the national pillars, highlighting the musical's core ideologies. Therefore, this verse shows the musical's strong focus on promoting the national pillars, which overshadows An's internal conflicts and his lack of understanding of local and global cultural capital as featured in the novel. Based on the active ideological transaction, which is manifested by the way that the creative team adapted the novel's narrative to fit the demands of a musical and the three approaches examined here, *Four Reigns The Musical* is imbued with a political voice that makes it capable of distributing national ideologies amongst local audiences.

Given the creative team's cosmopolitan strategies for grasping globalised characteristics of their musical, their emphasis on distributing and strengthening national ideologies, especially regarding the promotion of the monarchical institution, reflects tensions in their negotiation of global and local aesthetics. That is, as they aspire to produce a 'world-class' product, the

narrative relies heavily on local Thai significance, which is strengthened by the musical's capacity to relate to the real-world situation and to shape the musical as the pride of Thailand. On the one hand, this emphasis on local significance in narrative construct highlights, once again, how Thai musicals prioritise local stories despite their integration with foreign aesthetics. On the other hand, this so-called pride of Thailand also problematises the modern Thai identity as being rooted in strong cultural memory and, at the same time, imbued with globalised cultural capital. Such an interplay is further demonstrated in the creation and development of the score and choreography.

### **Development of Music and Choreography**

The adapted narrative driven by the active ideological transaction influenced how the creative team utilised elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism embedded in the source text as the foundation of the music and choreography and further developed them by actively fusing Thai and Western performance aesthetics. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, the novel's narrative displays elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism through the use of language and the characters' evolved lifestyles and consumption of cultural products during each reign. Such elements are due to the modernisation process, closely linked to westernisation, ongoing in Thailand during the time and are enhanced by the author's cosmopolitan orientation. These elements functioned as a departure point for the development of the musical score and choreography.

This is especially evident when the composer Sarawut Lerdpunyanut and the choreographer Sutheesak Phakdeethewa stated that the popular music and dance styles of each period served as the core for creating the musical score and choreography (Rheung Khong Rheung 2011). Virawan further added that although Thai traditional sounds were integral to the beauty of the musical score and melodies, they were, "at the same time, integrated with Western sounds according to each reign" (ibid). To illustrate how the creative team employed the pre-cosmopolitan condition embedded in the source text, I examine the transformation of music and dance styles which progresses hand in hand with the modernisation of Thailand and the endorsed ideologies of each reign.

The musical composition in the reign of King Rama V (the first reign of the musical) features highly prominent Thai traditional sounds. These sounds are stylised by letting a Thai flute

take the prelude and soar above the rest of the sounds and by composing the melody lines in mostly pentatonic scales (ibid). Such techniques allow the songs in this reign to be closer to the ethno-cultural aesthetics of Thailand. Lerdpunyanut also added that the Thai flute and pentatonic scales trigger a sense of being by a canal (ibid), thus enhancing the metaphor of the river flow and the nostalgic past that resonate throughout the musical. It can also be interpreted as a signifier of the cultural roots of the story and characters, which were constructed upon Thai traditional values.

Towards the end of King Rama V's reign and in the early reign of King Rama VI (the second reign in the musical), the score gradually incorporates more Western music aesthetics by featuring a *phleng luuk khruung* style. As shall be further discussed in Chapter Seven, this style is a music genre that hybridises Thai traditional singing with Western popular music, making it a product of Western musical influence in the Thai music industry. As one of the characteristics of the *phleng luuk khruung* genre is its heightened and elaborative lyrics and sentimental melodies (Wuttipong 2012), this genre is often deployed to represent the romantic relationship between Phloi and Khun Prem and Phloi's realisation of life changes. Towards the end of this reign, the score gradually features more big band jazz and Western pop-rock styles, though retaining the *phleng luuk khruung* singing technique, signifying stronger Western influences in Thai society. As I contend, the sound aesthetics in these two reigns conveys the sentimental beauty and peace of the nostalgic past, aligning with the narrative in Act I. The employment of *phleng luuk khruung* and Western musical traditions in the score reflects the dynamic transformation in Thai society as its cosmopolitan sphere rose with foreign cultural capital affecting the characters' understanding of the world and the cultural nobility of products from the West.

In the reign of King Rama VII (the third reign in the musical), which covers most of Act II, the score features military and marching styles in parallel with the narrative's focus on political events in Thailand. Lerdpunyanut explained that such styles were meant to convey a sense of patriotism, grounding, and violence (ibid). Apart from these musical styles, which are also the product of Western musical influences in Thai society, the score plays with a variety of pop, rock, and torch songs featuring iconic musical theatre singing techniques such as belting, yelping, and speak-singing. Finally, towards the end of Act II in the reign of King Rama VIII (the fourth reign in the musical), when the ailing Phloi flees to her childhood home by the canal, the score circles back to the music style deployed at the beginning of Act

I, featuring prominent traditional Thai sounds and the soaring flute sound that resembles the flow of a river. The return of Thai local aesthetics can be interpreted as symbolising the fact that Phloi's life has gone in a full circle and emphasising the message of coming back to one's cultural roots despite various changes occurring from external sources. Nevertheless, Thai sounds return with more prominent use of piano solo and (Western) drums. This can be read as a symbol that Thai identity has gone through transformations shaped by Western influences and has nevertheless found its way back to its starting point. In other words, it symbolises a Thai identity that transcends the old world to the new world only to find that the solution lay in the middle of the two worlds.

A similar process applies to the choreography in the musical, which gradually evolves from traditional Thai dance to a variety of Western classical and contemporary dances (e.g., ballet, jazz, ballroom). According to Phakdeethewa, the choreography in King Rama V's reign strongly emphasises traditional Thai court dance (ibid). The dance sequence in "Wang Luang" is derived from a prelude dance called *rum khing mai ngern thong* (a golden-silver branch dance), which is often performed prior to a traditional dance performance (ibid). The dancers dressed in full Thai traditional costume with a *chada* (headgear) signifies the formality of the dance. During the reigns of King Rama VI and King Rama VII, the choreography consists of technical dance steps ranging from ballet, ballroom, Charleston and flapper dance styles, which signify how Western influences permeated the entertainment culture of the upper classes in Thailand at the time.

The above indicates how the creative team utilise elements from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism previously shaped by the source text as evidenced in the integration of Thai and Western sounds and dances which progress in parallel with the increasing Western influences in Thai society from the reign of King Rama VI onwards. Below, I investigate how the creative team further developed such elements by delivering the score and choreography through a more active interplay between local and global aesthetics. The song "Bot Nam" and the choreography in "Wang Luang" can illustrate how the creative team further developed the pre-cosmopolitan condition despite their emphasis on the nostalgic past in Act I.

### **"Bot Nam (The Overture)"**

The “Bot Nam” begins with a drum roll introducing a robust Western orchestra (instrument families include woodwinds, strings, brass, and percussions). The drum roll and the orchestra are soon joined by a *ranat ek* (a high-pitched xylophone), which leads a transition to a gradually elongated downward scale as the overture enters a new phase. The tempo is increased shortly by the contribution of a *ranat thum* (a low-pitched xylophone) and percussion instruments such as *ching* and *chap* (various sized hand cymbals), *krap* (a wooden clapper) and *taphon* (two-faced drums), turning the song into a fusion of Western and Thai instruments. Although both the Western and Thai instruments play almost identical melodies, the Thai instruments are more resonant in the orchestration, both through their sheer novelty in an orchestral context and through the deployment of their higher pitch, leading to more penetrating sounds over the Western instruments. The orchestra, with its blend of Western and Thai instruments, functions as a simulacrum of the relationship between local (i.e., Thai) and global (as dominated by Western) aesthetics, each adapting and negotiating with the other to harmonise effectively. Sometimes, the local aesthetics have to be toned down to accommodate and align with their global counterparts. At other times, they have to be strengthened to sustain and promote their distinctive local characteristics.

This integration pattern also captures the negotiation of the old world and the new world as Thailand is transformed by her modernisation shaped by cultural products and knowledge from the Western world. In this sense, the overture supports the novel’s key message regarding using foreign cultural capital to enhance local cultural capital without negating local cultural roots. In this scene, the music reflects how ‘Thai’ aesthetics are represented by a constant interplay between local and global cultural points, yet the two never end up in a cultural clash due to their constant overlap.

The creative team’s development of the pre-cosmopolitan condition is also present in the choreography. Looking at the choreography from the dance sequence in “Wang Luang,” I will demonstrate how the Thai dance aesthetics in *Four Reigns The Musical* are also displayed through a fusion of Thai and Western dance styles, simultaneously delivering local and global aesthetics.

### “Wang Luang (The Royal Palace)”

Based on Phakdeethewa's statement, the dance sequence is derived from a prelude dance called *rum khing mai ngerm thong* (Rheung Khong Rheung 2011), which suggests the choreography's function as a signifier of traditional Thai culture. The dance sequence serves as an interlude leading the young Phloi to the city centre and her exposure to the civilisation and glorious traditions centred around the royal palace. In order to achieve such a presentation, Phakdeethewa stated that he placed importance on the elaborative and traditional moves in the style of "real Thai dance from the palace" (ibid). By this, I contend that he referred to traditional Thai court dance which strongly emphasised refined, elaborative, and often slow movement based on set repertoires. In the musical, compared to the standard court style, these moves are executed in a fluid style and at a faster pace with less defined flexed feet and by the use of the *soi tao* movement in which a dancer uses quick and small steps repeatedly to move. Furthermore, the arm angles are noticeably less sharp and angular, stressing continuous and fluid movement, similar to port de Bras in ballet. A similar style applies to the head movement, the angles of which are more free-form and move fluidly from side to side on the downbeat of *ching*. Another interesting aspect is that none of the dancers displays the rigidly accented downward and upward torso movement commonly present in traditional court dance. Instead, the dancers in this dance sequence glide their bodies upward and downward and side to side freely, enhancing the fluidity of the arm movement.

Although most of the dancers were professionally trained in Western classical and contemporary dance, which arguably led to their familiarity with the Western dance style present in this dance sequence, I think Phakdeethewa deliberately choreographed it in this way to make the traditional Thai dance appear more modern. This dance style matches the music of "Wang Luang," which features the prominent sounds of *ranat ek* playing the running melody and *ching* setting the upbeat tempo. While the Western orchestra takes the base instruments and occasionally the same melodic line, strengthening the overall melody in pentatonic scales. Therefore, this dance sequence indicates how the creative team delivered elements from the source text by intensifying the integration of traditional Thai dance movement with Western dance aesthetics.

## **Conclusion**

The adaptation process of *Four Reigns* from novel to musical reveals the creative team's objectives in staging the musical: to promote the national pillars of Thailand and distribute knowledge of Thai history as shaped by national ideologies. These objectives are evident in the inclusion of certain narrative parts and characters and the moments that are turned into songs. The employment of the role of Phloi that bridges the gap between the fictional world and the real world, the ending scene which features the portrait of King Bhumibol and, in the latest production at Lhong 1919, the pictures of all the kings in the Chakri Dynasty, and the stereotypical portrayal of certain characters are part of the strategies to strengthen the capacity of the musical in shaping the perspectives of the local audience. In this way, the musical features a firm political voice and actively reproduces such national ideologies. These selected moments and ideologies, then, determine the development of music and choreography, which are partially based on the elements of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism embedded in the source text. Such elements, as exemplified by the overture and dance sequence in "Wang Luang", were further developed by the creative team who created the music and choreography by intensifying the interplay of local and global aesthetics, suggesting a modern Thai cultural identity which has been reflexively transformed by encountering agents beyond its ethno-local boundaries. It is in this sense that the second step of creating *Four Reigns The Musical* is infused with aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, which, as shall be demonstrated in Chapter Seven, results in hybridised performative elements on stage.

## Chapter Seven—Realisation

This chapter seeks to further investigate how the score and choreography in *Four Reigns The Musical*, produced through aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism as examined in the previous chapter, are realised through hybridised performative elements. The analyses of these elements will be demonstrated through four selected moments: (1) Phloi's departure; (2) social participation; (3) parting with children; and (4) An's return. Although the latter three moments have been previously explored in Chapter Five, I have added the first moment, Phloi's departure, because it features strong elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism in vocal production, music composition, and scenic design. Based on the analyses of these moments in the source text, I will show how they are realised on stage with the influence of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism shaped by Anglo-American megamusicals. I will also demonstrate how elements of performance in *Four Reigns*, particularly the vocal production, are derived from the interplay of local (i.e., Thai music traditions) and globalised aesthetics (i.e., Western musical theatre and pop), resonating in hybridity.

The following performance analysis is mainly based on the first production of *Four Reigns The Musical*, which opened at the Rachadalai Theatre in November 2011 and closed in March 2012. I have chosen this first production because it includes the most extended rendition of the overall narrative and serves as the cast recording primarily used for the performance analysis in this chapter. This first production was the longest-running, extending to one hundred performances, making it the most commercially successful of Virawan's productions.

Prior to the analysis, I will briefly discuss the differences between Thai traditional singing techniques from the *phleng luuk khruung* (a hybrid of traditional Thai and Western pop-style music) genre and contemporary Western musical theatre. The understanding of these techniques serves as an important point of reference for the analysis of the hybridised singing technique used in this thesis. After providing an overview of these features, I will explore its global counterpart, namely the Western musical theatre singing style. The basic features of Thai traditional singing and Western musical theatre singing techniques serve as an essential foundation grounding the performance analysis of *Four Reigns The Musical* and the other



case studies. Understanding the characteristics of these styles brings to light restrictions on the music composition and the hybridisation process of vocal style arising from intermixing global and local aesthetics.

## **Key Singing Techniques for the Performance Analysis**

### **Thai Classical Singing**

It is important to summarise the features of the Thai language and the vocal production employed in Thai traditional singing and *phleng thai sakol* (a hybrid of Thai and Western singing styles) at the outset. Consisting of forty-four consonant characters and twenty-one vowel characters, Thai central language, which is the official language of Thailand, is a tonal and analytic language (i.e., it uses helper words to indicate the relationships in a sentence). Compared to English, Thai spoken language tends to make more use of nasal sounds and less use of voiced fricative sounds. It has five phonemic tones: *saman* (mid or flat), *ek* (low), *toh* (falling), *tri* (high) and *jattawa* (rising). These tones are directed by tone markers, vowels and/or consonants. Pronouncing the tone correctly is crucial in spoken language, as Thai has numerous words with the same spelling but different tone markers, resulting in totally different meanings. One of the clearest examples that can illustrate my point here is the word ห้า/ha (rising tone), which means “to find”. If the tone marker is changed to flat or สาม/ha (mid or flat tone), it becomes a slang word for “funny”. If the marker is changed to falling or ห้า/ha (falling tone), the meaning changes to “five”. Merely switching it with the low tone marker or ห้า/ha (low tone) turns it into a vulgar interjection. Besides tonal rules, Thai sounds are also directed by groups of consonants, though the complex rules of which are not required for the analysis here. Apart from differences in tones, both Thai single and mixed vowels are paired up in distinctively short and long sounds, which indeed affect the word’s meaning.

All of these characteristics of the Thai language have a significant impact on composing music and lyrics for a musical score. The last thing any writer wants is to convey the wrong message to the audience, which not only can create confusion about a song’s meaning but can also lead to misinterpretation of a character. For example, as a conservative palace lady, it would be out of place for Phloi to utter vulgar words in her songs. Therefore, the composer and lyricist have to work closely together to ensure the singing melody fits the correct tone of

the word and, thus conveys the meaning intended. Apart from composing the appropriate tone for each word, the creative team also has to deal with various diphthong and triphthong sounds as well as some tricky ending consonants such as the ‘ng’ (/ŋ/), which makes it more difficult to sustain during belting (discussed below). Unlike diphthongs in the English language which musical theatre performers usually sustain on the first vowel of the word and finish with a quick gliding to the second one, certain diphthongs in Thai need to be sustained on the second vowel; otherwise, they sound somewhat incomprehensible. This challenge requires a Thai musical theatre performer to finish the gliding of one vowel to another quickly before sustaining the ending vowel. However, gliding the vowels too quickly also risks the audience misunderstanding the word. The same issues also apply to triphthongs.<sup>63</sup> As would be expected, these characteristics of the Thai language indeed have a discernible impact on the ways in which traditional Thai singing styles have developed.

Thai traditional singing is a unique singing style of Thailand that is generally linked to the royal court (Latartara 89).<sup>64</sup> Until today, the origin of Thai traditional music and singing is still debatable because it was mostly passed down by oral transmission from teacher to student (Latartara 89). Below, I examine the general characteristics of Thai traditional singing.

In terms of its general vocal production and aerodynamics, the traditional Thai singer mostly engages her neck muscles and chest vibration to produce a controlled high-pitched and straight tone (ibid, Swangviboonpong 32). Latartara states that the sound remains motionless for the most part, as emotions are conveyed through music and lyrics (89). Instead of describing it as motionless, I think its motion can be more specifically visualised, to use Laban’s *The Eight Efforts*, as press and flick.<sup>65</sup> The singer pushes her breath until the very end of each phrase with a glottal stop in an upward motion. By not using the body to express emotions, the articulators such as the mouth and tongue have less freedom as well. This point can be noticed from her fixed jaw position and mouth shape, showing little gap between the upper and lower lips. Unlike musical theatre and Western opera singing techniques, she rarely adjusts the width of the mouth and drops her jaw as she goes up in her vocal range.

---

<sup>63</sup> These challenges will be further examined in the next case study.

<sup>64</sup> Thai traditional singing is also known as Thai classical singing or Thai court singing.

<sup>65</sup> *The Eight Efforts* is a part of Laban’s movement analysis initiated by the works of Rudolf Laban. It seeks to describe human movement and is widely practised in Western performing arts conservatoires.

The traditional singer also uses the ‘singing from the throat’ technique to produce vocal effects intrinsic to Thai traditional singing such as *kran* (a kind of vibrato, though not the same as the Western singing technique) and *plik siang* (to turn over the sound) (Swangviboonpong 32). From the perspective of Western singing, the latter technique can be explained in terms of register switching. Using this technique, the Thai traditional singer switches from the modal register to falsetto while deliberately releasing more air, showing the jump between two registers. Switching between registers results in an upward flick motion previously mentioned and nasality, which is also an essential feature of Thai traditional singing.

Thai traditional singing consists of two components: words and *uan* (wordless vocalisation on specific vowels and consonants) (Latartara 89). The *uan* characteristic is the core of Thai traditional singing and serves as a yardstick to measure the competency of a traditional Thai singer (Swangviboonpong 48). According to Dusadee Swangviboonpong, an expert in Thai traditional singing, *uan* sounds can be simplified into five basic sounds, which consist of two vowels and three consonants (Latartara 92). Using Latartara’s IPA designation of the sounds, the five basic sounds of *uan* are:

(1) /ə/ (ᵛᵛ)

(2) /ʉ/ (ᵛᵛ)

(3) /hə/; (ᵛᵛ)

(4) /ŋə/; (ᵛᵛ)

(5) /əli/ (ᵛᵛ)

The most predominant sound is /ə/ which is often used to begin a phrase ending with /əli/ sound (ibid).<sup>66</sup> From my observations, nasality is central to the production of *uan* and the limited movement of the lips and jaw enhances the nasal sounds. Another notable feature of Thai traditional singing is the glottal onset, which is highly evident in *uan* phrases.

---

<sup>66</sup> See John Latartara’s *The Timbre of Thai Classical Singing* (2012) on sound quality in *uan*. See Dusadee Swangviboonpong’s *Thai Court Singing: History, Musical Characteristics and Means of Transmission* (2016) on characteristics and performances of Thai classical singing.

To sum up, notable features of Thai traditional singing as relevant to the subsequent analysis are the following:

- (1) Neck muscles and throat as source of vocal production
- (2) Glottal onset
- (3) Press and flick motion with a glottal stop
- (4) Register switching
- (5) Nasality and rigid mouth/jaw movement
- (6) *Uan* sounds

### ***Phleng Luuk Kruung***

Based on my own observations, the vocal style mostly deployed in contemporary Thai musicals, particularly in Virawan's productions, does not directly stem from Thai traditional singing. Rather, it has evolved from *phleng thai sakol*, which covers a wide range of music styles with Western influences in Thailand (e.g., pop, jazz, strings, etc.). Nevertheless, several musical numbers in *Four Reigns*, particularly those sung by the characters Khun Prem and the young adult version of Phloi, share close resemblances with *phleng luuk kruung*, which is under the umbrella of *phleng thai sakol* discussed below.

*Phleng thai sakol* (literal translation: universal/international Thai songs) refers to music genres that “combine Thai melodies with Western harmony and rhythm” (Mitchell 414). It is interesting to note here an asymmetrical relationship of cultural status as ‘universal’ in this case refers solely to Western cultural products rather than products from other foreign countries. The integration of Western and Thai sounds, particularly from 1945 onwards, results in four main genres. These genres are *phleng luuk kruung*, *phleng luuk thung*, *phleng peuah chiwit*, and *phelng satring/phleng pop* (pop songs) (Wuttipong 37). Each style has its unique characteristics and has evolved into various subgenres. *Phleng luuk kruung* is central for the analysis here, as it is often deployed to achieve Thai aesthetics in the hybridised musical and singing techniques evident in *Four Reigns*.

*Phleng luuk kruung*, which can be directly translated as “songs of the sons of the city” (Swangviboonpong 28), denotes a musical style that fuses Western popular music and the Thai traditional singing style. According to the vocal expert Nalin Wuttipong, *phleng luuk*

*kruung* can be described as romantic songs expressed through elevated and elaborate language (45). She further adds that *phleng luuk kruung* tends to use major and minor scales found in Western popular music for their melodies rather than Thai pentatonic scales. The melodies are accompanied by slow rhythmic music played by Western instruments, which include a brass band. The Western-style melodies and music are then paired up with a hybrid singing style of Western popular music and Thai traditional singing (ibid 46). Despite their Western elements, the arrangement and main features of *phleng luuk kruung* are still close to Thai folk music style, thus classifying it as a part of traditional Thai culture (ibid). Due to its heightened lyrics and graceful melodies, *phleng luuk kruung* is also described as *phleng phuu dii* (noblemen's song) and is generally favoured amongst educated elites and urban audiences. Below, I demonstrate the essential characteristics of the *phleng luuk kruung* genre, which will demonstrate how the genre hybridises Thai traditional singing with Western popular singing styles, providing a basic understanding of the vocal techniques discussed in the scene analysis.

Overall, Thai traditional singing features—*uan* and nasality, register switching, straight tone and mouth shape—are still present in the genre of *phleng luuk kruung*, though to a lower degree. *Uan* remains an important technique as the nasal quality is still present. Rather than utilising *uan* as a wordless vocalised phrasing like in Thai traditional singing, *uan* in *phleng luuk kruung* is mostly used to elongate the word at the end of each phrase, demonstrating a graceful and elaborated vocal sound. The implementation of this technique often matches the heightened sentimental parts of the lyrics. The end of each *uan* sound finishes with a lesser degree of the glottal stop with the use of light vibrato. The vibrato here is similar to that in Western popular music with a certain amount of space between each upward and downward accent. Another factor that de-sharpens the *uan* sound is a lesser degree of upward movement at the end of each phrase, as most phrases do not usually end with a /əli/ sound like in the Thai traditional style.

A jump between registers is still noticeable in certain parts, though not as deliberate as in Thai traditional singing. Singers, especially female ones, engage more of their mix register (discussed below), colouring the register switching with a lighter mix rather than using their falsetto. Some singers release more air in higher notes to soften the switch. In terms of sound aerodynamics, the press and flick motion is mostly replaced by gliding with subtle vibrato. Heightened emotions and more expressive use of body language and vocal style contribute to

the new dynamic. Also, the glottal onset tends to be substituted with scooping or aspirate onsets. The last feature is the mouth shape, which is surprisingly close to the shape found in Thai traditional singing despite different outcomes. In the *phleng luuk kruung* genre, the mouth shape and movement of the singer remain relatively narrow and limited, though not as rigid as in Thai traditional singing. Generally speaking, the jaw is more relaxed and the mouth shape is less horizontal. This factor results in a broader, more velvety and projected vocal sound. In general, Thai traditional singing elements and Western-style vibrato are more clearly demonstrated by female singers while male singers demonstrate broader and rounder tones. This may be because female singers often sing in a high pitch, which is closer to the pitch composed for Thai traditional songs. It is likely that the female singers engage in frequent vibrato to soften the direct motion of the traditional sound and to deliver a Western pop aesthetic. For male singers, it is likely that they deliver broader tones in order to demonstrate a more masculine sound. This style preference is likely to be adopted from the Western pop singing style as well since the male notes in Thai traditional singing are often in the higher range.

### **Western Musical Theatre Techniques**

Having established important characteristics of Thai traditional singing and *phleng luuk kruung*, let us now examine musical theatre singing techniques as widely taught and deployed in the field of Western musical theatre. Firstly, it is important to note that, particularly for contemporary musicals, the required singing styles vary significantly for each musical genre. The high demand for vocal strength and capacity is the main reason why, in musical theatre training, performers need to develop a versatile repertoire of songs and techniques that can be adapted to a wide range of singing styles in both classical and contemporary commercial music.<sup>67</sup> I will only touch on core aspects: belting, mixing and resonance, and vibrato, which resonate throughout the vocal production in *Four Reigns The Musical*. It is important to note that, as a female musical theatre performer, these features will be approached mainly from the aspect of a female voice.

---

<sup>67</sup> Contemporary commercial music (CCM) is a term invented by a vocal pedagogue, Jeannette LoVetri, to refer to all genres of non-classical singing (Jennings 1).

Let us start with the first feature and arguably one of the most iconic characteristics of Western musical theatre—belting. Often associated with a powerful voice and high subglottic pressure, belting has not, up until today, been clearly defined. However, it has been described using various subtypes such as heavy (e.g., Idina Menzel), brassy (e.g., Ethel Merman), and ringy (e.g., Sutton Foster) (Echternach *et al.* 653.e1). Thus, singers can engage a different quality of belt to colour a song, which requires particular degrees of subglottic pressure. In general, belting can be executed by deploying various elements including higher and lower larynx position, elevated tongue dorsum, greater activity of transverse abdominal muscles, greater lip and jaw opening, and high-speed air pressure in the opening and closing of vocal folds (ibid, Jennings 34). Belting can also be enhanced by additional techniques such as yelping, which is achieved by tilting the head back slightly and opening up the upper body. Initially developed as a method to amplify a singer’s voice in the performance venue without a microphone, belting is now considered a singing aesthetic stapled to musical theatre. It conveys and heightens emotions and is sometimes referred to as the ‘money note’, signifying the most dramatic and climactic point in the song.

The second feature I want to discuss here is mixing. Mixing refers to a technique that blends modal and falsetto registers together, creating a more robust and continuous sound. In other words, it is used to strengthen the middle register. Having a strong mixed voice is essential to musical theatre singing style, which emphasises speech-like quality and clear articulation rather than emphasising vowels like in opera. The mixed register also allows female singers to deliver higher notes without going into full falsetto and create a seamless transition between vocal registers. In general, compared to belting, mixing requires a low-to-mid larynx position and less subglottic pressure, resulting in a thinner sound quality. Similar to belting, the mixing technique can be executed in varying colours according to the specific musical style.

Despite their differences, both belting and mixing techniques in musical theatre style engage similar resonance qualities, which are forward, bright and twangy. These qualities maintain the speech-like characteristic in musical theatre songs, allowing the voice to be projected and ‘ping’ to the audience. By smiling, adjusting the mouth shape horizontally and lifting the soft palate slightly, the forward and brighter resonance is achieved. Depending on individuals, placing the focus points on cheekbones, ‘the third eye’ (in the middle of your forehead, just above the eyebrows) and upper lips can create a more twangy sound. In terms of vibrato,

musical theatre singing often deploys vibrato at the end of sustained notes for emotional effects and aesthetic reasons (Holley 39).

Compared to *phleng luuk kruung*, the vocal production in musical theatre is more projected and more speech-like with the use of belting, mixing and blending between registers. Although the function of vibrato in both genres share similarities, the overall quality of vibrato in musical theatre style is closer to the vibrato used in Western classical singing, though the oscillation of the vocal folds that occurs in the first is not as rapid as in the latter. Another important aspect is that musical theatre singing requires more engagement with the muscles, greater flexibility in adjusting larynx position and more airflow throughout singing phrases. As shall be demonstrated in the next part, the vocal techniques examined here are integrated at varying degrees into the performative elements of *Four Reigns*.

### **Performance Analyses of Selected Moments in *Four Reigns The Musical* (2011)**

As noted in the introduction, the selected moments for analysis are (1) Phloi's departure with the musical number "Bahn Khong Chan (My Home)"; (2) social participation with the musical number "Saranrom"; (3) parting with children with the musical number "Phab (Photograph)"; and (4) An's return with the musical number "Congratulations". The literary versions of the second to fourth moments have been analysed in Chapter Five based on the categories of language, fashion norms, and lifestyle norms in order to determine the elements arising from aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism in the scenes. In this section, I will explore how these scenes are realised on stage with the use of hybridised performative elements. I will analyse these selected scenes based on four categories: (a) vocal production; (b) music composition; (c) dance choreography; and (d) mise-en-scène. Please note that some scenes do not contain all four aspects; thus, the analysis will omit the missing category.

#### **Phloi's Departure: "Bahn Khong Chan (My Home)" (Act I, Scene 2)**

##### **Narrative**

Amidst the crowd all dressed to represent the people of Bangkok in the Fifth Reign of King Chulalongkorn, the young Phloi emerged, a little girl with hair tied into a bun at the top of her head which was surrounded by a neat *puang malai* (a jasmine flower garland), a typical



handicraft for Thai ladies of the period. The young Phloi sang about her home on the banks of *khlong bang luang* (“Bahn Khong Chan (My Home)”), the lyrics painting a picture of a peaceful provincial life where locals used the *khlong* (canal) and its environs in the day-to-day activities of their lives. The song then turned to lamentation as the girl recalled her sadness at leaving her home and her mother. The lyrics established the theme of impermanence and uncontrollable aspects of life. As the boat drew nearer to the *phra nakhon* (the city centre) and the Royal Palace, the ensemble came out to describe the city centre and the importance of the monarchy, suggesting the people’s faith and pride in the Thai royal family (leading into “Wang Luang (The Royal Palace)”). This scene illustrates a peaceful life and serenity and, based on the narrative, can be interpreted as an establishment of the ‘old world’—defined as Thailand under absolute monarchy, which is the core of Phloi’s life.

### Vocal Production

The song “Bahn Khong Chan,” maintains the correct tones and features more techniques from Thai classical singing than some other songs in the show, particularly the *uan* sound and nasality. Such elements were often used to achieve correct tonality in the Thai language such as the word “bahn, /ba:n/,” “suay, /suai/” and “moh khao moh khaeng, /mɔː kaou̯ mɔː kɛːŋ/” in the lyric. My vocal transcriptions of the song below demonstrate how the *uan* are executed in both cases.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> The music score of *Four Reigns The Musical* and, in fact, any of Virawan’s musicals have never been published for the public; hence, the use of my own transcription of the songs. I choose to use Western musical notation here because, based on my experience as a performer in Thailand and abroad, staff notation is always used in musical rehearsals whether the performer can read it or not, and this is also evident in the score of “Mai Pen Rai” as part of the musical *Bangkokian* (discussed in Chapter Eight). In this sense, it can be said that the use of staff notation and the Western diatonic tonal system are a common practice within contemporary musical theatre in Thailand rather than using the Thai system. The fact that musical creative teams often provide performers with staff notated scores underlines how Western musical systems have long been integrated in the music practice in Thailand, so much so that it becomes a standard practice. In other words, this underscores the Eurocentricity of musical theatre practice in Thailand. The use of Thai musical notations, on the other hand, is often unfamiliar to Thai musicians and performers in musical theatre who are often trained in and/or familiar with Western music traditions. Thai musical systems are, therefore, limited primarily to traditional Thai musicians who mostly use it as a mnemonic device at an early stage rather than for a performance anyway (Myers-Moro 104, Miller 198). However, in a musical like *Four Reigns* that, as demonstrated throughout, greatly emphasises traditional Thai heritage and pride as well as the nostalgic past, the use of staff notation raises an interesting point. As many scholars including Phra Chen Duriyanga (2015), David Morton (quoted in Miller 1992), Pamela Myers-Moro (1990) and Terry E. Miller (1992) have pointed out, staff notation is not quite compatible with traditional Thai music as, amongst other factors, the equidistant pitches in Thai music cannot be easily captured by the half and whole steps in Western music. This means that the composers of *Four Reigns* have come up with a meeting point between Thai and Western sounds in Western musical systems. This point brings to light that *Four Reigns* achieves its ‘Thai’ sounds from using selected Thai instruments rather than using a traditional Thai band (e.g., *piphat*, *mahori*, *khreaung sai*) and from vocal techniques executed by the performers (which is a hybrid of Thai and Western musical theatre). Therefore, precisely due to its aim to

## Example 1

Bah\_n khong chan nan mi lam khlong yoo su\_ay ngam

## Example 2

moh kha\_o moh khaeng thook wan

The ending consonant in both cases, / n /, /ŋ / and /aou/, are intrinsically nasal, helping with the production and sustaining of *uan* sounds before finishing the syllable. These sounds were counterbalanced by musical theatre-style vibrato, which created a more legato and emotion-triggering effect at the end. It also helped soften the transition between registers and promotes richer resonance. Apart from the use of vibrato to compliment the *uan*, other notable singing techniques in this scene that made the songs sound more westernised were vowel modification and sustaining long notes. As mentioned above, Thai vowels tend to be quite nasal, which can create more tension in the throat if they have to be sustained for a long time. This issue is also present in English, particularly in the sound that finishes with the vowel /i/. Most singers will contract the throat to create an open space and some singers might modify the vowels slightly. This technique is used to ensure that they can sustain the note more safely and effectively. The same tricky sounds in English are even tighter and more nasal in Thai. On top of this, the Thai language also features several tricky diphthongs and triphthongs. Consequently, to use this scene to provide an example, whenever there was an /ai/ sound that needed to be emphasised or sustained, the performer modified it to /aī/ or even /ae/ such as in the phrase “wan phrung nee ja pen chen *rai*”. She glided and sustained

---

brand itself as an international product, the music of *Four Reigns* strategically adopts a Western diatonic tonal system and mostly relies on Western orchestration, which once again highlights how Western products are deemed aspirationally international. By presenting Thai pride in an ‘international way,’ the musical also serves as an agent in circulating the recognition and status of Western cultural capital.

the second vowel with a strong and consistent vibrato. As a result, the open vowels and modifications created a Western musical aesthetic in the songs. This style was counterbalanced by the crisp Thai consonants and tonality. My vocal transcription below demonstrates the *uan* motion (on the word “chen”) and the vowel modification (on the word “rai” which is modified to “rae”) in the final phrase of “Bahn Khong Chan”.

### Example 3

wan phrung ni ja pen che\_n ra\_e\_\_\_\_\_

Additional techniques from the Western musical theatre style are the mixing and ringy belting techniques. These were frequently used to create more seamless speak-singing in higher pitches and more intensity in the song. In the song, the phrase above also clearly demonstrates the belting (on “rai”) and mixing (on “pen chen”) technique. Since Pinta, the actress who played young Phloi in this production, was trained in opera and musical theatre singing, she was able to execute the song (as well as others that she sang in the show) using these techniques efficiently. Therefore, the vocal production resonated with Thai classical singing via deliberate execution of the *uan* and nasality enhanced by crisp pronunciation in Thai. Simultaneously, it was delivered through vocal registers, vertical mouth shape, and active engagement of the upper body, evidenced in the performer’s constant expansion of chest and back, which were in the realm of Western musical theatre techniques. In this way, the vocal production in this song travelled between both Thai and Western musical theatre traditions, making it become a hybrid of the two.

### Music Composition

The song began with a string orchestra playing the base melody with the *ranat ek* playing both countermelody and the melody itself in a higher octave. The musical movement of *ranat ek* showed a flowing dynamic constantly, signifying the movement of the river flow while young Phloi sang about the beauty of her home by the canal. This movement can also signify

Phloi's array of thoughts while sailing on the boat with her mother to an uncertain future. The prominence of traditional Thai instruments established the music's connection with Thai aesthetics, particularly in its soothing quality, which matched the lyrics that described the peaceful life by the canal. This pattern was soon joined by the Western instruments that took the same pentatonic melody previously established by the Thai instruments. The Western instruments were employed to amplify and enhance the existing Thai aesthetics rather than to introduce Western tunes or new genres. This point underlines how the creative team delivered the traditional sounds through an interplay of local and foreign aesthetics to fit the style of contemporary musicals and to make it appear international yet local. The belting note in the phrase "wan phrung nee ja pen chen rai ("What will tomorrow be like?)" signifies Phloi's realisation that she was departing from her old life. Then, the Western orchestra intensified before submerging under the domination of Thai instruments, which became gradually more intensified as the boat got nearer to the city centre and the Royal Palace. Led by the *ranat ek*, the Thai orchestra introduced various percussions such as *ching* and *taphon*, followed by Thai flutes. The tempo gradually increased leading to a dance prelude with the orchestra playing the same melody as the base. The domination of Thai instruments can be seen as a representation of the Royal Palace as a source of traditional and cultural richness in Thai cultural memory. In this way, the Royal Palace suggests how the monarchy serves as the distributor of national heritage and, therefore, civilisation for Thai subjects, strengthening the musical's honouring of the monarchical institution.

### Scenic Design

The most memorable scene design in "Bahn Khong Chan" was the wooden boat on which Phloi and her mother 'sail' through dry ice on stage. Shaped with a high pitch gable roof, it was recognisable to the audience through its design as being of the traditional Thai style. From my observation, this stage design also notably recalled and repurposed the famous underground boat scene from *Phantom of the Opera*, in which the Phantom sailed with Christine to his lair. Virawan's stated love for *The Phantom of the Opera* (Lim *et al.* 193) was on display here in this playful inversion of setting and theme (one set of characters going home, the others leaving), but, even for an audience unfamiliar with *Phantom*, the scene stood on its own merits, without being just a re-tread of a foreign megamusical. The homage in the scene's staging and choreography to the Western *Phantom* was balanced with Thai *mise-en-scène*, from the boat style to the *nang phab phiab* position (i.e., a sitting position

where both legs are bent on top of each other). These representations were enhanced by the background of the Royal Palace in the distance. Here, and elsewhere throughout the musical, we can see how Thai aesthetics were infused with influences from megamusicals to represent Thai cultural identity.

### **Social Participation: “Saranrom” (Act I, Scene 16)**

#### **Narrative**

As the show moved into the beginning of the Sixth Reign, Khun Prem, dressed in a full Western-style tuxedo, took young adult Phloi, wearing a fashionable Thai-style flapper dress, to a ball organised by King Vajiravudh. Here, men in black-tie danced with women in flapper outfits with feather headbands, signifying the arrival of the roaring twenties. This scene represented a sharp contrast to the previous reign, in which men and women conducted themselves in a more reserved way. Physical contact in public between males and females also became more permissible, as the two were seen holding hands while dancing. This ball and the conversations in the scene highlight Khun Prem’s status among the elite groups who consumed Western cultural capital such as by participating in a social club, dressing up in Western attire, and consuming imported liquors. It also shows King Vajiravudh’s cosmopolitan taste in European culture and extravagant social events. Throughout the scene, Khun Prem told Phloi about his pride in and his love for the king, with the lyrics of his song praising the king’s guidance in helping Siam to become more civilised. As mentioned previously, this ‘civilisation’ was often associated with being more westernised, highlighted in context here by the cultural activities and products adopted from the Western world. The message of the song indicates the legitimate choice of Siam to open up to more cultural products from the West, presenting the aspirational cosmopolitan stance of members of the elite in society who were proud of being civilised Siamese engaged in Western cultural capital.

#### **Vocal Production**

Despite the fast tempo of the music played by Western instruments, the vocal style delivered by the young adult Phloi and Khun Prem fell under the genre of *phleng luuk kruung*. The *uan* sounds were prevalent in both characters’ vocal lines, though they were executed in a more

legato style to heighten the loving sentiments in the song between the two characters. The use of legato and heightened lyrics are common features of *phleng luuk kruung* songs. The male and female melodic lines were composed in contrasting tones, where the sheer female voice soared above the rounder and velvety tone of the male voice. A light vibrato was deployed for the ending consonants throughout the song, though the overall consonants were not emphasised, delivering a graceful and continuous melodic movement. My vocal transcription below illustrates several points of deliberate *uan* and a legato movement in Phloi's vocal line.

#### Example 4



The ending consonant of both words, which are /ma<sup>h</sup>i/ and /lu<sup>h</sup>ang/, are common sounds of the *uan* technique, which allowed the performer to emphasise them more deliberately in the song. The ensemble sang in unison in a male and female key, mostly following the accent and tempo set by the musical instruments. Therefore, their vocal movement was crisp and staccato. The *uan* sounds were strongly decreased as the tempo increased. Their vocal lines steered the scene away from its Thai aesthetic set up by Phoi and Khun Prem, gearing towards the Western aesthetic of popular music of that particular time, which was a jazz “Charleston” style. The vocal production in the style of *phleng luuk kruung*, which is a hybrid of Thai classical singing and Western pop style, indicates the transformation in aesthetics amongst Thai subjects in the upper social milieu who had opportunities to be in contact with foreign aesthetics without leaving the country. However, as the song gradually featured more Western music styles, the vocal production steered further away from Thai aesthetics and was replaced with Western pop-style vocals. This can be interpreted as symbolising that Thai aesthetics negotiated with and were, eventually, overwhelmed by Western aesthetics in the hope of making Thai aesthetics more civilised.

#### Music Composition

Though the lyrics describe the pride in being Siamese and Thai cultural identity, the music composition of “Saranrom” itself featured no contribution from Thai traditional instruments. Instead, it was performed by all Western instruments in a big band style. Accenting on the second and fourth beat, the rhythm was straight rather than a swung eight note like typical big band songs. It featured bold brass and drum sections with the use of syncopated rhythm towards the end. The upbeat rhythm and the brass band set up a light mood for entertainment, leading to a full-on dance break as each musical section intensified. This music style delivered the Western aesthetic while accompanying the *phleng luuk kruung* singing technique, resulting in a fusion of jazz and traditional Thai music, though the former took the leading position. The domination of Western aesthetics signifies how Western cultural capital was considered aspirational and as good taste amongst Thai elites who strived to become modernised by steering away from traditional Thai ways. It also signifies how the Thai elites constructed their identity via relying on Western capital, welcoming Western cultural imperialism as part of their class membership. In this way, the music of “Saranrom” can be interpreted as signposting the potential direction of cultural consumption in Thailand, which gradually became increasingly dominated by Western aesthetics, causing traditional Thai aesthetics to become old-fashioned and, therefore, non-aspirational.

### **Choreography**

The entire dance break in “Saranrom” consisted of Western-style dances, particularly variations of tea dance, or the so-called ‘Gatsby’ dance, and pas de deux. It began with conventional ballroom dancing amongst club participants, except for Phloi who was learning the steps from Khun Prem. As the big band jazz music slowed down slightly, the choreography became more technical. The conventional ballroom style progressed into a pas de deux section showing variations of partnering lifts, pirouettes, and Temps Levé, leading to solo sections of male and female dancers showing acrobatic leaps and technical moves including grand jeté, jeté entrelacé, pirouettes, and chassé around the stage. One of the most notable sections was an ensemble ‘jazz hands’ dance row sequence towards the end which delivered the global aesthetic of classic scenes in notable American musicals such as *An American In Paris*’s “Stairway to Paradise”, *Top Hat*’s “Top Hat, White Tie And Tails”, *You’ll Never Get Rich*’s “Boogie Barcarolle”, and *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*’s “42<sup>nd</sup> Street” and finished with confetti cannons and spectacular lighting (Figure 12). This showstopper also functioned as the signature scene of the musical as evidenced by how it was often included in the

promotional video and performed on television shows as part of advertising the musical. Therefore, the advertisement of the scene and the choreography after conventional ballroom steps (which are historically accurate for the period) indicates the creative team's aspiration to deliver a showstopper fit for the demands of a megamusical.



Figure 12: The dance sequence in “Saranrom” (Kapook 2017).

### Scenic Design

The first set showed the living room in Phloi and Khun Prem’s house which was indicative of the period, furnished with European-style furniture as well as wooden shelves decorated in a Thai-style *kanok* pattern. The decoration of their house reflected the increasingly cosmopolitan taste of Thailand at the time, and how it blended with more traditional Thai styling. This norm indicated the preference of the Thai elite for incorporating foreign culture, European in this case, with their own ways. By adopting such norms, the high status and wealth of Phloi’s family were confirmed. Hanging on a pillar in the middle of the room was a portrait of King Vajiravudh, a sight familiar to contemporary Thai audiences who would be similarly likely to have a portrait of certain Thai kings in their houses. This *mise-en-scène* represents Phloi’s opening monologue, emphasising the monarchy as the central pillar for all Thais. While Phloi and Khun Prem were talking, the living room, then, glided away and was transformed into a social club. The club was decorated in a white, modern style similar to common ballrooms in international hotels. There was a big space in the middle for a big dance sequence in the scene. This was visually enhanced by decorative fairy lights and special effects lighting which transform the whole space into an extravagant dance floor.



## Parting With Children: “Phab (Photograph)” (Act I, Scene 17)

### Narrative

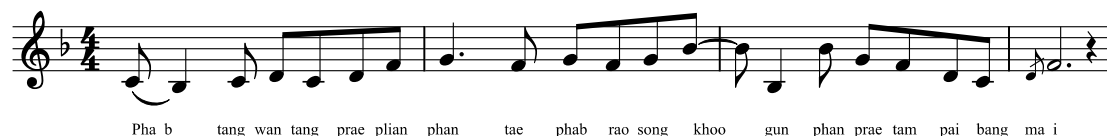
On the lawn in the middle of Khun Prem’s house, a photographer was seen using a plate camera to photograph Phloi, Khun Prem and all their children. It was obvious that Phloi was sceptical and a bit scared of this new activity while, as usual, the Khun Prem who eagerly participated in social trends shaped by Western influences convinced her of its benefit. Due to the old belief which saw the camera as a ‘tool for sucking away the soul’, the invention was not well received by Thais at first. This was perhaps why Phloi was uncomfortable during the photographing session. This activity was mostly practised amongst upper-class people who tended to be Western-educated or were at least exposed to Western cultural norms. Therefore, by having their photograph taken at home, the scene highlights Khun Prem’s aspirational cosmopolitan stance by following collective norms practised amongst the elite. It also shows how Khun Prem brought Phloi into contact with aesthetic cosmopolitanism by exposing her to foreign cultural products. While watching their children being photographed, Phloi confessed her worries to Khun Prem regarding sending An and Ot to study abroad, and On to be a military cadet. Khun Prem, then, consoled Phloi by telling her to cherish the beauty of life each day and reassured her that his love for her would last for a lifetime regardless of any changes in life. The word *phab* (photograph or picture) represents fragments of memory in life. The lyrics paint a picture of how these fragments are constantly created, suspended, and changed. Therefore, one should live in the ever-imperfect moment as nothing lasts forever. Similar to the song “Bang Khong Chan”, the message emphasises the theme of Buddhism, signifying the teaching of impermanence in life and how one should adapt to changing circumstances.

### Vocal Production

The singing technique for this song was mostly executed in the style of *phleng luuk kruung* with an aspirate onset, elaborate and scooping *uan* sounds, and legato style to heighten the emotions in the song. The ending of each vocal phrase was elongated and finished with a gliding and light vibrato rather than a clear cut-off. Such an ending can be interpreted as a representation of uncertainty and yearning in life. The strong *uan* sounds throughout this song and its pentatonic melodic lines delivered a bold traditional Thai aesthetic in the song.

This was enhanced by the sustaining of the floating nasal sound on the ending consonant /n/, which resonated with the traditional Thai singing aesthetic. Below, my vocal transcription illustrates the execution of *uan* sounds (on “phab” and “mai”) and the elongated nasal phrases (on “phan”, “khoo” and “gun”).

#### Example 5



Pha\_b    tang wan tang    prae plian    phan       tae    phab    rao song    khoo       gun    phan prae tam    pai bang    ma\_i

Such strong Thai-style vocal features were accompanied by exaggerated Thai pronunciation, particularly for consonants that feature /r/ such as the phrase “wan kheun phan prae chen rai, /wan kə:n p<sup>h</sup>an præ: ʃen rai/”. Normally, the /r/ consonant in Thai is pronounced by flipping the tip of the tongue on the hard palate only once. In this song, though, the /r/ consonant was often overenunciated sounding like a trilling /r/ sound. This technique helped to enhance the clarity of the Thai pronunciation and the Thai vocal aesthetic. The emphasis on Thai vocal aesthetics, particularly because this song followed right after “Saranrom”, can be interpreted as a reminder of the cultural roots associated with the national pillar of Buddhism, which remained firm despite various changes that came with the modernisation process. Its sharp contrast in aesthetics with the strong Western style of “Saranrom” also reveals a nostalgic sense of the traditional Thai ways, perhaps inviting the audience to look back to and appreciate their cultural heritage.

The Thai vocal aesthetics, though, were also delivered with the help of Western musical theatre vocal techniques. In higher notes, the Western-style vibrato and mixing resonance were deployed to lift the note, making it soar and fade out. Towards the peak of the song, Khun Prem’s vocal line climbed up the scale, adding more weight to the dynamic and pronunciation. To execute such demands, the performer contracted the throat and introduced a stronger vibrato at the ending phrases, a technique widely deployed in the Western musical theatre style. As he went up the scale, he dropped his jaw more, engaged his upper body by lifting his chest and tilting his head backwards slightly. These body gestures allowed him to deliver a strong belt on the word “khang gai, /ka:ŋ ga:i/”. To maximise the belt quality, he

sustained the belting on the open vowel of /a/ and then added the /i/ vowel just before ending the word. After the money note, he engaged more air in the vocal production to deliver a sentimental message, slowing the song down and fading to the end. The belting section is demonstrated in the transcription below.

#### Example 6



The incorporation of Western musical theatre techniques despite the emphasis of the song on traditional Thai techniques indicates how Western vocal aesthetics were utilised to shape their Thai equivalents in order to deliver the aesthetics common to contemporary musical theatre. In other words, Western vocal aesthetics were employed to enhance Thai aesthetics to make them more accessible to the contemporary mass audience.

### Music Composition

The song began with a string section playing in pentatonic scale, then the keyboard took on a higher pitch which assimilated the gliding movement of *uan*, thereby delivering the aesthetics of Thai music. When the vocal started, the piano accompanied the vocal line while the strings and keyboard functioned as a countermelody in the style of *uan* sounds. As the song progressed, it featured more brass instruments to increase the intensity of the song. The *ranat* echoed lightly in a similar movement to the piano throughout the song. Overall, the music of “Phab” delivered a strong Thai aesthetic despite the fact that it was dominated by Western instruments. This was due to the pentatonic scale and the assimilation of the *uan* movement. Similar to the section on vocal production above, Western aesthetics were employed to enhance their Thai equivalents, resulting in a blend of the two aesthetics.

### Scenic Design

The photograph was taken on a big lawn situated in between three buildings on Khun Prem’s land. This mise-en-scène represented a Thai style of architecture that often included several houses on a family’s land. Each house would be occupied by different members of the

household, who might have their extended family members living with them. This living style indicated the preference for living together as a big family in Thai society in the past. The façade's grandeur also showed Khun Prem's wealth and the neat decoration of Thai patterns suggested his family's high status. As the scene progressed, the children and the photographer in the background was not lit and the focus was shifted to Phloi and Khun Prem. In the background, a shadow of the city centre, which included the Royal Palace and several temples nearby, was seen in the distance. Putting it together with the message of the song, the shadow can signify the golden era of the Royal Palace, which was left behind in the past. On the other hand, its solid feature at the centre stage can signify how, through thick and thin, the three pillars of nation, religion, and king stood tall, providing stability for the Thais.

### **An's Return: "Congratulations" (Act I, Scene 1)**

#### **Narrative**

Lucille's fashion style (a flapper dress, short curly hairstyle, and bold makeup) and open mannerisms (e.g., greeting others by hugging and kissing) caused awkwardness amongst the family due to cultural differences. An, as always dressed in Western attire, a white button-down shirt with a tie layered with a waistcoat and slack trousers, seemed to approve of his wife's behaviour. Prapai, Phloi's youngest daughter, found Lucille's westernised gestures and lifestyle fascinating. So, Prapai spent as much time as possible with Lucille and learnt to copy her gestures including her expressive body movement and facial expressions. This point can be interpreted as Prapai being exposed to cultural products from the West and aspiring to adopt Lucille's behaviours because she was a figure of civilisation to her. Lucille did not express much desire to adapt to Thai culture, and when she did, it was only to gain benefits. For instance, in the 2019 production, after performing a *waii* gesture (putting both palms together in a prayer-like position and bowing one's head down to the palms) she remarked that "the Thais are indeed stupid, just *waii* them and you will gain their approval". This type of condescending remark is not featured in the novel as a part of Lucille's characteristics. By adding this line to the musical, Lucille is made a villainous character, just like her husband An. This remark can be interpreted as a tool for strengthening the imagined community and a sense of nationalism amongst Thai audiences. The reason for this is because, as an outsider, Lucille's condescending behaviour is directed at Thai people as a whole, which is likely to

trigger a sense of solidarity amongst local audiences. Furthermore, Lucille's behaviour represents the deconstructive aspect of Western influences despite such influences being previously deemed aspirational amongst the Thai elite, particularly in "Saranrom". By presenting Lucille as an arrogant and condescending character, Western influences are now a destabilising threat to Thai subjects, which paves the way for An's downfall due to his Western orientation.

As the scene progressed, An came home from work and found that Lucille, Prapai, Ot, Perm and Choi had thrown a surprise party for his promotion ("Congratulations"). They all praised An's talent and his bright future, concluding that it was due to his Western education and predicting that he would create a good name for the family. The young characters, Praipai, Lucille and Ot, said "congratulations" in clear English without any difficulty. Perm, Phloi's brother, tried to pronounce the word, resulting in /kɔn 'gæɔ tu lɛ 'ʃan/, which made everyone laugh. After everyone praised An, they concluded that they must open a bottle of champagne as a part of a celebration. The use of the English language and the act of throwing a party with a bottle of champagne in this scene indicate the upper social status of Phloi's family and that the family members, particularly the youngsters, were permeated by cosmopolitan taste.

### **Vocal production**

The singing technique in this song featured no traditional Thai or *phleng luuk khruung* singing techniques. Rather it was executed by singing in harmony with the chorus and speak-singing for the pattered phrases of the song. Most speak-singing phrases were in the lower range of modal register, whereas the chorus verses were in the mix register for females, making them soar above the pattered parts. Female characters occasionally utilised a strong mix and brassy belt to make their lines audible on top of the others' lines and celebratory-style music. Apart from Lucille, who sang in an accented Thai indicating her French identity, all characters emphasised their consonants to deliver the lyrics clearly. On the one hand, the fact that the vocal production in this song featured no Thai aesthetics signifies the modern period of Thailand or, to use the main conflict in the story, the 'new world' where young subjects were extensively transformed by globalised cultural repertoires dominated by Western cultural imperialism. On the other hand, it also underlines how this 'new world' had no place for traditional Thai aesthetics which belonged to the 'old world,'

accentuating how Western influences were a destabilising threat to Thai society and should be treated with caution.

### **Music Composition**

In parallel with the vocal production style, the music in this scene featured no Thai instruments or pentatonic scales. The song “Congratulations” began with Western cymbals and an accented downbeat, soon joined by a keyboard and drums. The song gradually slowed down before transgressing into a rhythmic section similar to the ragtime style. The rhythmic base proceeded in a steady marching style throughout the song, which was complemented by a kick and snare drum pattern. The piano took the syncopated melodies running in the background and created musical effects for comedic moments, such as when Perm mispronounced the word “congratulations”. The rhythm would slow down slightly to elongate the chorus part before proceeding into the same rhythmic pattern. Similar to the above, the Western instruments represented an air of fun and modernity in the ‘new world’ where Western influences dominated Thai society, not just in terms of conspicuous consumption amongst a limited number of elites like in “Saranrom,” but in terms of domestic ways of life and how one navigated the world. The slower rhythm during Perm’s mispronunciation not only gave way to the comic moment but also suggested that Perm, who belonged to the old world, was struggling to keep up with the new world and made a fool of himself.

### **Scenic Design**

The scene was set in the same living room as at the beginning of the social participation scene with the display of an array of European furniture with Thai decorative styles signifying the cosmopolitan taste of Thai elites. This time, the portrait in the centre was changed to that of King Prajadhipok Rama VII, signifying the new reign and the family’s continuous faith in the monarchy. The portrait was positioned high enough to be seen clearly from every angle, even when the characters clustered in the centre stage. The characters mainly positioned themselves in a single horizontal line while An stood in front as the focal point. They also made use of the space by moving around congratulating An, sitting on the sofa and, towards the end, handing out champagne flutes and opening the champagne (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Family's surprise for An (Kapook 2017).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the last step of the adaption of *Four Reigns The Musical*, realisation, is infused with aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism as evidenced in the hybridised performative elements. In comparison with the scene analysis in Chapter Five, I showed how these scenes are realised on stage and feature a stronger degree of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism through performative elements. Such hybridised elements constantly transition between Thai and Western performance techniques, resonating with local and global aesthetics simultaneously while aiming to deliver representation of Thai cultural identity and Thai historical knowledge. Therefore, it can be said that the performative elements featured in *Four Reigns The Musical* are born out of the constant tension between Thai and megamusical aesthetics which occurs from mixing the two cultural points. As demonstrated, Western aesthetics are often employed to enhance their Thai equivalents with the aim of achieving a modern Thai identity. In this sense, the musical shows that a modern Thai identity is, to a certain degree, shaped by Western cultural capital. However, as seen in the case of the song “Congratulations,” when the influence of such capital is too great, it is presented as deconstructive. As such, the musical suggests the employment of foreign, largely Western, cultural capital to enhance that of the local space, though the former should not negate the latter. This resonates with the novel’s key message examined in Chapter Five.

Across the four chapters that have constituted this case study, I have argued that every step of the adaptation of *Four Reigns The Musical* is infused with aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism. The interplay between global and local aesthetics is one of the most important factors in *Four Reigns*' commercial success amongst local audiences. In Chapter Five, I showed that Kukrit Pramoj's aesthetic cosmopolitanism is manifested in various characters and across the narrative of *Four Reigns*. This sensibility combined with the historical details of the novel illustrate the dynamic formation of the cosmopolitan imaginary in Thailand and lays the foundation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the source text of *Four Reigns The Musical*.

In Chapter Six, I demonstrated the musical's significance in Thai society as a celebration of the institution of the monarchy and as a tool for disseminating national ideologies and the Thai history shaped by such ideologies. Given the musical's correlation with the contemporary socio-politics in Thailand, it is imbued with political voices which have a substantial capacity to didactically shape the perspectives of local audiences. I also examined how the creative team developed the musical using the pre-cosmopolitan condition previously set up by the source text and their stance of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism, resulting in the musical's hybridised score and choreography.

In this last chapter, I further investigated the interplay between Thai and Western aesthetics, focusing on hybridised performative elements. Such hybridisation results in a unique style, which delivers both Thai sentiments and globalised aesthetics shaped by megamusicals. Although aiming to disseminate endorsed national ideologies, particularly the preservation of Thailand's national pillars, the hybridised aesthetics suggest using global, largely Anglo-American, cultural capital to sustain, strengthen, and continue Thai cultural memory. In this way, the hybridity manifested in the musical, both in terms of narrative and performative elements, underlines how modern Thai identity was, and is, constructed by urban subjects' negotiation and incorporation of global cultural capital with local cultural capital. In so doing, their imaginaries are affected by the increasingly cosmopolitan sphere in their environs and their altered worldviews which, in turn, contribute to the cosmopolitan aesthetics circulating within urban Thailand.

By aligning the three steps—the source text, the process of adaptation and the realisation—we see varying degrees of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism flowing within and



travelling across each step. Read in combination with Chapter Four, we can also see that Virawan's branding strategies—the figure of Virawan, the transliterated name and performance venues, the source material, and the star power—in crafting his musical productions, including *Four Reigns*, are also significantly influenced by aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Despite being firmly rooted in Thai aesthetics and national ideologies, *Four Reigns The Musical* is largely delivered using global aesthetics derived from Anglo-American megamusicals. These branding strategies serve as an attraction point, enabling local audiences to experience Thai sentiments in an art form shaped by the global aesthetics of megamusicals. This process allows the global level to interact with the local level, with the aim of achieving fulfilment from both levels for local audiences. In this way, *Four Reigns* satisfies the taste of modern, urban Thai audiences whose identity has been continuously transformed by global cultural capital yet retains roots in Thai cultural identity. In other words, such audiences yearn for grasping products shaped by global aesthetics which feature cultural significance at the local level. Furthermore, as the musical is centred on Thai cultural memory and advertised as being on par with Anglo-American megamusicals, it serves as both an item of national pride and a global product. As such, I contend that the creative team's artistic decisions resonate with the key message of the story, which is to use foreign aesthetics to enhance local aesthetics without homogenising the latter with the former. Given the success of the musical as evidenced by several revivals and the positive feedback garnered, such an interplay between global and local levels (with the latter being more emphasised in the narrative context) may be one of the keys to creating a commercially successful contemporary musical in Thailand as it appears to resonate well with the characteristics of modern Thai identity, at least in urban Thailand.

## Chapter Eight: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in an Alternative Musical

The previous case study of *Four Reigns The Musical* demonstrated the different ways in which aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism influenced the creative process of the musical, allowing it to represent itself as both a cultural item of national pride and a global product. The combination of these two elements helped to drive the musical to commercial success with a Thai audience. As a counterpoint, this chapter investigates how aesthetic cosmopolitanism manifests in an alternative, also known as small-scale, and non-commercial (i.e., free entry with booked tickets and free streaming on Facebook) musical staged in Bangkok in 2020. By examining the entire creative process of a project called *Musical Lab*, organised by FahFun Production in 2020, and the self-devised musical titled *Bangkokian* which resulted from it, this chapter seeks to better understand the role of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the creation of a community specialising in small-scale musicals, the technical training involved, and the self-devised musical produced by them. It also considers key cosmopolitan imaginaries and social factors that impact the entry point of the individual into the community of musical theatre in Thailand. Such social factors bring to light how members navigate within this community.

The argument in this chapter is predicated upon recognising that, in the development process of *Musical Lab* and the creation of *Bangkokian*, aesthetic cosmopolitanism and the consumption of foreign musical products, specifically Anglo-American musicals, formed transaesthetics that influenced the aspirational standard of Thai musical theatre amongst this community of musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts. Their familiarity with and knowledge of such foreign musicals highlight the role of education and language skills inherent in the acquisition of cultural capital and community participation. These transaesthetics propelled the strategies of the production team in forming an ensemble community that steered away from the model of large-scale commercial musical theatre by utilising the technical training and musical materials circulating within the community, and the glocalised musical work that they sought to produce. Such an aspirational standard driven by transaesthetics enabled *Musical Lab* and *Bangkokian* to engage in a global link with international level musical theatre, predominantly that associated with Anglo-American geographical areas. In turn, the project functioned as an articulator of and contributor to the aesthetic cosmopolitan sphere in the contemporary performing arts scene in Bangkok.

This chapter is divided into three sections, which are (1) *Musical Lab*; (2) the role of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the two labs; and (3) *Bangkokian*. Section one introduces the project *Musical Lab*, examining its core objective and the desired community. This process of building a community determined the model for *Musical Lab*, the audition process, and the kind of participants they selected. I will also analyse how making the musical non-commercial enabled the team to build the desired community and locate the project in the alternative theatre. Lastly, I will evaluate the results of this community building and consider whether it achieved its goal.

Section two seeks to investigate the role of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the two labs of the project, the brainstorming lab and the training lab. For both labs, I will demonstrate how aesthetic cosmopolitanism played an important role in shaping how the community members accessed, appreciated and practised the art form of musical theatre as part of their desire to contribute to an alternative musical theatre. Bound to this process is the role of language skills as an integral part of the cultural capital of participants as this significantly influenced how well they could navigate within this community and access professional training.

Section three focuses on the self-devised musical titled *Bangkokian*. It explores how aesthetic cosmopolitanism influenced the process of creating the musical, the performance techniques and aesthetics engaged in by the participants, and the audience's appreciation of the art form, which suggests their membership in the community established by the project. I will analyse how the narrative and musical styles featured in the musical reflect the musical's alternative position in comparison to commercial Thai musicals and the participants' attempts to increase the viability of Thai musical theatre as influenced by the transaesthetics explored in previous sections. Using the song and scene "Mai Pen Rai (It's Okay)", I will further demonstrate how aesthetic cosmopolitanism is manifested in forms of artistic inspiration and the globalised form of musical theatre training, resulting in the process of glocalisation.

Before proceeding to the listed sections, I will summarise the unique position of the *Musical Lab* project and how it can contribute to the understanding of contemporary Thai musical theatre, specifically in terms of small-scale theatre. I will also briefly analyse the current dynamic of small-scale theatre in Thailand in order to define the terms alternative and small-scale theatre as used throughout this thesis, thereby highlighting its engagement with

aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism shaped by the transnational flow of Western musical theatre.

### **Choosing *Musical Lab***

Apart from offering a counter-aspect to large-scale commercial musical theatre previously examined, the development process of *Musical Lab* is particularly unique because it operated on an ensemble-based model rather than a director-based model. The project consisted of discussions and technical training workshops before proceeding into the creation and rehearsal process for the self-devised musical. The ensemble model and the activities prior to the making of the musical aptly reflected participants' perspectives on the contemporary musical theatre both in Thailand and internationally and their desires to be a part of the former. Furthermore, the community that the project aimed to build was to provide ongoing support and contributions for the alternative musical theatre in Thailand. Therefore, the analysis of the production team and the participants in this project can bring forth the current dynamic of, and ideologies circulating within, the contemporary musical theatre, particularly the different positions occupied by large-scale and small-scale musical theatre and the practitioners involved. It can also reveal the possible direction in which small-scale musical theatre is progressing, which is towards a closer link with international musical theatre and further away from nationally driven narratives.

Lastly, as one of the participants, I was involved in all the processes throughout the project. During the processes, not only did I experience the labs and the musical creation as a participant, thus absorbing and contributing to the ideologies and aesthetics shared amongst the participants, but I also observed and worked closely with other participants and members of the production team. This primary experience exposed me to their horizons of knowledge, expectations, and imaginaries regarding the art form of musical theatre. This enabled me to analyse multifaceted aspects of this community and better understand current musical theatre in Thailand as a whole. As such, most of the information and analyses here are based on my personal experience and the journal which I recorded throughout the process. In my journal, I recorded the activities and exercises done in the project, my personal reflection on each day, and my observation of other participants. I also conducted personal interviews with some of the coaches and participants to further clarify certain points. All the key individuals discussed here have been made anonymous and are referred to by their positions unless stated

otherwise. I acknowledge that although I tried to alternate between the two roles of both being a participant going through the training and a scholar observing other participants and coaches, my personal views and experience are bound to have influenced the way I understood and analysed the project. Furthermore, as a musical theatre practitioner trained in Western theatre conservatoires, my tendency was to discern the technical training and performance standards from the point of view of Western musical theatre. I overcame this as far as possible by working to understand the factors affecting amateur participants and locally trained practitioners in the community, which revealed a great deal about the current dynamic of and aspirations for the alternative musical theatre in Thailand.

### **Alternative Theatre in Thailand**

As a point of departure, it is useful to briefly investigate the role of alternative theatre, *lakhon thang leauk*, also commonly referred to as small-scale theatre, *lakhon rhong lek*, in Thailand. Both terms are often used interchangeably with the former connoting a sense of non-mainstream theatre more strongly. Hence, some practitioners also refer to such theatre as indie theatre, *lakhon indie*, suggesting its speciality in creating niche theatre work. The background of Thailand's alternative theatre is essential for understanding why *Musical Lab* operated in a specific way and the response to it from participants and the audience.

Small-scale theatre is best defined in relation to large-scale theatre. For most theatregoers and practitioners in Thailand, stage productions are generally divided into large-scale theatre, *lakhon rhong yai*, and small-scale theatre, *lakhon rhong lek*. The general rule to distinguish both types of theatre is the size of a performing venue and the distance between performers and the audience. Large-scale theatre usually refers to stage productions performed in a large theatrical venue, usually a proscenium arch theatre that features at least two tiers of seating. Given the size and the prominent stage area of the venue, the distance between the performers and the audience tends to be large and clearly defined. Examples of theatrical venues for large-scale theatre in Thailand include Rachadalai Theatre, Kad Suankaew Theatre, and the KBank Siam Pic-Ganesha. In contrast, small-scale theatre is often staged in a small-scale theatrical venue with low audience capacity (generally no more than a hundred seats) or in a flexible space. Examples of such venues in Thailand include The Crescent Moon Space, the Petralai Blackbox, Makhampom Studio, the Naked Mask Playhouse, and Lanna Ari.

The names of the venues above show that, unlike large-scale theatre venues, these venues do not strictly brand themselves as theatres. They often instead describe themselves as performance spaces, flexible spaces, or even event venues. Many of them, therefore, operate as multifunctional spaces, offering spaces for rehearsals, seminars, art galleries, or simply for a gathering of group members. While most large-scale theatres are established with the support of big corporate sponsors (e.g., the insurance company, Meung Thai Praguncheewit, for Rachadalai Theatre and Kasikorn Bank for the KBank Siam Pic Ganesha Theatre), most venues for small-scale theatres are often not originally built to host theatrical performances. They are often renovated from spaces in academic institutions, such as The Crescent Moon Space in the Pridi Panomyong institution and the Petralai Blackbox in the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy at Chulalongkorn University. Other venues like Lanna Ari make use of a space within the owner's family property (Rodanant 2021).

The reasons why many of these spaces are situated in academic institutions are due to factors I explored in Chapter Three, specifically that contemporary theatre practice gained recognition in university settings first, and staging a performance has remained a well-recognised activity for university students with both theatre and non-theatre degrees. In this way, having a performance venue in an academic institution is a way for the universities to promote their students' activities and showcase their work on behalf of the universities. Also, by building a flexible space like the Petralai Blackbox, the university can use the space for other purposes such as holding seminars and meetings and rent the space out to non-university staff. Given that the spaces for small-scale theatre tend to be flexible spaces or transformed from non-theatre spaces, the distance between the performers and the audience tends to be smaller, making the fourth wall less clearly defined. This intimacy between the performers and the audience is at the heart of staging a small-scale theatre (Diloksamphan 2019). Therefore, some productions push the boundaries of a performance space by staging their productions in unconventional venues such as board game cafés, restaurants, and old warehouses (ibid).

Due to the size of the venue and the small audience capacity, small-scale theatre productions often stage original work rather than adapting well-known epic stories found in large-scale theatre (e.g., Scenario's *Four Reigns The Musical* and KBank Siam Pic-Ganesha's *Chai Khlang The Musical*). Instead, they often present stories that they find important for

themselves or society. Nisha Rodanant, a professional actress in both large-scale and small-scale theatre and founder of a drama troupe titled *Khanalakhon Poon-Poon*, explained that small-scale theatre practitioners tended to tell whatever stories they found meaningful for themselves or stories that they wanted to explore further rather than thinking about what would appeal to an audience (2021). Since these stories are often based on a writer's personal views and experience, they tend to reflect social and political situations more explicitly than large-scale theatre productions which target a mass audience and are often backed by national corporate sponsors. Compared to large-scale theatre, therefore, small-scale theatre practitioners have more freedom in terms of choosing their materials and crafting their works.

Since small-scale productions do not usually perform well-known stories and target a specific audience rather than a broad one, they do not attract large audiences (Kijchaicharoen 2021, Rodanant 2021). Their audiences are usually those who are already into alternative theatre, with many of them already being professional and amateur theatre practitioners, highlighting the small size of this community. Rangsimun Kijchaicharoen, a playwright and lyricist for many productions at Kad Suankaew Theatre, said that the number of audiences for small-scale theatre productions had increased during the past few years due to advertisements on social media platforms, particularly online posts by *The Standard* and *The Matter*, well-known online magazines targeting young readers. However, ever since the COVID-19 pandemic started, most small-scale theatre productions have been cancelled or postponed indefinitely, disrupting the growth of audiences in small-scale theatre (2021). Rodanant agreed that the audiences for small-scale theatre were starting to grow before the pandemic and that Facebook played an important role in promoting new productions to a wider range of audiences (2021). Nevertheless, the audience size for small-scale theatre is still considered relatively small and still heavily relies on word of mouth as the main advertising method (ibid). By relatively small audience, I am referring to a situation where one tends to bump into familiar faces when attending or performing in small-scale productions. Therefore, small-scale theatre in Thailand is still an entertainment form consumed and practised by a limited group of people.

As small-scale productions tend to attract a small audience, they generate little to no profit (ibid, Kijchaicharoen 2021, Puttikulankura 2021). On average, the tickets for small-scale theatre productions are usually around 500 Baht and 350 Baht for concessions, with a donation box at the performance venue. For troupes or performers that have not gained much

recognition, they tend to make their performances free to enter and only ask for donations at the end. These ticket prices are considered quite low compared to large-scale productions, which usually range from 500 to 3,000 Baht. However, they are not considered a cheap form of consumption in Bangkok, the most expensive city in Thailand, where an inexpensive meal ranges from 50 to 170 Baht (Numbeo 2021). This highlights that, although cheaper than large-scale theatre, going to an alternative theatre is still a considerable expense, suggesting that it is only viable for those who are middle class and above.

The income from ticket sales is used to cover the fee for a performance venue unless a show has sponsorship for the venue and other costs. The remaining income is distributed amongst the cast and crew to cover their travelling and food expenses. If there is still any money left, it is paid to the cast and crew as their working fee. Most of the time, though, there is no profit and the cast and crew often do it for free (Rodanant 2021, Kijchaicharoen 2021, Puttikulankura 2021). In the event that the ticket sales and donations do not cover the cost, the cast and crew usually spend their own money to cover it as well. This is why one of the top priorities when staging a small-scale theatre performance is to find as many cost-saving methods as possible. Such methods include finding a sponsor for a venue and food or connections that will allow one to access affordable or free rehearsal space (Rodanant 2021, Puttikulankura 2021). Although there are organisations such as the ThaiHealth Promotion Foundation<sup>69</sup> and the Thai Theatre Foundation<sup>70</sup> that provide funding and opportunities for small-scale theatre practitioners, the overall level of support from private and state sections is still quite low (Rodanant 2021).

Another common way to reduce costs in small-scale theatre is to work with unpaid actors. From my formal and informal conversations with Thai theatre practitioners, I noticed that none of them mentioned the unpaid nature of small-scale theatre. For most of them, it is generally understood that one will not get paid for being a part of a small-scale production. For instance, Rodanant stated that when she staged her children's shows at Lanna Ari, her troupe never made any profits even though they charged for a ticket. She said that the ticket sales covered the costs for props and other expenses, so they never made a loss either (2021).

---

<sup>69</sup> ThaiHealth Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) is an autonomous government agency established by the Health Promotion Foundation Act in 2001 (Thai Health Promotion Foundation 2021).

<sup>70</sup> Thai Theatre Foundation is a tax-exempt organisation that “supports and strengthen the contemporary Thai theatre” (Thai Theatre Foundation 2021).



Similarly, Kijchaicharoen stated that they received no money from staging a small-scale performance with the Naked Mask, a well-known community theatre group (2021).

The fact that they have to invest their efforts and money into a production that is unlikely to generate any profit, brings to light a certain financial aspect relating to small-scale theatre practitioners and those who desire to be involved in it. Since it is often unpaid work, individuals involved in small-scale theatre need other income streams to support themselves. Those who are professionally trained in performing arts tend to take performing related gigs such as shooting commercials or starring as extras and supporting actors in films and television series. Some of them also teach performing arts in performing arts conservatoires or after-school academies. Others who are not professionally trained in performing arts usually do other jobs not related to theatre at all (Rodanant 2021, Kijchaicharoen 2021). In either case, the fact that these talented individuals can invest their time in doing theatre for free, and for a loss in some cases, suggests that they come from at least the middle class or that they are still in university and supported by their family. Otherwise, it would be unlikely for them to be able to take part in an unpaid job voluntarily.

The unpaid nature of small-scale theatre often leads to challenges in terms of the rehearsal process and performance quality. Since most participants have their ‘real’ jobs to do, the rehearsal cannot be scheduled as regularly as rehearsals for commercial theatre where the cast and crew are fully paid. Consequently, rehearsals are often scheduled for after work hours or on weekends to avoid conflicting with their ‘real’ jobs. Also, as they often do this for free, the creative team often feel what we call in Thai *greng jai*, which can be translated along the lines of ‘feeling obliged to someone’. This feeling makes the creative team hesitant to call the actors in for rehearsal as often as necessary because they are aware that the actors sacrifice their time after work to do this for free. Instead, they rely on actors to do their homework (e.g., learning lines and analysing the script) in their own time, and put all elements together in a limited rehearsal period. However, due to multiple jobs and other factors (e.g., discipline, technical training, experience), rehearsals are often not as effective as they should be (Rodanant 2021). The creative team, again, hesitate to reprimand actors because they do not get paid for the project. Therefore, although not for every small-scale production, a limited rehearsal time contributes to poorly rehearsed productions. This is the current challenge concerning the quality of small-scale theatre in Thailand, which problematises its attraction to a wider audience and, therefore, its financial gain. As long as the cast and crew still rely on

their own investment and work on the feeling of *greng jai*, this challenge remains difficult to overcome and limits small-scale theatre to the middle class and above.

### ***Musical Lab***

*Musical Lab*, or *Krathamkan Musical*, was an artistic project that took place in Bangkok, Thailand, from 12-20 September 2020 with face-to-face sessions on two weekends. It was organised by FahFun Production and there were twenty-four participants selected. The project sought to bring two groups of all-level musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts together to create a self-devised musical. There were no rules and requirements regarding the narrative, the duration of the musical or the musical styles used.

The two groups of participants were (1) musical theatre actors and (2) musicians and writers. Both groups initially received technical training and guidance separately before being grouped into smaller teams consisting of a composer, a writer/lyricist, and actor(s) to work on their self-devised song and scene. The project consisted of two main labs, which were the brainstorming lab and the training lab for actors and musicians/writers. As a participant in the actor group, the training lab discussed here only refers to the technical training for the actors. The expected outcome of this project, as advertised in the audition call and, later, on the show poster, was a musical devised by participants, which was presented on the last day of the project.

In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate that although the self-devised musical was the expected outcome, the most important objective was to create a particular kind of community for musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts who rarely subscribed to the model of large-scale commercial musical theatre in Thailand. As a point of departure, I will briefly investigate the formation of FahFun Production, which foregrounded the instigation of *Musical Lab* and the kind of community that the production team aimed to achieve.

### **The Cultural Politics of the *Musical Lab* Project**

FahFun Production is a group of young musical theatre practitioners (in their twenties to thirties) based in Bangkok. It was initially established by a group of professionally trained musical theatre practitioners and musicians and, later, acquired non-trained practitioners who

had professional theatre experience. They target small-scale musical theatre, often in a black box style, and offer various levels of theatre workshops. The size of the group continues to vary as members step in and out due to their careers as professional musicians, theatre practitioners and drama instructors (Puttikulankura 2021). There were four main creative individuals from FahFun who ran the *Musical Lab* project: one vocal coach, one acting coach, one writer, and one composer. The vocal coach and the composer are professionally trained in Western musical theatre and music (majoring in music composition). The acting coach and the writer do not have professional training, but they have worked closely with recognised practitioners who adopt Western performance techniques.

As shall be further demonstrated in section two, their skills shaped the techniques and musical aesthetics they circulated amongst the participants in the brainstorming and training labs. For now, I will demonstrate that their training backgrounds and professional experience served as a fundamental reason for forming FahFun Production, which was strongly linked to the instigation of the *Musical Lab* project.

In my interviews with the vocal coach and the writer of *Musical Lab*, they acknowledged feeling that they did not quite fit in with and did not want to subscribe to the large-scale commercial musical theatre in Thailand. Their issues with it included the excessive use of celebrity casts (all celebrities bar the ensemble), repetitive and unoriginal themes (based on previously successful Thai novels, television series or films rather than original stories) and the vocal and musical aesthetics used (often reliant on easy-listening songs, in which singers often dwelled within the commercial pop singing style and employed limited vocal techniques and range). For instance, the singing coach admitted that their vocal type did not quite suit most Thai musical songs, which were mostly written for a “Disney-like” aesthetic. By “Disney-like,” they referred to the type of songs that could be categorised as torch songs, but the vocal techniques were mostly executed by light mix, aspirated vocal effects, and tended to stay within a limited vocal range.

The reason for this is likely to do with the accessibility of the style for a wide range of audiences, as it is catchy and easy to listen to. Another reason might be the vocal strength and ability of the performers as most leading performers in commercial Thai musicals are either television stars or pop singers. Composing songs in a commercial pop style is likely to ease such performers’ execution, thus gaining even more appreciation from their fans, leading to

the musicals' bigger sales. Moreover, since star performers often originate the roles (and continue to play the roles in other revivals), this implies that the composers must have taken into account their vocal ability when composing, resulting in songs that sit somewhat comfortably in their range. In this way, the commercial pop style benefits both star performers and the mass audience who might not be familiar with or appreciate technical musical theatre songs (i.e., songs that feature more advanced and diverse musical theatre vocal techniques).

This point resonates with Virawan's intention to write stand-alone musical songs that could be played on other platforms as a way of making his musicals more accessible to and memorable for a local audience (Lim *et al.* 47). As demonstrated in Chapter Six, the song "Nai Luang Khong Phaendin (The King of the Land)" was widely circulated on television and social media platforms, serving as a tribute to the late King Bhumibol and as a marketing tool for the musical, which has been revived many times. Given these reasons and Virawan's influence on Thailand's commercial musical theatre (see Chapter Four), it is not surprising that most songs from commercial musicals tend to adopt this aesthetic for marketing purposes.

Therefore, the formation of FahFun was based on the desire of its members to break away from this repetitive pattern and create a kind of musical that offered more variety in terms of musical aesthetics, originality, and storytelling. Throughout their careers, they met other Thai practitioners who shared the same view of not subscribing to the commercial musical theatre model, which led to their hypothesis that there must be more like-minded performers out there (Puttikulankura 2021). Their hypothesis then took shape in forming a community where these like-minded people could come together and collaborate to explore their artistic visions and contribute to musical theatre in Thailand.

The core objective of *Musical Lab*, then, was to form a community of like-minded musical theatre practitioners to create a platform for exchanging ideas, collaboration, and supporting one another. As demonstrated above, the like-minded practitioners in this case were those who did not subscribe to the commercial musical theatre in Thailand. According to the writer of the *Musical Lab*, this group also included those who could not make it into commercial productions due to their lack of professional theatre experience or connections. This sense of community played an integral role in the project because the production team funded it using

their remaining donation money from previous shows. No one, including the production team, got paid for this project. Although they did not clearly state this zero-payment model in the audition, it was generally understood by interested participants, including myself, and no one asked about any form of remuneration. This reflects the unpaid nature of small-scale theatre productions in Thailand as stated earlier.

To counteract their zero-payment scheme, they advertised that the participants would get the chance to explore their artistic skills, find answers to their theatre-related questions and create a musical together. Their strategy to advertise the project in this way indicates their emphasis on creating free space, solidarity and togetherness amongst the community they sought to build.

The intention of creating a free space and togetherness was later confirmed in my interview with the project's writer who stated that they were looking for longevity rather than a project-based commitment because, in the case of the latter, "those individuals could just join commercial musical theatre". They further stated that they wanted to "create a space for everyone in the society" rather than choosing only the "finished products". By "finished products", they referred to professionally trained talent who preferred joining productions created by commercial musical theatre rather than being part of building a community. The team's determination to place community above trained talent was due to their involvement with the Naked Mask, a well-established community theatre group, prior to organising *Musical Lab*. The writer told me that, as a student from a provincial town coming to study in Bangkok, they discovered their passion for theatre by joining workshops organised by the group. These workshops were often free and open for participants of all levels. While they told me about their experience in this community theatre, it was clear that they highly valued the communal sense and the open-for-all policy of the group. This community not only inspired their creativity but also supported their well-being (as a student living alone in Bangkok) and taught them technical skills from scratch. In other words, they emphasised the importance of giving a chance to 'unfinished products' rather than just 'finished products' who were likely to have had more opportunities to pursue their professional training. Therefore, by organising *Musical Lab* the team aimed to build a similar kind of community with a strong focus on musical theatre.

The audition process and participants selected underlined the open-for-all policy and revealed the kind of community in question. The production team did an online open-call audition for

professional and amateur musical theatre practitioners to explore the pool of talent based in Bangkok. Based on their call for musical theatre talent of all levels, the community that the team wanted to create was clearly not one consisting only of the top musical theatre performers with the aim of creating technically advanced musical work. Rather, it was an ideological community of members who shared a passion for musical theatre. Furthermore, voluntary participation engendered a sense of imagined community amongst participants as they were all passionate about musical theatre; otherwise, they would not have participated in a non-paid project from the beginning. Such an imagined community of Thai musical theatre lovers helped form the sustainability of the community. The expectation was that the community members would be likely to support and nurture an alternative musical theatre in the long run because of their shared passion and their sense of belonging to the community.

The significance of building a nurturing community was highlighted in the audition process. When auditioning for the performer team, auditionees were required to submit a self-tape performing two contrasting musical theatre songs. When auditioning for the music and writing team, auditionees were required to submit their past composition work or a section of their original playscript or lyric. After submitting the required materials and theatre credits (if any), auditionees were required to state their desire to participate in this project. At first glance, this section did not seem so important, as it was a single box situated at the very end of the audition form, was not marked as mandatory, and did not specify a word count. Nevertheless, there was a bracketed remark stating that the answer for this section may affect the audition result.

At the end of the project, it was revealed by the production team that each auditionee's reason for taking part was indeed integral to the team's selection of participants. Regarding their selection process, the acting coach stated that anyone who expressed a lack of interest in building and nurturing a community was not selected regardless of talent and prior fame. They further said that some of those rejected were quite famous, but they did not bother stating their reason for wanting to participate in the project or only typed a few words for their reason. The team perceived these limited or non-existent reasons as a lack of enthusiasm for being a part of the community and so they were not selected. Therefore, the reason for participation, particularly because it was not marked as mandatory, served as a pre-elimination for those who did not display potential in building a community. In tandem with the writer's statements above, these auditionees were perceived to be in the group of 'finished

products' that were better off working on a project-based production rather than supporting the community. In this way, their commitment to contributing towards building a supportive hub for small-scale musical theatre seemed questionable.

In connection to the team's rejection of the commercial musical theatre, which often relies on the use of star power, it is suggestive that an auditionee's fame might have affected their chance of being selected as well. On the one hand, their emphasis on the auditionees' reasons for taking part affirmed the project's core objective to build a sustainable community and function as a supportive hub for musical theatre practitioners in the long run. On the other hand, their decision to exclude famous auditionees suggests the production team's frustration over star power and the lack of inclusivity in commercial musical companies in Thailand. This decision also revealed their desire to create an alternative community of non-famous practitioners and a different kind of work from the commercial musical theatre. In this way, their intention of creating an inclusive space for everyone in the society was counteracted by their decision on excluding some 'finished products', forming a new kind of exclusivity amongst non-famous musical theatre practitioners.

At first glance, this seems to reflect the team's position against large-scale commercial theatre. Under scrutiny, however, there was more to this than simply being anti-big business. The project's writer told me that their focus was different from large-scale musical theatre which relied on "popular stories and good-looking performers" amongst other factors to monetise their product. They said that it made sense for large-scale theatres to do so because they needed to make lots of profits, which was different from small-scale theatre. They acknowledged that small-scale theatre was never meant to be the mainstream choice, but they saw the importance of strengthening it for theatre-goers who enjoyed non-mainstream theatre. The singing coach also acknowledged the status of large-scale theatre and stated that "our competitor is not large-scale theatre, but rather Netflix and cinemas. It's about how to make Thai people consume more theatrical entertainment". They emphasised "having our own space and performing it in our own way" and "having freedom in creating content". Based on their statements, it is not so much that the team wanted to position themselves against large-scale theatre but that they started with a different mindset from the beginning. Their focus on unknown musical theatre performers, then, strongly underlined the team's determination to create a space and freedom for 'everyone' and provide variety in Thai

theatre. Again, 'everyone' in this case mostly refers to the unfinished products, those who did not fit in with commercial musical theatre for one reason or another.

As such, it is clear that the production team wanted to acquire a wide range of musical theatre practitioners who could support one another in the long run and contribute to the alternative musical theatre in Thailand. Their intention led to their selection of twenty-four participants, which ranged from professional performers and musicians who had credits in Thai and international productions (but not celebrities), musical theatre students currently in drama or music schools in Thailand and England, university students who studied drama or music as their degrees, university students who studied other degrees but had taken part in university theatre clubs, and musical theatre enthusiasts. Regarding the various levels of selected participants, the project's writer believed that all participants would receive benefits from the *Musical Lab* project, though in different ways. Those who had less or no technical training would gain the knowledge and techniques related to performative skills, while those who were more experienced would gain connections with other professional practitioners. Hence, by selecting participants who had different levels of experience and skills, the production team wanted to form a multi-functional community. This community was multi-functional because members could support one another by offering training and expert advice to less experienced members, collaborating, and attending to members' artistic projects in the future. The multi-functional nature of the community also showed the production team's democratisation of access to musical theatre training, as influenced by the community theatre.

The sense of working together was central to this community because, instead of working under a director model in which there is usually a degree of separation between the creative team and the cast, all members were responsible for bringing their skills to the table, supporting one another and co-devising the work. In this sense, the community they sought to build was based on an ensemble model, where all members had their say in the project and could contribute to the work using different kinds of artistic skills and visions. This not only created comradeship amongst this group of musical theatre practitioners and the FahFun team but also helped encourage publicity for their future work and improve the training standards of musical theatre in Thailand. The idea was that whenever a member of this community wished to stage a performance in future, they would know where to look for talent and a supportive audience. According to the writer, if any member chose to join commercial musicals, they could confidently do so knowing that they would have support from this



community regarding technical skills, experience, and access to a supportive audience. Therefore, this community not only enabled freedom and space for the members to explore their artistic visions in their projects but was also able to sustain itself on the contributions from its members.

### **Project Model**

The essence of the supportive community determined the working model for *Musical Lab*. The idea of the project was derived from the workshops hosted by the Musical Theatre Educator's Alliance (MTEA) as part of their annual conference in New York, which the vocal coach attended in person. In short, MTEA is a United States-based organisation that serves as a hub for musical theatre educators worldwide to exchange ideas and pedagogies regarding musical theatre training in the States and internationally. Ever since its establishment in 1999, the organisation has gained members from different regions including Europe, Latin America, Australia, and Asia. It hosts an annual conference in New York that consists of discussions, workshops, and presentations from key US-based musical theatre conservatoires. Apart from its annual conference, the organisation also publishes its own academic journal and provides an online forum regarding musical theatre-related teaching resources, scholarly articles, and pedagogy (MTEA 2021). In the workshops that the vocal coach attended, participants had to learn and perform new Anglo-American musical repertoires each day and create a self-devised musical at the end. Feeling stimulated by this experience, they decided to throw the same challenge to musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts in Thailand as a part of the community building process.

The MTEA's contribution to the mechanisms underpinning the dominant aesthetics in the global field of musical theatre is vital in understanding the aesthetics circulating in the technical training and aspirations of participants and the production team involved in *Musical Lab*. With the organisation's commitment to promoting the "highest standards" in musical theatre training and its inclusion of musical theatre educators around the world (MTEA 2021), the MTEA plays a crucial role in shaping the dominant aesthetics and performative skills in the art form of musical theatre at the global level. This partly arises from the organisation's strong base in the United States, which arguably fosters the adoption of the standards used by musical theatre conservatoires in the States. This in turn encourages educators from other regions to adopt the same standards and pedagogies circulating within

the organisation's conferences and platforms. However, rather than imposing such standards and pedagogy on others, it is my contention that these international members adopt the standards for their own benefit. This is because, as demonstrated throughout the thesis, Anglo-American regions hold the dominant historical narrative of the art form and have provided the inspiration and training repertoires for other practitioners in the field. In the case of Virawan's musicals, we have seen that he and his creative team used Anglo-American megamusicals as their aspirational standard, determining to elevate the status of Thai musicals. In the drama schools in Singapore and England where I trained, the musical repertoires and pedagogy employed in training shared a close resemblance as they were all from recognised vocal schools and Anglo-American audition repertoires. The same applies to the musical theatre programme at Mahidol University, one of Thailand's top music conservatoires (Puttikulankura 2021). Therefore, in this case, I believe that the musical theatre educators from across the globe who join the conference see it as beneficial to adopt such a standard to offer their students training on par with the dominant standard.

As demonstrated by Motti Regev, this 'global' standard is a form of cultural imperialism, particularly led by the Anglo-American cultural industry, which contributes to aesthetic cosmopolitanism at the local level (130). Nevertheless, this does not mean that all cultural products in non-dominant regions will be homogenised by such regions and lose their ethno-cultural uniqueness. Rather, by using the global standard in the field, local artists glocalise their works, leading to hybridised works that resonate with local and global aesthetics (ibid 127). As shall be demonstrated in sections two and three, this form of aesthetic cosmopolitanism is strongly present in the project's labs and musical creation process.

Now, let us return to the connection between replicating the workshops and the multifunctional community that the team sought to build. The brainstorming and training labs and the challenge of creating a self-devised musical within two weeks demonstrate two points. Firstly, the brainstorming and training labs enabled the participants to get a sense of the community's overall capacity by witnessing one another's skills and sharing their experiences and how they perceived the current musical theatre scene in Thailand. The singing and acting workshops also allowed the participants to develop their performative skills by workshoping their assigned song repertoires and observing other participants. This enabled participants from both the music/writer team and the actor team to know who shared the capacity to and/or interest in creating the music style that they preferred, leading to their

collaboration in smaller groups for the devised scenes. This could also lead to future collaborations between members. Secondly, the challenge of creating a musical within two weeks without setting a specific genre of music or narrative gave the participants freedom to express their creativity and collaborate with other participants who had different experiences in order to experiment with possible creative results. Moreover, throwing this challenge at them suggests the team's desire to prove that a group of unknown musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts could create a musical within two weeks. Therefore, at least theoretically, they could also create a complete small-scale musical production without using any celebrity or high-profile sponsors like other commercial musical companies in Thailand.

The decision to make the musical free entry and stream it online on the show day released the production team and participants from any of the economic pressure that large-scale musicals had to face. They did not have to worry if the performance product was worth the audience's money or their efforts in attending. Furthermore, by advertising the performance online as a musical project created within two weeks, the production team highlighted the developing nature of the musical and, thus, lowered the expectations of the audience. The unfinished look was enhanced by their decision to present the show in the rehearsal studio with no stage and no special techniques for lighting and cueing. In this sense, it could be said that the audience was also a part of the imagined community of musical theatre lovers in Thailand because only theatre fans who were into alternative musicals would be interested in seeing this show. The low investment and the unfinished stage of the musical gave the participants more room to focus on their artistic experimentation. Such experimentation went hand in hand with the production team's desire to break away from commercial musicals in the sense that they offered non-mainstream musical genres and an original story that touched more deeply on the social situation in Thailand (discussed in section three).

The project achieved its aim of building a multifunctional community of musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts as evidenced by the following. First, the group chat in the LINE application<sup>71</sup> formed at the beginning of the project has remained active until the present. Members have used the chat to advertise their work, including musicals, films, original songs or musical theatre-related talks. These posts would receive acknowledgement, comments and encouragement from other members of the group. Some professional members also used this

---

<sup>71</sup> Line is a messaging application developed by Line Corporation and is widely used in Thailand.

chat group for advertising their artistic businesses such as singing lessons, auditions and acting workshops. Secondly, the group organised a gathering for members to watch *Hamilton The Musical* via the streaming platform Disney+ together and members accompanied one another to attend shows and discuss recent local and international musical work. Thirdly, the more experienced members have since collaborated on other musical projects such as *Falcon The Musical* (2021)<sup>72</sup> and *Timeline The Musical* (2022)<sup>73</sup> and sought advice regarding performative techniques from other professionals in the group.

Following the project, none of the members joined big commercial musical companies in Thailand and instead continued to create small-scale work or work within their own groups. This might be due to the scarcity of large-scale musical productions during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it also suggests that the members sought to create their own alternative work, away from the model of commercial musicals in Thailand. Based on these cases, the production team succeeded in establishing a multifunctional, and therefore, sustainable community of non-famous musical theatre practitioners who do not subscribe to the ideals of large-scale musical theatre in Thailand and are likely capable of supporting smaller-scale musical works in the long run.

The question remains: what makes this group of musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts different, so much so that they chose to position themselves differently from commercial musical theatre in Thailand? At the beginning of this section, I have demonstrated that the founders of FahFun Production felt that they did not fit in with the commercial musical theatre industry and neither did they want to subscribe to it. I would argue that the reasons for the community's misalignment with the commercial musical theatre are closely linked to their active consumption of and subsequent aesthetic transformation by Anglo-American musical theatre as well as their professional training and experiences, which are shaped by globalised forms of technical training and aesthetics in musical theatre.

### **The Role of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in the Two Labs**

---

<sup>72</sup> An original musical created by KAD Performing Arts, performed on 18-27 November 2021.

<sup>73</sup> An original musical written by Lalit Sritara and music by Chawin Temsittichok, performed on 15 January 2022.

Understanding the manifestation of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in the project's two labs (the brainstorming lab and the training lab) highlights its important role in shaping how the members of the community accessed, appreciated and practised the art form of musical theatre, leading to their desire to contribute to Thailand's alternative musical theatre.

### **The Dominant Aesthetics in the Brainstorming Lab**

The brainstorming lab was composed of a 'question and concern' session and a musical sharing session. The former opened the floor for all participants and the production team to post as many musical theatre-related questions and concerns as possible on post-it notes. After that, everyone discussed each note and tried to come up with possible answers or, at least, explanations for such concerns. The latter session was for the music and writing team to share musical songs and scenes that inspired their musical work or their musical aspirations.

The questions and concerns raised by participants in this session could be categorised into three main groups: (1) questions about Thai and international musical theatre; (2) questions about the use of star power; and (3) questions about professional training and careers in musical theatre.

The first set of questions was mostly related to comparing Thai musical theatre with that of Anglo-American origin and attempts to understand why the latter was thriving in comparison to the former. By classifying it as thriving, it was clear from the questions that they referred to the wider range of musicals available (from Broadway/West End megamusicals to off-Broadway/off-West End productions), the longer runs and tours of these musicals, and the number of musicals produced and performed in different venues at the same time. This suggests that the participants actively engage with Anglo-American musicals and see them as a yardstick and aspiration for Thai musical theatre.

This case resonates with Regev's argument demonstrated above and Cicchelli and Octobre's conclusion that through consumption of foreign cultural products, consumers designate a specific geographical area as producing the global standard for a particular product. This area transmits transaesthetics to other geographical areas and stimulates local consumers' creativity based on such global standards (33, 196). This is due to the area's well-recognised speciality in those products and the number of quality products that the area produces. In

contemporary arts, such transaesthetics and stimulation align with what Masha Meshkimmon demonstrated in her work as a practitioner's engagement with the cosmopolitan imagination, leading to their participation in a creative dialogue with the global level and engendering a sense of being at home in the world through their work (27). This means that their work disseminates aesthetics from different parts of the world while often using local aesthetics as the starting point. In other words, their work is infused with aesthetic cosmopolitanism, which in turn displays an amalgamation of aesthetics or techniques that resonate with multiple regions. Due to these hybridised aesthetics, consumers experience a sense of the local and global simultaneously. This is the case in *Four Reigns The Musical*, which carries national and international aesthetics at the same time. However, the productions of *Four Reigns* overall harness international aesthetics to elevate themselves to the status of cultural items of national pride. By using Anglo-American musical theatre as a yardstick, this community of Thai musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts aspires to push this amalgamation of aesthetics further and create a Thai musical theatre that mirrors the former in terms of variety, a quality which is considered a sign of viability for musical theatre.

In this sense, this group of concerns implies that Thai musical theatre needs to have more variety to thrive, which reinforces the participants' desire to create diverse musical genres to increase the viability of the theatre. Their desire to increase the viability and variety of Thai musical theatre indicates that the participants perceived the current dynamics of the industry to be repetitive to a certain extent. I contend that this is primarily due to the dominance of large-scale commercial musical theatre, which is advertised widely in public (not limited solely to social media platforms and word-of-mouth marketing like small-scale theatre) and consumed by a mass audience. As demonstrated in the previous case study, large-scale musicals, most of which are staged by Virawan, tend to focus on dominant national ideologies, easy-to-understand narratives, and easy-listening musical aesthetics. One of Scenario's marketing strategies is to make musicals based on well-known Thai stories, folk tales or television series. Even Virawan himself acknowledged that the storytelling method in his musicals tended to involve spoon-feeding to suit the taste of the general Thai audience (Lim *et al.* 75). Given these factors and their objective of targeting a mass audience, it is not surprising that their productions often feature similar acting and musical aesthetics and nationally-driven plots. Although some musicals touch on social and political issues, they tend to do so briefly or offer a solid answer to those issues rather than critically analysing them. In fact, many theatre practitioners that I have encountered often refer to this style as

“Rachadalai style” as the majority of Virawan’s musicals are staged at the Rachadalai Theatre. The fact that this is recognised as a signature style of Virawan’s musicals only underlines how often it has been employed. Since Virawan’s musicals are arguably the most well-known amongst the mass audience, so much so that he is known as the ‘father of stage drama industry’ in Thailand and their residence theatre is the biggest theatre in Thailand, his musicals tend to represent Thai musical theatre as a whole. This likely led to the participants’ perception that Thai musical theatre was in need of more variety, not just in terms of producers but also in relation to different performative styles, narratives, and storytelling methods. The participants’ perception of current Thai musical theatre was in parallel with the FahFun team who felt the need to create their own space. Having stated that they had a different focus to large-scale theatre in terms of monetisation, their aim was to provide alternative theatrical entertainment for Thai audiences, underscoring their intention to increase the viability of Thai musical theatre as well. Although, as explored at the beginning of this chapter, small-scale theatre productions do offer a variety of narratives and styles, they are limited to a niche audience and often go unrecognised. Furthermore, most productions tend to be straight plays and interpretive dance rather than musicals. This might be due to the fact that creating a musical requires specific sets of skills, limiting the number of practitioners who can take on such a project.

The ever more pressing demand for more variety in a Thai musical theatre scene dominated by large-scale musicals is apparent in the second group of questions. This group was about the use of star power in Thai musicals, a major concern for the participants judging by the volume of questions it provoked. This is likely because most Thai commercial musicals feature well-known celebrities or pop stars as protagonists, if not for all non-ensemble characters. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, this is one of the marketing strategies to attract a mass audience and the fanbase of those celebrities, maximising the saleability of the musical. Again, many participants compared Thai musicals with those in the West, posing the question of why the latter could produce a musical without relying on star power.

This is not entirely accurate because many musicals in the UK (e.g., the upcoming *Cabaret* with Eddie Redmayne and Jessie Buckley, Sheridan Smith in *Funny Girl* and Leona Lewis in *Cats*) and the US (e.g., Emma Stone in *Cabaret*, Ariana Grande in *Hairspray* and Daniel Radcliffe in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*) do use celebrities as their selling point. However, compared to Virawan’s musicals which often

feature an all-celebrity cast except for the ensemble, the musicals in the West used a limited number of stars. In the discussion, many participants shared their views on how certain Thai celebrities hindered the full potential of a musical score as they could not execute certain notes and the songs were written to accommodate them. The acting coach also shared a story of how one celebrity in one large-scale musical bowed and waved to the cheering audience after his solo in the middle of the show. From this view, it is understandable why most participants found the use of star power in Thailand quite concerning.

These questions regarding whether or not a musical can succeed without any stars suggest the desire of participants to break away from commercial musical theatre and focus more on displaying their artistic potential via scores, vocal ability, and acting. This is linked to the first category regarding how to make Thai musical theatre thrive. By using Anglo-American musical theatre as the aspirational standard, the participants saw that the way to increase the viability of Thai musical theatre was to create more genres of musical, which could be achieved by creating space for practitioners to express their artistic visions and skills rather than writing to accommodate the stars' talents. The main challenge of not using any star is, of course, the lower commercial appeal and reduced ticket sales for the show. In fact, this challenge is also present in the Anglo-American theatre but was not mentioned by the participants. I contend that this is likely because, compared to Anglo-American musical theatre, the number of musicals being performed on average in Thailand is relatively low. This calls for the necessity of using well-known performers to attract local audiences, arguably much more so than in Anglo-American theatre. In this sense, the use of non-famous performers aggravates the limited reach of Thai small-scale musicals. Unfortunately, this is not an unusual situation for small-scale theatre and, subsequently, raises the question of how viable it is that this community can contribute to Thai musical theatre should this situation continue. Unfortunately, as Thailand is still emerging from the pandemic, the theatre industry has been severely affected, and the growth of small-scale theatre has stalled. Therefore, whether small-scale musicals can attract a wider audience by selling artistic quality rather than star power remains to be seen in the long run.

The third category of questions reflected participants' curiosity about professional training, performance techniques, and working in the musical theatre industry. Examples of these questions included "how do top performers do a high belt in every show without losing their voices?", "how to sustain your vocal health when performing eight shows a week?," and "do



you let all your emotions out in a song or hold back?”. In the discussions of these questions, several Broadway and West End musical performers were mentioned by participants. For instance, when discussing belting techniques, participants referred to the vocal aesthetics produced by Sutton Foster and Lea Salonga. At the same time, they mentioned healthy tips suggested by Aaron Tveit and Ramin Karimloo for sustaining vocal health and increasing versatility in vocal styles. Sometimes when they did not mention a specific performer’s name, they raised an example based on the overall score of musicals, which included *Mean Girls*, *Hades Town*, *Beetlejuice*, and *Dear Evan Hansen*.

The fact that these questions did not specify a performer or geographical area, yet participants almost always quoted musical theatre performers who made a name on Broadway and the West End underlines how participants used such performers and geographical areas as the ideal aesthetic that shapes their understanding and appreciation of the art form of musical theatre. Furthermore, several participants who had not been to drama schools inquired about tips on how to get into top drama schools in the United Kingdom and the United States and the training environments there. Their curiosity about the training in the West and their desire to attend such schools indicate their association with such institutions as an aspiration to develop their professional skills in musical theatre. This case suggests that not only does Anglo-American musical theatre function as a standard in terms of the viability of musical theatre but the technical training and performance aesthetics circulated in Anglo-American musical theatre also serve as the globalised form of technical training that is deemed aspirational for this group of practitioners.

The musical sharing session further demonstrates that the participants used Anglo-American musical theatre as their entry point into the musical theatre field and viewed such products as an influence in creating glocalised musical work in Thailand. The majority of musical materials shared in the session were from recent musicals including the songs “Another Day of Sun” from *La La Land*, “Dead Mom” from *Beetlejuice*, and “I’m Cool” from *Uncool: The Party*. These examples demonstrate how, at least in this community, Anglo-American musicals have dominated the musical theatre market, forming the transaesthetics across the community. Such transaesthetics shape the way participants perceive musical theatre, for they tended to use musical products from the two geographical areas as a fundamental source for understanding, appreciating, and creating musical theatre. In parallel with the desire to increase the viability of Thai musical theatre by increasing variety, the influence of such

transaesthetics amongst this group of participants suggests that they aspired to create a Thai musical theatre community that engaged in a transnational link with the Anglo-American musical community. This is because their glocalised work resonated with Anglo-American musicals whether in terms of musical style, performative techniques or staging. As they sought to contribute to small-scale Thai musicals, it can be said that, based on Anglo-American musical theatre, they aspired to resonate with off-Broadway and off-West End musicals. It is important to note here that as of 2021 this link tends to be one way: the community of Thai musical theatre adopts influences from its Anglo-American equivalent and not vice versa, underlining the power of cultural imperialism in the musical theatre world.

### **Globalised Musical Theatre Training in the Training Lab**

The training lab clearly demonstrates how the dominant aesthetics shaped by Anglo-American musical theatre contributed to the globalised form of musical theatre training in this community. It was composed of singing and acting-through-song workshops. The first session focused on the musical songs that the participants brought in. The second session focused on the musical repertoires that the vocal coach assigned to each participant based on their vocal types. Let us begin by looking at the musical repertoires selected by the participants and those assigned by the vocal coach.

The majority of songs brought in by the participants were from modern Anglo-American musicals including “No Good Deed” from *Wicked*, “Waving Through the Window” from *Dear Evan Hansen*, “Someone Gets Hurt” from *Mean Girls* and “Someday” from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. It is noticeable that apart from being in the English language, these songs mostly engage modern musical theatre singing techniques which overlap with pop singing techniques such as the use of a lighter mix in sentimental parts. They also require strong and sustaining belting techniques for their money notes. Interestingly, none of the songs brought in by the participants was from the pre-1960s musicals or modern musicals which featured legit style vocal technique for females and strong baritone and vibrato for males (e.g., *Carousel* and *West Side Story* for the former and *When Death Takes a Holiday* and *The Light in the Piazza* for the latter).

This suggests the popular vocal aesthetic amongst this group of young musical theatre practitioners leans towards the pop-rock musical theatre style. Two reasons for this may be due to the faster circulation of modern musical materials, which makes them easier to access online, and the belting technique, which is easier to grasp, though not necessarily easier to master, compared to the legit vocal technique that often requires some basic training in Western classical singing. Their choices of such musical theatre songs also indicate that most of them are up-to-date with the popular Anglo-American musicals, thus highlighting their use of such musicals as their primary source of consumption.

The use of Anglo-American musicals as the primary source was also evident in the vocal coach's selection of musical repertoires. The song repertoires that the vocal coach selected for participants were all from Anglo-American musicals and, at least based on my training and auditions in Singapore and the UK, are often featured as part of audition song repertoires in Western-curriculum drama schools as well. Examples of these songs included "Run Away with Me" from *The Unauthorised Biography of Samantha Brown*, "Fly, Fly Away" from *Sister Act*, "Now I Can See" from *Wonderland*, and "A New Life" from *Jekyll And Hyde*.

Similar to the songs selected by most participants, these repertoires are mostly from modern musicals and rely on strong belting and forward resonance rather than the legit vocal techniques deployed in the pre-1960s musicals. On the one hand, in relation to the analysis above, this may be because the belting technique is easier to access and requires less background training than a legit style, thus making it suitable for participants with various technical backgrounds. On the other hand, the fact that such repertoires are similar to those currently used in the West indicates a link between technical training in Thailand and Western-curricular musical theatre institutions. Such a link indicates the globalised form of technical training, which, in this project, was also evident in the performative techniques and the aesthetic standard used by the coaches.

The vocal coach's professional training in Western classical music and musical theatre and the acting coach's working experience under Western-based drama instructors greatly informed the performative techniques and the training standard used in coaching the participants. Examples of vocal exercises included singing the word "ice cream" up and down the scale to warm up the vocal range and promote the forward placement and flexibility

in larynx positions, sticking the tongue out while singing to achieve a higher larynx position which eased belting, squeezing the nose while singing to avoid the nasality, and working on the airflow to sustain vibrato at the end of each phrase. The acting exercises used in this lab mainly were from Stanislavski's system, focusing on the 'Given Circumstances' (i.e., what are the given conditions in the scene?), 'Objective' (i.e., what do I want?), the 'Magic If' (i.e., what would you do if you were in this situation?), and 'Actioning' (i.e., What do you do to the other person?). Apart from these, the acting coach had the participants work on the subtext of their song lyrics, especially before performing each phrase.

Such vocal techniques and acting exercises were often employed in classes and rehearsals for musical productions in the Western drama schools where I trained as well. According to the vocal coach, the vocal exercises and techniques used in this lab were also a part of those they taught in the musical theatre programme at Mahidol University. The similarities amongst these institutions, which are located in different geographical areas, highlight the globalised form of musical theatre training and the transaesthetics used as the aspirational standard for professional musical theatre performers, at least in this community and the mentioned institutions. Given the two coaches' roles as educators in several institutions, it can be said that their Western-based training also contributed to the promotion of such transaesthetics in the theatre training in Bangkok.

### **Language Skill as Cultural Capital**

For both brainstorming and training labs, most participants displayed their familiarity and engagement with Anglo-American musical theatre. This is likely due to the influence of such musicals, which, at least based on this community, dominate the musical theatre market in Thailand. Their familiarity with such musicals highlights the role of language skills, often English in this case, which are inherently linked to education level and social status. These factors serve as an individual's capital, determining their ability to access global musical theatre and participate in certain musical theatre communities in Thailand.

Since the main language central to consuming musicals in Thailand is English, most musical theatre enthusiasts in Thailand are likely to have a good command of the English language, which indicates that they come from the educated class. This is because most of these musicals, particularly the recent works, are not usually circulated on free Thai television

channels, but are accessible via online platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and other streaming platforms. However, the musical materials on these platforms rarely have Thai subtitles (except for major musical movies that are shown in cinemas such as *La La Land*, *Les Misérables* and *Beauty and the Beast*). This means that most musical theatre enthusiasts consume such musicals in their original language without Thai subtitles, requiring a reasonably high level of English language knowledge.

This was the case for the participants and the production team in *Musical Lab* as well. They often displayed their high command of English through their analyses of the English-language lyrics in the musical sharing session and the acting-through-song workshops. Some participants also consumed such musicals in person during their stays or trips to England and the United States. Although all participants come from the educated class as they are all either in university or have at least an undergraduate degree and know English, their fluency in English affects how well they can navigate within the musical theatre community.

In the brainstorming and training labs, it was apparent that those who had better English had a more comprehensive knowledge of musical theatre and could participate in a more detailed discussion of musical works, particularly those with complex and subtle lyrics such as those by Stephen Sondheim and Jason Robert Brown. Those who had a lower command of English, which comprised a handful of participants, struggled to understand the technical terms and musical references used by the coaches and other participants.

The most obvious case was when one of them received a new song from *Chess The Musical* and had to spell the lyric out phonetically in Thai to pronounce it. Due to the pronunciation struggles, they had difficulty decoding the song's lyrical meaning and, therefore, acting it out. In fact, at the end of the show, another participant in this group remarked that they were impressed by how all participants were so good at English. This suggests that, at least for this community, fluency in English served as an important entry ticket into the community of musical theatre practitioners and allowed individuals to access professional training. It also functioned as capital that paved the way for one to engage in a transnational dialogue with Anglo-American musical theatre regarding performative elements, aesthetics, and creativity. Deeper engagement with such a transnational dialogue also enabled one to position one's self higher in the community due to their more extensive knowledge of musical theatre. In this sense, English language skills functioned as aspirational

capital for members of the community who aspired to engage with Anglo-American musical theatre, which, as demonstrated, shapes the global aesthetic of musical theatre. In the case of the training labs, those who had a low command of English were still able to join the community but had a more challenging time navigating within it, as they struggled to participate in detailed discussions of musical works and the training shaped by global aesthetics.

### ***Bangkokian*: Creation and Presentation**

The creative process of the musical *Bangkokian* and its audience reception shed light on the desire of the ideological community for diverse musical works based on global aesthetics. Using the examples of the musical's narrative and the song titled "Nee Leah Kheu Krungthep (This Is Bangkok)", I will demonstrate how the musical attempted to offer different narrative and music styles to other Thai commercial musicals. Thus, the musical work represented the community's ideology in increasing the viability of musical theatre in Thailand. Finally, I will use the song "Mai Pen Rai (It's Okay)", which was created and performed by my team, to demonstrate further the performative techniques derived from globalised forms of training and how the audience perceived the performance. The aim is to investigate the aesthetics underpinning the audience's appreciation of the art form.

*Bangkokian The Musical*, or *Krungthep* in Thai, is a self-devised musical, comprised of ten musical numbers. Each musical number was composed and performed by a different team of participants in the *Musical Lab* project. Set in the present time, the musical relates ten different stories of people who live in Bangkok, exploring various aspects of the capital city ranging from its status as a land of promise to an overcrowded city of despair. The table below summarises the narratives of different aspects of the lives portrayed in each musical number.

Table 1: Full list of musical numbers in *Bangkokian* (2021)

No.	Song title in Thai / Song title in English (my translation)	Description of the song and scene
1	Meuang Thep Sang / The City Created By Gods	Bangkokians are cramped up on the skytrain, starting

		yet another day. They remark the eventful nature of Bangkok and its ancient legend as a city created by gods.
2	Pen Pai Dai Mai / Is It Possible?	Nok, a girl from Southern Thailand, comes to Bangkok to pursue her dream of being a model. She expresses how Bangkok is not as hopeful as she has imagined. Rather, this city is full of hardships, which makes her wonder why gods would create such a city.
3	Cheewit Dee Dee Thee Lhong Tua / Good And Perfect Lives	An office worker, a CEO, and a maid choose to see happiness in their lives regardless of their different struggles and financial status.
4	Nee Kheu Khwam Jing / This Is The Truth	A bride and groom who are getting married wonder if they have made the right decision due to issues with their families and financial level.
5	Yak Ja Roo / Wanna Know	A young student joins a political protest in Bangkok meets her soldier boyfriend, who warns her to get out due to the aggravating chaos.

6	Khvam Khad Yaeng Rhawang Bartender and So-phay-ni / The Conflicts Between A Bartender And A Prostitute	A Japanese businessman visits a bar in Bangkok. A bartender and a prostitute fight for him, seeking to get a client for the night.
7	Pen Yang Khao / I Want To Be Like Him	A wealthy young man is envious of a poor noodle stall owner who seems happy with small things in life.
8	Mai Pen Rai / It's Okay	A single girl faces numerous mishaps on her way home in the rain.
9	Phab Luang Ta / Illusions	A drag queen who is fed up with pressures in life decides whether she should end her life.
10	Nee Laeh Kheu Krungthep / This Is Bangkok	Bangkokians conclude that Bangkok is an eventful city, full of good and bad things, and all of us create it.

As seen from the table, each musical number features unrelated characters' stories, but it is all intertwined in the context of modern lives in Bangkok. The dialogues and monologues are kept at a minimum as each number is a self-contained story and actively progresses the scene. The overall narrative touches on political and social issues which contribute to the establishment of the city's widely stratified social milieu and its rapid yet uneven modernisation, told through the perspectives of young to middle-aged Bangkokians. The epilogue song "Nee Leah Kheu Krungthep (This Is Bangkok)," the lyrics of which build on the prologue "Meuang Thep Sang (The City Created By Gods)," is a good example that indicates the musical's attempts to steer away from nationally-driven musicals (i.e., those that



strongly promote traditional Thai heritage and national values like *Four Reigns The Musical*). The verse below can illustrate my point here.

Nok: This is Bangkok.

It's a colourful city even though it might not be pretty.

It's full of such diverse people.

They said it's a city created by gods, that the gods came down to build this city.

This is Bangkok.

It is Bangkok.

All: It's a colourful city even though it might not be pretty.

It's full of such diverse people.

This is not a city created by gods.

It is created by all of us.

That's why it's full of people's stories.

The Thai name of Bangkok is *khrungthep*. *Khrung* means a city and *thep* means god(s). The song demonstrates the love-hate relationship locals have with Bangkok, asking an ironic question of whether gods actually built this city, as it is full of struggles and misfortune. They conclude that Bangkok was not built by gods as the legend said, but it was built by all of us, which explains the state that it is in. While some characters display their frustration towards the city, others remain hopeful despite their mishaps. This song not only serves as a conclusion to the musical, but also reflects how the young generation feels about their city, their secular worldview in opposition to believing in divine power, and their attempts to present different aspects of Bangkok, and ends by posing an open-ended question for the audience regarding how they feel about their city. This is in contrast with other Thai commercial musicals, such as *Four Reigns*, which either strongly promote nationalistic values or do not critically engage in politics.

As explored in Chapter Six, many musical numbers in *Four Reigns The Musical* often provide a more explicit conclusion to the songs, showing the rights and wrongs of a character's intentions. For instance, the song "Seang Thee Ther Sadtha (Your Light of Faith)" clearly shows that An's actions and idealist goal of transforming Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy are deemed to be wrong. In soliloquy numbers that do not have a clear answer like "Sai Than Cheewit (The River Flow of Life)", the characters

often conclude that lives are ever-changing and leave situations to fate. In comparison, the characters in *Bangkokian* often ask questions about how to survive in this city in the best way possible and how to find the answer rather than leaving it to a higher power. Again, in parallel with the lyrics of “Nee Leah Kheu Krungthep (This Is Bangkok)”, this demonstrates the creative team’s more secular worldview. Although the characters attempt to find the answer and most of them arrive at a solution in the end, the overall meaning of the musical did not seek to explicitly tell the audience how they should feel or perceive the city. These questions are based on different contexts for each character and feature different tones. For example, the character Nok ponders the questions in a jaded way, as evidenced in the phrase “I want to ask through the sky if it has ever cared about my dream?” This is in contrast with the character Nice, who asks the questions in a hopeful way and manages to look at all unpleasant things in Bangkok positively (demonstrated below).

### **Musical Genres in the Show Presentation**

The variety of lifestyles and social milieu that are exhibited through a diverse range of musical numbers underlies the attempts of the creative team to experiment with wider genres of music styles and plots. This ranges from a couple’s hesitation before marriage musicalised in the style of rap and hip-hop, two teenagers falling in love at a political protest musicalised in the style of upbeat pop music with a dance interlude, a young rich guy feeling envious of a poor but happy noodle stall owner musicalised in the style of pop-rock torch song to the unexpected meeting of a Thai prostitute, a bartender, and a Japanese businessman musicalised in complex big band jazz. Some of these songs clearly share a creative dialogue with musicals on the global stage. For example, the song “Nee Kheu Kwam Jing (This Is The Truth)” resembles the song “Satisfied” from *Hamilton*, the song “Pen Pai Dai Mai (Is it possible?)” resembles “Breathe” from *In the Heights* and the choreography and the instrument part in the dance interlude of the song “Yak Ja Roo (Wanna Know)” resembles the dance sequence in “A Lovely Night” from *La La Land*.

This is not to say that the creative teams copied those songs. Rather, based on the materials circulated within both labs, it is likely that they were aesthetically transformed by the consumption of recent Anglo-American musical products, which shaped the way they explored their artistic visions. As discussed in the case of Regev’s findings, such transformations are necessary for the artists to create work based on the global standard of

musical theatre. Therefore, the different musical genres used in *Bangkokian* reflect how the participants were shaped by the transaesthetics set by Anglo-American musicals, leading to their aspiration in creating glocalised work in various genres that resonated with Anglo-American musical theatre. Linking back to the participants' desire to break away from Thai commercial musical theatre and to make Thai musical theatre more viable, the variety of music styles featured in *Bangkokian* indicates their attempt to strengthen alternative musical theatre.

The creation process and the vocal techniques used in the song “Mai Pen Rai (It’s Okay)” can further demonstrate the inspirational sources acquired by the creative team which are based on local and Anglo-American aesthetics, leading to the process of glocalisation. Before the song took shape, my team was assigned the task of creating a comedic song to counterbalance the slow torch songs in the scenes before and after. After the writer and the composer decided that the song would relate to the character’s disastrous journey home, we gathered ideas based on our commuting experiences and mishaps in Bangkok, particularly from the perspective of a lady commuting alone. Inspired by the song “What More Do I Need?” from Stephen Sondheim’s *Saturday Night*, in which the character expresses her fondness for the gritty and noisy New York, I shared the song with the team, resulting in the decision to create a light and upbeat pattered song. I was not responsible for the composition, but I found that the song shared some similar characteristics with “What More Do I Need?”. The song was composed in a common time signature using the piano as the main instrument, creating some flexibility for me to play with the rhythmic patterns of the pattered phrases (see the full score in Appendix VI). However, the lines composed in triplets (e.g., bar 21, 23-27) had to be executed according to the score to achieve the staccato style thus conveying a sense of playfulness and jitteriness. The melody mostly dwells in the middle C to the D above it, replicating the speaking range of a young female. The melodic pattern appears quite repetitive in the score, but the composer allowed me to improvise and ‘shout out’ some phrases based on my acting interpretation.

The following parts are good examples of how the song used Thai sentiments and achieved positive responses from the audience. The part when Nice took a taxi (bar 50 – 84) is a parody of the qualities of hospitality, sincerity and politeness—well-known characteristics attributed to Thais in tourism campaigns. As the taxi got stuck in the traffic—another well-known issue relating to Bangkok—the driver drove through shortcuts, which were unfamiliar

to Nice. Though feeling anxious, Nice tried to soothe her worries by saying that “It’s okay because Thai people are famous for being sincere”. After that, the friendly taxi driver started chatting to her, and Nice felt obliged to pretend to nod along out of politeness. This part usually received more laughter from the participants in the rehearsal and the live audience on the show day. Although partly due to the character’s comical mannerisms and expressions, I think the joke worked well because it inverted the positive qualities of Thai people into an awkward situation, thus satirising the well-regarded manners of the Thais.

Another part that relied on experiences familiar to locals occurs when Nice finally reached her neighbourhood and had to walk through an alley to get home (bar 97 – 114). She remarked how the alley was narrow and secluded, which was scary for a single woman like herself. Throughout her walk in the drizzling rain, she stepped on dog poo and tripped on the uneven pavement. These are quite common things on the public footpath in Bangkok unless one lives in a more developed and modern area. On the contrary to the above example, where positive qualities were presented as being awkward, these unsightly events were presented positively due to Nice’s optimism. She said that the rain would wash away the dog poo, so she would not have to clean it, and the uneven floor served as a reminder to always have *sati*. The term *sati* comes from the Pali language, which essentially refers to mindfulness and consciousness (Seangsinchai 2019). This term is at the core of Buddhism studies and is a common term in colloquial expressions in Thailand whether one is discussing Buddhism-related topics or not, thus indicating how Buddhism has deeply influenced the Thai ways of life. By putting this term next to the description of unpleasant things like dog poo and an uneven pathway that caused her harm, and given that Nice had not been mindful throughout her journey, the lyrics suggest how Buddhism serves only as the last source of reliance for bad things that happen in life. In combination with her satirical gesture of meditation, this suggests a distance between the character’s faith and Buddhist teachings.

Given that her character represents a Bangkok woman in the modern days, her use of a Buddhist concept reveals the more secular worldview of young Bangkokians or, at least, the fact that they often do not take religion so seriously. This point, therefore, demonstrates the musical’s alternative narrative in comparison to nationally-driven musicals. To achieve clear portrayals of each event and all the comedic elements, we incorporated miming, improvising additional spoken lines, and playing each unit to imaginary co-actors. This was because we

wanted to make each event as clear as possible using minimal props (only a handbag and an umbrella) and other actors, thereby presenting this song in the style of a one-woman show.

The vocal techniques I used to execute the song were those I acquired from my Western-based training derived from English language musical repertoires. The only vocal effects I adjusted were my emphases on the nasality and the trill /r/ inherent to the characteristics of the Thai language (see Chapter Seven) to deliver a clear Thai text. Most of the melody sat in my modal and mix registers, so I constantly alternated between those registers while bridging the gap between each register jump. On the elongated notes, which were usually on the notes C and D above the middle C, I usually executed them using the belting technique and a musical theatre-style vibrato (e.g., bar 5 – 10, 105 – 112, 127 – 132). The belting conveyed the character’s feeling of joy and confidence while achieving the vocal aesthetic stapled to the musical theatre singing style. This aesthetic was enhanced by elongating the open consonant in a straight tone before gradually adding a more consistent vibrato to reach the ending consonant. For instance, in the phrase “yang noi, /ʎaŋ nɔi/” (bar 5), I separated the mixed vowel of /ɔi/ into two vowels, /ɔ/ and /i/. In order to execute the belt, I sustained the first vowel, which was more open than the latter, and incorporated a vibrato to increase the airflow before finishing with the /i/ vowel to complete the word. I also used the belting technique to increase the dramatic effects of certain phrases such as the word “nam tho, /nam tɔ:/” (bar 105) which refers to water dripping from the gutter.<sup>74</sup> I belted out and elongated the word “nam (water)” to dramatise the scene, creating suspension regarding what kind of water dropped on the character’s head. Apart from belting, I often added vibrato at the end of each phrase and engaged my mix (which was mostly accompanied by vibrato) to execute some higher notes in the pattered phrases.

Due to my training and familiarity with Anglo-American musical repertoires, I noticed I made too much plosive sound in the consonants /p/, /t/ and /b/, which are not as plosive in the Thai language. Out of habit, I also accented some ending consonants, making them sound like voiced consonants, as in the case of finishing consonants /m/ or /n/ in the English language. These plosive sounds and the voicing of the ending consonants are inherent features in singing Anglo-American musical theatre as they help a performer to achieve a

---

<sup>74</sup> In the score attached, the lyric is written as *nam fon*, raindrop, but the team changed it to *nam tho*, gutter water, in the final revision of the song, which was not included in the score, but performed as such.

clearer pronunciation and convey certain emotions. However, such features are foreign in the Thai language, which does not contain strong plosive sounds and ending consonants. In fact, in my early musical theatre training at a Western-based conservatoire, the lack of such features was one of the main critiques of my performance that hindered me from achieving clear pronunciation on stage. Such foreign features were magnified by certain notes that did not fully match the correct tone in Thai words, particularly those with the *jattawa* tone or the rising tone (discussed in Chapter Seven). For example, words like /sīa/ (broken) (bar 14) and /mɔː/ (doctor) (bar 26) were sung in the *tri* tone or the high tone. Composing the melody that matches the correct tones is important to convey the correct meaning in the Thai language and the meaning of the text is integral to musical theatre songs. Therefore, theoretically, adding these features would make the song sound foreign and incorrect to the local audience. In the following paragraphs, I will investigate how the audience perceived these foreign features, seeking to find out the aesthetics involved in their appreciation of the art form.

The audience who attended the show were mostly friends and teachers of the participants and the production team. Similar to the participants, most are musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts. Some of them are vocal instructors teaching in higher education institutions in Thailand and others are studying theatre-related degrees or have theatre-related experiences either in amateur or professional settings. As demonstrated at the beginning and here, the audience of small-scale theatre tends to be theatre practitioners and a small subset of theatre-goers. This means that this group of people belong to the same imagined community of musical theatre or small-scale theatre enthusiasts, a niche group on the whole. I did not know any of the audience members who approached me, which made their feedback on my performance hold more weight as it reduced the chance of them complimenting me for the sake of being polite to a friend. Their feedback revealed the standard they used in perceiving the art form of musical theatre.

Despite the foreign features demonstrated in my execution of the song above, much of the feedback referred to my clear pronunciation of the Thai text since they could hear every word despite the fast tempo and pattered phrases and the relatability of the songs. One member of the audience, who works as a lecturer in mass media and is an art critic, mentioned the song “Mai Pen Rai” as the highlight of the show. He stated in his review that it was the most well-received and well-executed number in the show and the performer “delivered every part perfectly” (Wongwisit 2020). The majority of the comments, though, were about the vocal

performance. Most of the audience members remarked how I sounded like “Broadway” and “*lakhon meung nok* (abroad musicals)”, which most probably referred to the general vocal aesthetics used in Anglo-American musicals. One of them, a voice student in Bangkok, complimented the variety of my vocal placement throughout the song and asked me to share tips on how to achieve those resonances in singing. When I told her about my training in the West, she said that she was not surprised how I could achieve such vocal techniques. She was not the only one, as another participant, majoring in performance, remarked that my singing confirmed her idea of the high standard of the musical theatre performers in the West.

The above feedback demonstrated two points. First, their feedback on the clear Thai pronunciation despite some incorrect tones and pronunciation and the relatability of the lyrics suggests that they placed more importance on the music and vocal aesthetics and the relatable story and did not perceive the incorrect intonation as a hindrance. This suggests that the audience for alternative musical theatre, which is mostly comprised of non-famous musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts, is more receptive to artistic creations that do not follow the conventional rules. Secondly, their feedback on my vocal techniques, which mostly relied on Western musical theatre techniques, and their comparison with musical theatre in the West, reveals that their perceptions are shaped by transaesthetics and the globalised form of technical training driven by Anglo-American musical theatre. They also used such transaesthetics as ways to appreciate and perceive the art form.

## **Conclusion**

Although the self-devised musical was set as the goal all participants worked towards, the core objective of *Musical Lab* was to create an ongoing community of musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts in Thai small-scale theatre. This community appeared to operate under an open-for-all policy, democratising musical theatre training to performers and making musical theatre more accessible to audiences. Their reasons for steering away from large-scale musical theatre were driven by their desire to create more variety in Thai musical theatre in terms of performance aesthetics, narratives, and storytelling methods. Based on an ensemble model, the community sustained itself through its members, who collaborated with and supported one another by attending one another’s shows, and taking classes and discussing ideas together. In this way, this community provided connections for musical theatre practitioners in Thailand and ensured audience support from other members of this

community. The community offered an alternative type of musical and promoted inclusivity amongst musical theatre practitioners. However, by positioning itself differently from commercial musical theatre companies, it formed an exclusory platform primarily for non-famous musical theatre practitioners and enthusiasts from the educated class. This is evidenced in the way they conducted auditions and the participants they selected.

The community was also exclusory in the sense that all participants actively engaged with Anglo-American musical theatre and used it as an aspirational standard for their creative work and performance techniques. Their active engagement was evidenced in most members' extensive knowledge of current Anglo-American musicals and musical theatre performers and creators in those areas. The questions and concerns session demonstrated that many participants wanted to make Thai musical theatre more like that in the Anglo-American regions, indicating how they used the latter as a global yardstick for musical theatre and as an aspiration for Thai musical theatre. Although this was an ensemble-based community, not all members had equal status, particularly when it came to technical training. Fluency in English served as capital that allowed members to access more advanced technical training (both in Thailand and abroad) or, at least, more up-to-date musical theatre knowledge. This point underlines the exclusory side of this community.

By using transaesthetics shaped by Anglo-American musicals as the aspirational standard, the community members expressed a strong desire for globalised musicals and more diverse musical genres in terms of music styles, plots, and performance techniques. The aim was to create more variety in Thai musical theatre, which, for these members, would be a way to elevate Thai musical theatre to the same thriving standard as Anglo-American musicals. Their stance of aesthetic cosmopolitanism and desire to break away from the commercial musical theatre were manifested in diverse music styles, globalised musical theatre performative techniques and a non-nationally-driven plot which circulated within the *Musical Lab* project and featured in *Bangkokian*. The musical produced together with the technical training in the project therefore situated them closer to the global aesthetic shaped by Anglo-American musicals rather than the national aesthetics and institutional ideologies manifested in *Four Reigns*. In this sense, *Musical Lab* and *Bangkokian* expressed artistic visions arising from members' reflexive transformation of Anglo-American musical consumption and contributed to the cosmopolitan imaginaries of the members and the audience.



As demonstrated in the previous case study, Virawan and his creative team are also aesthetically transformed by consuming such musical products and globalised such aesthetics through hybridised performative techniques. The difference between Virawan's musicals and the kind of work that *Musical Lab* members created, including *Bangkokian*, lay in their working model and target market. The former, which aspires to be associated with Broadway/West End musical theatre, adopts the transaesthetics and hybridises them to suit a wide range of local audiences by incorporating Thai cultural memory, traditional local aesthetics, national ideologies and high-budget productions. Such musicals also use extravagant special effects and sets, presenting themselves as large-scale entertainment products. This high investment leads to high economic pressure and thus the company's use of star power, well-known stories and certain musical aesthetics that can resonate with a mass audience. Furthermore, due to the size of the company, the status of creative individuals and high economic investment, such musicals often function on a director model rather than giving freedom for everyone to explore their ideas. However, the latter, which aspires to be associated with off-Broadway/off-West End musical theatre, participates in a deeper creative link with Anglo-American musical theatre with the aim of experimenting with artistic visions and skills, leading to a non-conventional work. Compared to large-scale musicals such as *Four Reigns*, which uses such a creative link to enhance its traditional Thai appearance and elevate its status as a national product, small-scale musicals do not disguise their influences from Anglo-American musicals behind the national pride. Instead, they experiment with how the aesthetics derived from such influences can be incorporated into a Thai context. Such musicals prioritise originality and creativity in performative skills and storytelling rather than their appearance as mass entertainment products. Their way of working is also ensemble-based, giving artists more opportunity to express their visions and experiment with their skills. Since they often operate on a low budget (whether through choice or lack of funding), they use few props and special effects, often being staged in a black box style theatre. The low investment allows them more space to break away from Thai aesthetics and national values and market their work to a younger audience looking for alternative musicals not strongly driven by national values. It is also important to note that, despite their aspiration to mirror Anglo-American musical theatre which manifested in their music styles, globalised performative technique and how members navigated within the community, the narrative construct still remains close to the local level. The emphasis on the local significance reflects that when it comes to narrative structure, Thai musicals often prioritise local stories and characters to make them relatable to local audiences unlike their strategies in welcoming

global aesthetics. Such priority on local significance, therefore, indicates the tension between global and local aesthetics deeply integrated in Thai musical theatre and its practitioners. Furthermore, it underscores how global aesthetics lead to glocalisation and hybridisation rather than homogenisation within Thai musical theatre.

## Conclusion

The aesthetic shifts in performative techniques, practitioners' artistic visions, and the tastes of local audiences in each style of *lakhon phleng* can be clearly grasped through the concept of aesthetic and aspirational cosmopolitanism. Such a concept facilitates a better understanding of how the art form has transformed in response to increasing global flows while striving to situate Thai ethno-cultural uniqueness in the globalised context of musical theatre. Such transformations lead to the ever-shifting hybridisation of performative elements and ever-growing connection with the global field of musical theatre dominated by Anglo-American regions.

The hybridisation of Thai and Western performance aesthetics in Mejudhon's musicals was most integrated. As examined in Chapter Three, the performative elements of both aesthetics constantly negotiated, complimented, and contrasted without dominating each other. The use of Thai classical texts and performative modes from traditional Thai performing arts were composed to fit the demand for *lakhon phleng* to present re-imagined Thai classical stories, bridging them with younger Thai audiences swept by the tide of globalisation. Mejudhon's presentation of Thainess as constructed upon the integration of different performative elements suggests her intention to challenge the boundaries of traditional Thai heritage as fixed and untouchable in some distant past. In this way, her musicals aptly illustrate Cohen and Nozsloty's notion of post-traditional theatre in Southeast Asia in which local practitioners seek to interweave cultural points from various traditions in order to present their own traditional performances in a new light rather than conceal them. The amalgamation of performative elements from Thai, Anglo-American, and other Asian performance traditions, aimed to achieve aesthetics that dwell in the middle ground between such elements. Such a balance was achieved through Mejudhon's understanding of the aesthetics used and her collaboration with practitioners of the particular tradition. Mejudhon's expertise in traditional Thai performing arts and her position as a mimic of Western musical theatre enabled her to harness aesthetics from the latter to create performances that resisted cultural homogenisation through their subversion of dominant power. In doing so, Mejudhon and her team glocalised Anglo-American musical theatre and its techniques by putting them in juncture with Thai and other Asian performances, yielding distinctive aesthetics in which all cultural entities were presented as equal. Not only did her musicals show local and international audiences how traditional Thainess could be read anew

and remain relevant to the contemporary context, but they also pointed out how local practitioners could find their own voice through the use of foreign, largely Anglo-American, performance traditions, and, therefore, take ownership of their craft without relying on Western dramatic scripts. Mejudhon's works also resonate with the intersectionality of different cultural entities inherent to the characteristics of contemporary performance in Southeast Asia as observed by Tan and Rajendram. As such, her works showed how the art form of Western musical theatre was practised and developed by local practitioners in order to produce local particularities and, thus, challenged the dominance of imported musicals and artists in urban Thailand at the time.

In the case of Takonkiet Virawan, as examined in Chapters Four to Seven, the Western performance aesthetics featured in the hybridisation process are those of Anglo-American megamusicals, which strongly drive his branding strategies and artistic choices in each musical production. This is evidenced in the prioritising of large-scale productions, high-quality performance venues, pop-style musical scores, impressive showstoppers, spectacle sets and special effects. These elements are balanced by well-known Thai stories and star power to target mass audiences. His strategies to maximise Thai decorum and national ideologies in the narrative of his musicals suggest his focus on Thai audiences and his desire to use the musical theatre art form to construct a modern Thai identity through the shows. However, due to his aspiration to place Thai musical theatre on a par with Anglo-American regions, Virawan also relied on aesthetics shaped by Anglo-American megamusicals to deliver his shows. The strategies of presenting his musicals as products shaped by Anglo-American musical aesthetics also help attract aspirational audiences who want to consume Thai aesthetics via a global product. Such strategies problematise the construction of modern Thai identity by putting it in constant negotiation between being familiar with international cultural products, largely those associated with Western cultural capital, and preserving traditional forms of Thai culture and traditions. This underlines how the modern, urban Thai identity is rooted in the past but significantly shaped by globalised cultural capital, resulting in a constant tension between local and international preferences. Presenting his products as both a cultural item of national pride and a global product simultaneously helps gear them towards their commercial success amongst Thai audiences. This suggests that an entertainment form seeking to achieve success and popularity amongst contemporary mass Thai audiences should engage Thai stories and Thai aesthetics to show their ethno-cultural uniqueness. At the same time, it needs to be explicitly imbued with globalised performative

techniques and technological advancement which help to identify the performance as a world-class product in order to satisfy the local and global aspects integral to the identity of modern Thai audiences.

Although Virawan's large-scale musicals seek to utilise global aesthetics shaped by Anglo-American megamusicals and highlight Thai aesthetics in order to achieve popularity amongst mass audiences, this is not always the case in the small-scale contemporary *lakhon phleng*. Chapter Eight reveals how global aesthetics shaped by Anglo-American musical theatre have permeated the community of small-scale theatre practitioners and enthusiasts even more strongly. Such global aesthetics are not limited only to megamusicals such as Virawan's but extend to all Anglo-American musical theatre, especially contemporary Broadway and West End musical productions. For the community members, such global aesthetics serve as the standard of musical theatre, whether in terms of technical training, artistic visions, appreciation of the art form, or the assessment of Thai theatre. As such, they sought to go beyond Virawan's style of mass musical theatre and create more diverse glocalised musical works that touched on social issues in Thailand. In doing so, they aspired to make Thai musical theatre thrive as it does in Anglo-American regions. The variety of aesthetics, performance and narrative styles featured in their self-devised musical *Bangkokian* indicated their glocalisation of popular Anglo-American musicals of the time. This underlines the fact that they sought to position themselves closer to Anglo-American musical theatre, and reveals how the latter still dominates global aesthetics in the musical theatre world. Nevertheless, such domination propelled this community of Thai musical theatre practitioners to integrate global aesthetics with local performative elements and narrative to deliver an original work that reflected their local specificities and aligned it with the global community of musical theatre.

The chronological development of *lakhon phleng* analysed here indicates how the art form, particularly its shifts in aesthetics and performative elements, has been transformed in reaction to increasing global flows in urban Thailand by gradually moving closer to aesthetics shaped by Anglo-American musicals and establishing creative dialogues with practitioners in the two geographical areas. These key practitioners have been exposed to foreign cultural products, primarily Anglo-American ones, via their education, experiences of working abroad, or mediated sources (e.g., streaming platforms, videos available on television and online). Their initiation of artistic works usually occurs from their reflexive transformation by

performances from the Western traditions, leading to their desire to create a similar type of art form that is palatable for the local audience. Due to the domination of the Anglo-American cultural industry, particularly in the field of musical theatre, the products from these geographical areas tend to provide transaesthetics deemed aspirational to local practitioners. Their works, in turn, expose local audiences to foreign aesthetics derived from such areas, thereby encouraging more globalised worldviews and perceptions of the musical theatre art form. In this way, such key practitioners produce cosmopolitan aesthetics within their national boundaries, contributing to the cosmopolitan sphere in urban Thailand, particularly Bangkok, and, thus, ensuring that Thai musical theatre resonates with the globalised aspects of musical theatre as a whole. Of course, as Anglo-American musical theatre shapes such transnational aesthetics, it reveals signs of cultural imperialism. This aspect will continue to exist in Thai musical theatre due to the art form originating in the West and the thriving influence of Anglo-American musical theatre. However, as seen in the case studies, the adoption of such aesthetics does not result in cultural homogenisation, but rather its deeper hybridisation with Thai aesthetics as, ultimately, these musicals are created for the local audience before anyone else. The fact that even Thai large-scale and commercial musicals prioritise the demands and tastes of local audiences underscores the glocalisation (rather than homogenisation) of Anglo-American megamusicals.

Alongside the aesthetics shifts in the art form, there is also a noticeable change in the production of culture within the Thai musical theatre scene. Initially, the art form heavily relied on royal patronage, which can be seen from King Chulalongkorn's initiation of the modernisation of drama and his endorsement of *lakhon rong* by Prince Narathip. After the art form became popular, it gradually spread out of the elite circles to middle-class Thai practitioners who were trained in Western and Thai music such as Phran Bun and practitioners of other troupes like *Pakawalee*.<sup>75</sup> From the 1960s onwards, university institutions, particularly Chulalongkorn and Thammasat University, have played an important role in producing educated-class practitioners who operate under the systems of Western dramatic arts. In the present (2021), there are increasingly more private academies and programmes, particularly at Mahidol University, that offer professional training in musical

---

<sup>75</sup> See Nattayakul, Sirimongkol. *Pakawalee: Tam Nan Lakhon Waetee Khong Thai*. Intanil, 2012.

theatre and, therefore, spread the opportunity of contact with the musical theatre art form to a wider range of individuals as seen in the case of *Musical Lab*. However, the ability to acquire opportunities to travel abroad and mediate within both Thai and Anglo-American cultural realms highlight practitioners' role as cultural brokering made possible by their higher political, educational, and economic levels, for they all come from at least an educated, middle class. Comparing the case studies of Mejudhon and Virawan to that of small-scale musical theatre practitioners in *Musical Lab*, it is clear that the former two who sit in a significantly higher social milieu are able to stage their productions in a bigger scale and achieve a wider public recognition with a higher economic return as well. Meanwhile, as demonstrated in Chapter Eight, many small-scale theatre practitioners cannot afford prioritising making profits as they strive to find as many cost-saving methods as possible. Unsurprisingly, this suggests that Thai musical theatre is still relatively limited amongst the middle class (both as a product of and by the middle class) and a practitioner's social and economic capital play a crucial role in power brokering within Thai musical theatre.

Initially, the hybridisation of Thai and Western performance aesthetics was simply the adoption of performance modes to make the traditional Thai performing arts more understandable in the modern world dominated by Western imperialist countries. Later, performance aesthetics from Anglo-American musical theatre shaped practitioners' technical training, inspirations and artistic visions, situating themselves deeper in the interplay between local and global aesthetics. It has also led to their establishment of a creative dialogue with practitioners beyond their local sphere, particularly those in Anglo-American musical theatre.

Recently, Virawan also deepened the creative dialogue with American musical theatre by collaborating with the famous American theatre director and lyricist Richard Maltby Jr and composer David Shire in staging *Waterfall The Musical* (2015) in America. This musical was adapted from his original production titled *Waterfall The Musical*, known in Thai as *Khang Lang Phab The Musical* (2008). Although *Waterfall The Musical* did not make it to Broadway as initially hoped, the musical is currently being revised as *Dancers at the Waterfall*, with Virawan resuming his role as a producer and director. Two staged readings of the musical, starring Broadway stars Sierra Boggess and Joshua Dela Cruz, took place on the sixteenth of May 2019 (Rosky 2019). Another recent case that demonstrates a deeper dialogue between Thai and American small-scale musical theatre involves the workshops run by the promising off-Broadway composer Tidtaya Sinutoke in Thailand. Having composed

for several off-Broadway musicals including *Half the Sky* (2020) and *Sunwatcher* (2020-2021) and won multiple awards such as the Fred Ebb Award and the Jonathan Larson Grant—highly recognised awards in American musical theatre, Sinutoke workshopped some of her original songs with Thai practitioners and composers. Some of these songs would be developed into her works staged in the United States (Puttikulankura 2021). These cases are considered crucial steps for contemporary Thai musical theatre to establish a more active dialogue with American musical theatre and suggest a possible direction that Thai musical theatre may move towards. As such, this thesis has mapped out a counter-aspect of musical theatre development in Thailand and shows how its role within the transnational flow of musical theatre has become increasingly more active. As argued from the beginning, the art form of *lakhon phleng* is a product of ongoing cultural hybridisation shaped by the interplay of local and global levels, and thus the materials examined in this thesis underline the ever-shifting aesthetics amongst Thai musical theatre practitioners and audiences. With the number of local musical productions and Thai musical theatre practitioners who are directly trained in musical theatre, like myself, increasing, and general interest in the art form growing, *lakhon phleng* remains an evolving subject that can benefit from further research. On a concluding note, in attempting to locate my position, I found that my trainings in and familiarity with Thai and Western musical theatre are intrinsic to my identity as a performer who can understand and navigate within both worlds. As contemporary Thai musical theatre increasingly welcomes the global aesthetics, I hope my cosmopolitan experience can contribute to the active development of Thai musical theatre, aiming to reach creative dialogues with the global musical theatre communities where Thai practitioners can stand on equal footing.



## **Appendices**

## Appendix I: Chakri Dynasty

<b>Reign I</b>	King Yodfa Chulaloke	(6 April 1782 – 7 September 1809)
<b>Reign II</b>	King Lerdlanapalai	(7 September 1809 – 21 July 1824)
<b>Reign III</b>	King Nangklao	(21 July 1824 – 2 April 1851)
<b>Reign IV</b>	King Mongkut	(2 April 1851 – 1 October 1868)
<b>Reign V</b>	King Chulalongkorn	(1 October 1868 – 23 October 1910)
<b>Reign VI</b>	King Vajiravudh	(23 October 1910 – 26 November 1925)
<b>Reign VII</b>	King Prajadhipok	(26 November 1925 – 2 March 1935)
<b>Reign VIII</b>	King Ananda Mahidol	(2 March 1935 – 9 June 1946)
<b>Reign IX</b>	King Bhumibol Adulyadej	(9 June 1946 – 13 October 2016)
<b>Reign X</b>	King Vajiralongkorn	(13 October 2016 – present)

**Appendix II: Reference clips for Mejudhon's works**

Clip 1:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1\\_2FbAKnkQ7r0XguiA1sjvVj4isAvIUQT/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_2FbAKnkQ7r0XguiA1sjvVj4isAvIUQT/view?usp=sharing)

Clip 2:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gSQJzCgub9tazQe28ee92sNqNbZr4jsf/view?usp=sharing>

Clip 3:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/19tHLE4rkSE4eRt1WqvBNBILdtLNs-uLO/view?usp=sharing>

Clip 4:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IUPW76G\\_bWx54DIRGRxDIIh0FMmNlaeC/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IUPW76G_bWx54DIRGRxDIIh0FMmNlaeC/view?usp=sharing)

### Appendix III: Synopsis of *Four Reigns*

Born into the family of a noble gentleman named Phraya Phiphit, Phloi is the daughter of his minor wife, Mae Cham.<sup>76</sup> Having been abused by Khun Un, Phraya Phiphit's eldest daughter with his major wife, Mae Cham decides to leave the house and send Phloi to live in the royal palace with the princess commonly referred to as Sadej. Here, Phloi gets to learn various skills of *chao wang* (i.e., palace ladies) under supervision of Khun Sai, the headmistress of the young protégées, and Sadej herself. Phloi also meets Choi, who is Khun Sai's niece, and the two of them become best friends for life. Due to Phloi's obedience and diligence, she soon becomes the princess's favourite and gets to serve her in various royal events.

Growing up to be an accomplished and beautiful lady, Phloi catches the eye of Khun Prem, a royal patronage from a wealthy Sino-Thai family. After courting Phloi subtly for some time, Khun Prem asks for her hand from her father and Sadej. Being obedient and conservative, Phloi accepts the marriage despite not knowing Khun Prem personally. Therefore, Phloi has to leave her peaceful life in the royal palace and starts a new phase of her life with Khun Prem. Soon after their marriage, Phloi finds out that Khun Prem has an out-of-wedlock son named On with a maid. Although she is traumatised by her mother's unhappy life as a minor wife, Phloi accepts and raises On as her son, as the boy's mother has left long ago. The death of King Rama V has brought great sorrow to all Thai people including Phloi whose life is centred around the monarchy, bringing an end to the first reign in her life.

In the second reign (the reign of King Rama VI), Thailand becomes even more influenced by the Western world. The reason for this is mostly due to the cosmopolitan taste of King Vajiravudh, whose preference derives from Victorian social norms. Khun Prem's career significantly advances along with his love for and loyalty to the current king. He enthusiastically adopts all Western fashions and values practised by the king such as participating in clubs, smoking cigars, horse riding, and going to see plays written and translated by the king. These practices have an impact on Phloi's perception of the world, bringing her closer to the external world both in a sense of global culture and of the consumption pattern of those in the higher social milieu. As this period is mostly dominated

---

<sup>76</sup> Until the reign of King Rama VI, polygamy was widely practiced in Thai society. The first married wife was usually regarded as a major wife and, in some families, she may have higher authority and status than other (minor) wives who were later married into the family. However, in other families, major and minor wives shared their house chores and family duty with no disputes.

by foreign-educated elites, elevating the status of Western civilisation in Thai society, this leads to Khun Prem's decision to send their two legitimate sons, An and Ot to study in France and England respectively. On is allowed to enrol as a Thai military cadet and Prapai, their youngest daughter, is enrolled in a missionary school in Bangkok. In the meantime, Choi keeps informing Phloi about the deteriorating state of the grand palace life, as the king rarely stays there and many palace ladies are forced to leave the palace in search of a better life. The age of extravaganza ends with the passing of King Vajiravudh, bringing devastation upon all Thais, particularly Khun Prem.

The third reign in Phloi's life begins when King Prajadhipok Rama VII ascends to the throne only to face serious economic problems caused by King Vajiravudh's debt and the World War I crisis. Having graduated in law from France, An returns home with a French wife named Lucille, causing tension amongst his family members. Upon his return, An looks at Thai culture in disdain and expresses disappointment towards the backwardness of Thailand, determining to change the country for the better. Later Ot returns from England and prefers to be at home with Phloi rather than getting a job. The blow of King Vajiravudh's death puts an end to Khun Prem's hope and ambition, leading to his decision to take an early retirement. Instead, he seeks joy in wild horse riding, which worries Phloi. Meanwhile, Phloi is concerned about her children; On is stationed far away, An only talks about his Western political ideologies, Ot shows no desire for working, and Prapai has become much less conservative (judging from Phloi's values) as a result of consuming European popular culture. As time passes by, a family quarrel starts to form with An and Prapai on one side, and On, Ot, and Phloi's brother, Perm, on the other.

Khun Prem dies from a horse-riding accident, sending Phloi and the family into grievance. His death and the political scene in Thailand aggravate the family's dispute, as it turns out that An is a part of The People's Party. The group determines to change Thailand from the absolute monarchy to a constitutional democracy. After the revolution in 1932, King Prajadhipok grants a constitutional democracy and steps down from the throne, making way for the young King Ananda Mahidol King Rama VIII to ascend. This event leads to an uprising between The People's Party and the rightist group of soldiers later known as Woradet Rebellion, of which On is a member. Later, the group is defeated, and On becomes a death row inmate along with other members of the group. The family's disunity and On's imprisonment devastate Phloi. During that time, Prapai, who trusts An's advice, marries

Seawee, a wealthy merchant from a Sino family. Her marriage is an unhappy one, though she thinks she can divorce him whenever she likes.

An sadly realises that the revolution does not accomplish his idealistic goals, as the power still stays amongst certain individuals. Ot takes up a mine-related job in the southern part of Thailand and relocates there. Another blow strikes when World War II begins and Japanese soldier troupes use Thailand as a passageway. Seawee makes a deal with the Japanese, hoarding essential items and making money on Thai people's suffering. The bomb destroys Khun Prem's house, so Phloi and her family flee to Phloi's childhood home. Meanwhile, On is released from the prison thanks to the new government's and the king's order. He returns home with unfortunate news about Ot's death from malaria. The return of the young King Rama VIII to the royal palace is a golden ray shining upon the Thai people. However, soon after his return, a gunshot echoes throughout Thailand, and the king is found dead in his room. Along with the king's passing, Phloi finds her soul slip away as the fourth reign of her life draws to an end.

## Appendix IV: Musical Numbers in *Four Reigns The Musical*

Table 1: Full list of musical numbers of *Four Reigns The Musical* (2011)

### Act I

No.	Song title / English translation	Characters	Description
1	Bot Nam / Overture	Adult Phloi (monologue)	Instrumental overture leading to Phloi's opening monologue.
2	Bahn Khong Chan / My home	Young Phloi	Young Phloi reminisces about the beauty and serenity at her childhood home next to the canal, concluding with uncertainty about her future from now on.
3	Wang Luang / The Royal Palace	Ensemble, Phloi, Mae Chaem (Phloi's mother)	Young Phloi and her mother travel from their canal home to the city centre, the heart of civilisation.
4	Theung Khrao Tong Chak / It's Time to Part	Young Phloi, Mae Chaem	Mae Chaem says farewell to young Phloi who will be staying in the palace, reminding her to be obedient and diligent.
5	Wan Thee Rai Mae / The Day Without Mother	Young Phloi, Adult Phloi	Young Phloi expresses her feelings of emptiness after parting with her mother while adult Phloi comments that there is so much more for her to learn.
6	Chao Wang / Palace Ladies	Ensemble, Young Choi, Sadej, Young Phloi	The palace ladies, Sadej, and young Choi talk about etiquettes and their ways of life in the palace while young Phloi is trying to take everything in.
7	Tai Rom Phra Bharami / Under the King's Prestige	Ensemble	The civilians talk about their peaceful lives in the reign of King Rama V and His Majesty's great achievements for Thailand including slave emancipation and the postal system. They also express sympathy for him when he loses his own son, bringing him closer to the people.
8	Nai Luang Khong Phaendin / The King of The Land	Young Phloi, Young Adult Phloi	Young Phloi finally understands the achievements that the king has brought upon Thailand and the great amount of effort he puts in for the benefits of Thai people. The civilians are grateful for his

			determination to make Thailand peaceful and independent.
9	Mae Chang Hom / Accomplished Lady	Ensemble, Young adult Choi, Young adult Phloi	The palace ladies and Choi comment on how accomplished and attractive young lady Phloi has become. Phloi says that she is not looking for love, but her friends tease that, amongst all Phloi's suitors, Khun Prem seems to be the most promising one.
10	Khanomjeen Haeng Bang Pa-in / Khanomjeen of Bang Pa-in	Young adult Khun Prem, Young adult Phloi	Khun Prem uses the tale of Bang Pa-in's famous <i>khanomjeen</i> to court Phloi. When Phloi gets caught up in the story and wants to know the ending, Khun Prem reveals that the ending depends on Phloi's action now.
11	Phloi	Khun Prem	After finding out that Phloi has agreed to marry him (with the guidance of Sadej), Khun Prem expresses his joy, comparing Phloi to a precious gem <sup>77</sup> and vowing that he will love and cherish her forever.
12	Sai Than Cheewit / The River Flow of Life	Young Adult Phloi	Phloi expresses her sadness and hesitation in leaving her content life in the palace. She concludes that despite her fear of the unknown future, she will see where life takes her to.
13	Phloi (Reprise)	Young Adult Khun Prem	Khun Prem expresses his joy at marrying Phloi.
14	Aht Kheoi Pen Khon Mai Dee / I Might Have Been Bad	Young Adult Khun Prem, Young Adult Phloi	After discovering that Khun Prem has an out-of-wedlock son named On, Phloi is shocked, thinking of her mother's warning of not becoming a man's minor wife. Khun Prem admits his mistake and pleads for her forgiveness, promising her that she is the only one that he loves.
15	Dao Hang Ma Yeuan / The Comet Is Here	Ensemble	Civilians sing about the arrival of the comet, which is a bad omen

<sup>77</sup> In Thai, Phloi means a gemstone and is a common female name.



			that an important figure in the country will die. They pray that it won't be King Rama V.
16	Saranrom	Young Adult Khun Prem, Young Adult Phloi, Ensemble	Phloi asks if Khun Prem is tired from working so hard. Khun Prem says that King Rama VI's talents and efforts for his subjects make him want to work harder for the king. People at the club enjoy their night out.
17	Phab / Photograph	Young Adult Khun Prem, Young Adult Phloi	Phloi is sad that her sons are going abroad. Khun Prem consoles Phloi and reminds her that things are bound to happen, change, and disappear, including themselves. Once we can accept this truth, we can see the beauty in every moment.
18	Khom Roon Mai / New Generation	Adult Khun Prem, Adult Phloi, Ensemble, On, An, Ot, Prapai	Everyone sings about rapid changes occurring in the country. Phloi's grown-up children sing about their aspirations in life.
19	Sai Than Thee Tang Kan / Different Tides	An, On, Ot, Prapai, Perm (Phloi's brother), Adult Choi, Ensemble	An expresses his determination to change Thailand while On doubts An's thoughts. Ot expresses his joy to be home at last while Prapai is excited for what is to come. The civilians sing about the uncertain future of the country, saying that everyone has their own destiny.

## Act II

No.	Song Title / English translation	Characters	Description
1	Congratulations	Prapai, Lucille, Ot, Perm	Prapai, Lucille, Ot, and Perm congratulate An on his promotion. Prapai praises An's talent due to his Western education while Perm is trying to catch up with the youngsters' use of the English language.
2	Phid Wang / Disappointment	An, Ot, Adult Choi, Perm, On	An is upset that he does not get promoted, claiming that the person who gets it is not even qualified. Others convince An that that

			person might have worked there longer, but An blames it on the corrupt working system in Thailand which relies on connections, particularly for those who have noble blood.
3	Patiyan / Take an Oath	On, Ensemble	On and the soldiers take an oath to protect the nation and the monarchy, ensuring peace in Thailand.
4	At Khoei Pen Khon Mai Dee (Reprise) / I Might Have Been Bad (Reprise)	Adult Khun Prem	Khun Prem reminisces about his past with Phloi.
5	Phab (Reprise) / Photograph (Reprise)	Adult Phloi, Adult Khun Prem, Young Adult Phloi	Phloi confides her worries about the children to Khun Prem who consoles her.
6	Taek Yaek / Falling Apart	An, Ot, On, Adult Phloi	After Khun Prem's funeral, An tells Ot to get a job instead of wasting his good education. Ot argues with An and On tells An to stop hanging out with inappropriate people who try to take down the throne. An and On get into a fight while Phloi tries to stop them.
7	Chan Ja Yoo Khieng Khang Ther / I Will Be There For You	Ot, Phloi	Phloi is feeling overwhelmed by Khun Prem's death and An's zealous action against her faith. Ot offers Phloi a shoulder to lean on.
8	Phid Kham Saban / Break the Vow	Phloi, An, Ot	Phloi confronts An for forcing King Rama VII to abdicate and Ot warns that the Thai people are not ready for such a quick change. An insists on the virtue of his action, claiming that this is how Thailand can grow like other developed countries.
9	Phaendin Look Pen Fai / The Land Is Set Aflame	On, Ensemble	As a part of the Woradet Rebellion, On is sad to see Thai people fighting against each other and prays that this nightmare will stop soon.
10	Tong Tham Thook Sing / I Must Do Everything	Phloi, On, Ensemble	Phloi tells On, who is now a death row inmate, that she will do everything to help him. On

			apologises for his mistake, but Phloi says his actions for the monarchy should be praised.
11	Mae Ja...Ya Rong Hai / Mother...Please Don't Cry	Ot, Phloi, Ensemble	Ot consoles Phloi, telling her to be strong, as there will be a way to help On.
12	Leuak Krai Nor / Who to Choose?	Ot, Chai Noi (Prapai's suitor), Adult Phloi, Prapai, An, Saewee (Prapai's suitor), Perm, Adult Choi	At Prapai's birthday party, Ot brings Chai Noi, a royal descendant, and An brings Saewee, a wealthy businessman, as Prapai's suitor. The family members wonder who Prapai will choose. An says that nowadays it is better not to be involved with royal descendants because they are viewed negatively.
13	Rod Mai / Will I Survive?	Adult Choi	Choi observes the lifestyles of modern Bangkok women, who are becoming more Westernised. She asks if their carefree and idle attitudes will benefit them in the long run. Her diverse skills which she has learnt from the palace are what makes her survive in the real world.
14	Phaendin Ron / Furious Land	Ensemble, An	During World War II, Japanese soldier troupes use Thailand as a passageway. Saewee and his fellow politicians ask An to sign a business deal with the Japanese soldiers to make money at the expense of Thai people. An refuses to do so and he is fired.
15	Phuak Khai Chat / Traitor	Saewee, An	An finds out that Saewee is hoarding medical supplies and selling them at an overprice to Thai people in need. An condemns Saewee for being a traitor and realises that he has been taken advantaged by his fellow politicians all along.
16	Bahn Khong Kwam Song Jam / The House of Memories	Adult Phloi, Adult Khun Prem	After fleeing to her childhood home, Phloi thinks back on her past memories.

17	Bahn Khong Chan (Reprise) / My Home (Reprise)	Adult Phloi	Phloi recalls her happy memories and reflects on her eventful life.
18	Chan Ja Yoo Khieng Khang Ther (Reprise) / I Will Be There For You (Reprise)	Ot	Ot passes away in Southern Thailand due to malaria. Ot says farewell to Phloi in her dream.
19	Saeng Thee Ther Sadtha / Your Light of Faith	An	An realises that he has destroyed everything because of his zealous actions. He finally understands the importance of national pillars for Thailand and repents for his mistakes.
20	Kwam Wang Kheun Ma Yang Phaendin / Hope Returns to the Land	Ensemble, Adult Phloi	King Rama VIII returns to Thailand and a large number of people go welcome him on the streets including Phloi's family. Everyone is joyous and hopeful once again until a gunshot echoes and they find out that the king is dead.
21	Bot Sarup / The Conclusion	All cast	All the characters summarise Phloi's life while stressing the importance of national pillars for Thailand.

**Appendix V: Original Vocal Score of “Mai Pen Rai”**  
Lyrics by Lalit Srithara, Music by Tharit Sittipornpun

## ไม่เป็นไร

**A**  
♩ = 100

ไม่เป็นไร ไม่เป็นไร คน เยอะ นิด น้อย ก็ ไม่เป็นไร— อย่าง น้อย แอร์ ก็เย็น ฉ่ำ

6  
แถมผู้-ชาย คน นั้น ก็ ดู หล่อ ส่า เห็นแล้วใจ สั่น น้ำ-แทบ เดิน เอื่อ

**B**

12  
ไม่เป็นไร— ไม่เป็นไร— รถ เสีย เป็น ชั่ว โมง ก็ ไม่ เป็น ไร แต่มี เขา ยิน ด้วย— ฉัน ก็ทน ได้

**C**  
♩ = 120      ♩ = 130

17  
ถึงต้อง ติด อยู่ ตลอดไป นั้น ก็ ยอม นั้น คง ต้อง ติด อยู่อย่างนี้— แต่ไม่ เป็น ไร

**D**  
♩ = 140

23  
หอรอก ผู้ ชาย ดี ดี— ถึงเราอยู่ ใกล้จนแทบจะ ชี คอ ติด ไรด ก็แค่ ไปหา หมอ โสด ดี อะ ไรอย่างนี้

28  
ก็ คง ต้อง ติด อยู่อย่างนี้— แต่ไม่ เป็น ไร หอรอก ได้กลิ่น แขน— ก็ ดี— อยู่กรุง-

33  
เทพ ก็อย่างนี้— อุ-ณ - ภาพ ซี-วิท ดี— ทน อยู่ เดียวก็ชิน ไป เอง อย่าง

**D**  
♩ = 100

42  
น้อยอากาศวันนี้ ก็ ดี ไม่เป็นไร— ไม่เป็นไร— รถ

52  
ติด ปิด ถ-น-น— ก็ ไม่ เป็น ไร ได้— นั่ง ดู Net Flix— สักตอน. สอง ตอน— มิ-

56 เดอร์ ก็ พุง ทะ-ยาน เป็นเลข สาม หลัก แต่ ก็ ไม่ เป็นไร ไม่ เป็นไร เลี้ยว

60 ไป เส้น ทางแปลกๆ คง ไม่ เป็น ไร เพราะคน ไทย เรา ส่ง เรื่องความจริงใจ ลุง

64 แก คง พาสัก เลอะ เทียวเล่น ไซ โทม \_\_\_\_\_ ฉันทอง ต้อง ติด อยู่ตรงนี้ \_\_\_\_\_ กับ พี่ คน ชับ อยู่ตรงนี้ \_\_\_\_\_

70 \_\_\_\_\_ เปิดประ ตุ ลงไป ก็คงไม่หัน ไม่ ังน ครึ่งหน้า ต้องขึ้นรถ เมลส์ โชค ดี อะ-ไรอย่างนี้ ก็ คง ต้อง

75 \_\_\_\_\_ ติด อยู่อย่างนี้ \_\_\_\_\_ แต่ไม่ เป็น ไร หรอกเดี่ยว ก็ \_\_\_\_\_ ถึง ที่ \_\_\_\_\_ แท็กซี ที่ นี้ ก็อย่าง นี้ \_\_\_\_\_ มีเรื่อง ให้

80 \_\_\_\_\_ คอยได้หึ่ง บี เปิด ใจ เดี่ยวก็ชิน ไป เอง

94 \_\_\_\_\_ และฉันทองเดิน เข้า ซอย \_\_\_\_\_ ทั้งแค้นทั้งเปล่าเปลี่ยว \_\_\_\_\_ ทั้งซวย มี ฉันทอง คน เดียว

100 \_\_\_\_\_ นำ หวาดเสียวเหลือเกิน ฝนหยุดแล้ว แต่พื้น \_\_\_\_\_ ก็ยังแฉะๆ \_\_\_\_\_ เหยียบชี้หมา ละลาย น้ำฝน

104 \_\_\_\_\_ ก็ ดี ไม่ ต้อง และ \_\_\_\_\_ น้ำ ฝนหยุดลงมาลงหัว \_\_\_\_\_ ช่วยแก้ เหนง เพราะฉันทอง ก็ ไม่ มี ตัว \_\_\_\_\_

109 \_\_\_\_\_ พื้น ก็ ไม่ ส-มา เสมอ \_\_\_\_\_ แต่ ก็เตือนให้เรา มี ส-ติ \_\_\_\_\_ ทุกอย่าง ก้าว \_\_\_\_\_ ฉันทอง ไม่

116  $\text{♩} = 130$   $\text{♩} = 140$

ติด แล้ววันนี้ อีกไม ที่ก้าว ก็ถึง บ้าน แล้วนี้ เดินทางกลับ บ้าน วันละ ไม ที่ ชั่วโมง วัน

121

นี้ รองเท้า ก็ยังไม่พอง ฉันท เก่ง อะ ไรอย่างนี้ มองใน แ่ง บวก อย่างฉันนี้ ถึงปิ่น งาน จนตี สี่

127

ก็ ยัง ดี แล้วรีบ นอน เพราะ วัน พรุ้ง นี้ ก็ คง โชคดี เหมือน เดิม

## Glossary

**Ching (ฉิ่ง):** various sized hand cymbals

**Dok Krathum (ดอกกระพุ่ม):** a short trimmed hairstyle, popular during the Fifth Reign

**Farang (ฝรั่ง):** a Thai term used to refer to white Caucasians and all forms of cultural products associated with white Caucasians

**Jong Grabehn (โจงกระเบน):** sarong-style trousers

**Khim (ขิม):** a Thai dulcimer

**Khon (โขน):** Thai masked dance

**Kran (ครั้น):** a vibrato technique in Thai traditional singing

**Krap (กรับ):** a wooden clapper

**Lakhon (ละคร):** dance-drama

**Lakhon Duekdamban (ละครดึกดำบรรพ์):** a modernised form of *lakhon* that fuses Western opera with traditional Thai court dance.

**Lakhon Nai (ละครใน):** royal court drama; the distinguishing between the royal court style and outside-of-court style developed in the reign of King Baromakot (1733-1758) when *lakhon* was refined by and incorporated as part of the court entertainment.

**Lakhon Nok (ละครนอก):** outside-of-court drama or drama of the common people

**Lakhon Phanthang (ละครพันทาง):** a modernised form of *lakhon* that fuses Western opera with traditional Thai outside-of-court dance

**Lakhon Phleng (ละครเพลง):** musical drama

**Lakhon Phut (ละครพูด):** spoken drama

**Lakhon Rhong Lek (ละครโรงเล็ก):** small-scale theatre, usually no more than a hundred seats

**Lakhon Rhong Yai (ละครโรงใหญ่):** large-scale theatre, usually a proscenium arch theatre that features at least two tiers of seating

**Lakhon Rong (ละครร้อง):** sung drama

**Lakhon Thang Leuak (ละครทางเลือก):** alternative theatre

**Maem (เหมม):** a Thai term used to refer to a female Caucasian.

**Musical (มิวสิคัล):** a transliteration name of musical theatre and is used interchangeably with the term *lakhon phleng*



**Piphat** (ปี่พาทย์): a Thai orchestra consisting of percussion and wind instruments

**Piphat Mainuam** (ปี่พาทย์ไม้ نرم): a *piphat* orchestra that features certain instruments to deliver a softer and smoother sound. The wooden head mallets used to strike the *ranat ek*, *khong wong yai* (a large circular instrument with gongs) and *khong wong lek* (a small circular instrument with gongs) are replaced with mallets covered by layers of weaved threads and cloths. The orchestra also features *piang or* flutes and *soh ooh* to enhance the roundness of the sound.

**Phleng Luuk Khruung** (เพลงลูกกรุง): a music genre that fuses Western popular music and the Thai traditional singing style, usually featuring elaborate lyrics

**Phleng Neua Tem** (เพลงเนื้อเต็ม): a full-text song with no *uan* parts

**Phleng Thai Sakol** (เพลงไทยสากล): a music genre that mixes Thai lyrics and tunes with Western music arrangement

**Plik Siang** (พลิกเสียง): a vocal technique in Thai traditional singing in which a singer switches her vocal registers

**Ranat** (ระนาด): a Thai xylophone

**Ranat Ek** (ระนาดเอก): a high-pitched Thai xylophone

**Ranat Thum** (ระนาดทุ้ม): a low-pitched Thai xylophone

**Si Phaendin** (สี่แผ่นดิน): a historical novel written by M.R. Kukrit Pramoj in 1951-52

**Soh Duang** (ซอด้วง): soprano two-stringed fiddle

**Soh Ooh** (ซออู้): alto two-stringed fiddle

**Soi Tao** (ซอยเท้า): a technical movement in traditional Thai dance in which a dancer uses quick and small steps repeatedly to move.

**Taphon** (ตะโพน): a two-faced drum

**Ten Sao** (เต็นเสา): a technical movement in *khon*, which can be described as bent knees facing outwards in a square position leading to the upward and downward movement

**Uan** (เอื้อน): wordless vocalisation on specific vowels and consonants

### Works cited

- Althusser, Louis. *Ideology And Ideological State Apparatus*. 2nd ed., Kledthai, 2017.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections On The Origin And Spread Of Nationalism*. Quebecor World, 2006.
- Anuman Rajadhon. *Essays On Thai Folklore*. Institute Of Thai Studies/Chulalongkorn University, 2010.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjunction And Difference In The Global Cultural Economy". *The Global Transformations Reader*, David Held and Anthony McGrew, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 230-238, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Aronczyk, Melissa, and Ailsa Craig. "Cultures Of Circulation". *Poetics*, vol 40, no. 2, 2012, pp. 93-100. *Sciencedirect*, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2012.02.001>. Accessed 1 Sept 2022.
- Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory And Cultural Identity". *New German Critique*, no. 65, 1995, p. 125. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/488538>. Accessed 9 Feb 2021.
- Babbage, Frances. *Adaptation In Contemporary Theatre: Performing Literature*. 1st ed., Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2018.
- Bahn M.R. Kukrit. *Khon Thai Gub Bukkon Samkan Khong Lohk Cheu Kukri*. Bahn M.R.Kukrit Company, 2010.
- Banmuang. "7 Kwam Ying Yai Thammai Tong Chom "Si Phaendin @Lhong 1919"". *Banmuang*, 2019, <https://www.banmuang.co.th/news/entertain/170386>. Accessed 1 Apr 2022.
- Bennett, Susan. *Theatre Audiences*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006.
- Berzin, Alexander. "Impermanence As A Resource For Healthy Relationships". *Study Buddhism*, 2002, <https://studybuddhism.com/en/tibetan-buddhism/mind-training/handling-the-challenges-of-life/impermanence-as-a-resource-for-healthy-relationships>.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location Of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

- Bharucha, Rustom. *Theatre And The World: Performance And The Politics Of Culture*. Routledge, 1993.
- Bharucha, Rustom. *The Politics Of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre In An Age Of Globalisation*. Athlone, 2000.
- Brown, Garrett W. *Grounding Cosmopolitanism*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 31-54.
- Brown, Garrett. "Kant And Cosmopolitan Legacies". *Routledge International Handbook Of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Gerard Delanty, 2nd ed., Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, pp. 36-48, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Buarapha, Homhuan. "Suntareeyaphab Tham New Kid Praty Thawantok-Thawan-Ohk". *Homhuan2554*, 2011, <https://homhuan2554.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/e0b89ae0b897e0b897e0b8b5e0b988-2.pdf>. Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Chan, Shelby Kar-yan. *Identity And Theatre Translation In Hong Kong*. Springer, 2015.
- Chernilo, Daniel. "There Is No Cosmopolitanism Without Universalism". *Routledge International Handbook Of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Gerard Delanty, Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, pp. 61-76, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Chiangkul, Wittayakorn. *Sueksa Bot Bat Lae Khwan Kid M.R. Kukrit Pramoj*. Mingmit, 1995.
- Chow, Rey. *Ethics After Idealism*. Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Cohen, Margaret. "Sentimental Communities". *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention Of The Novel*, Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2002, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Cohen, Matthew Isaac, and Laura Nozlopy, ed. by. *Contemporary Southeast Asian Performance: Transnational Perspectives*. Cambridge Scholars Publishings, 2010.
- Commissiong, Anand Bertrand. *Cosmopolitanism In Modernity: Human Dignity In Global Age*. Lexington Books, 2012.

- Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth. *The Sum Of Small Things: A Theory Of Aspirational Class*. Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Delanty, Gerard. "The Field Of Cosmopolitanism Studies". *Routledge International Handbook Of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Gerard Delanty, 2nd ed., Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, pp. 24-34, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Delanty, Gerard. "The Idea Of Critical Cosmopolitanism". *International Handbook Of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Gerard Delanty, 2nd ed., Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, pp. 145-158, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Department of Cultural Promotion. *Nang Patravadi Mejudhon*. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmqfMTLgHhE>. Accessed 29 Nov 2021.
- Diamond, Catherine. "Phra Lor (Review)". *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol 27, no. 2, 2010, pp. 366-369. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25782124>. Accessed 2 Apr 2022.
- Diamond, Catherine. *Communities Of Imagination: Contemporary Southeast Asian Theatres*. University Of Hawai'i Press, 2012.
- Dillingham, Kyle. "Kyle Dillingham". *Kyledillingham*, 2022, <https://www.kyledillingham.us/>.
- Diloksamphan, Witchaphon. "The Showhopper". *Facebook*, 2019, <http://facebook.com/theshowhopper.th/photos/a.335954923441583/861165514253852/?type=3>.
- DNA Attitude. *DNA Attitude Ep. 5*. 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR5go\\_h0XoQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR5go_h0XoQ). Accessed 1 Sept 2022.
- Echternach, Matthias et al. "Vocal Tract Shapes In Different Singing Functions Used In Musical Theater Singing—A Pilot Study". *Journal Of Voice*, vol 28, no. 5, 2014, pp. 653.e1-653.e7. *Elsevier BV*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2014.01.011>.
- Faculty of Arts. "อภิมหารัตน". *Arts.Chula.Ac.Th*, 2016, <https://www.arts.chula.ac.th/AlumWeb/100years/DetailArts.php?id=160&group=41>.
- Faculty of Communication Arts. "Assistant Professory Dr Sukanya Sompiboon". *Commarts.Chula.Ac.Th*, <https://www.commarts.chula.ac.th/th-th/profile.html?UID=22>.

- Farid, Muhammad Noramin Bin Mohamed. "Imagining Tarian Melayu In Singapore: Curating Bodies Of Malay Dance". Royal Holloway, University Of London.
- Gilbert, Helen, and Jacqueline Lo. "Performing Hybridity In Post-Colonial Monodrama1". *The Journal Of Commonwealth Literature*, vol 32, no. 1, 1997, pp. 5-19. *SAGE Publications*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002198949703200102>.
- Gilbert, Helen, and Jacqueline Lo. *Performance And Cosmopolitics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Gill, Michael J. et al. "Constructing Trustworthy Historical Narratives: Criteria, Principles And Techniques". *British Journal Of Management*, vol 29, no. 1, 2017, pp. 191-205. *Wiley*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12262>. Accessed 11 Jan 2022.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*. Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. "The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter To The National Arts Community". *Beyond The Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism From Latin America*, Gerardo Mosquera, INIVA, London, 2022, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Graireuk, Piriya. "Paginaga Nai Phrabahsomdej Phrachullachomglaio Chaoyoohua Reung Kwam Plienplang Tang Dan Sillapa Wattanatam". *Sillapa Wattanatam*, 2004, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Grantley, Darryll. *Historical Dictionary Of British Theatre*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013, p. 250.
- Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson. *Ethnography: Principles In Practice*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2007.
- Hammill, Faye. *Sophistication*. Liverpool University Press, 2010.
- Harrison, Rachel V, and Peter A. Jackson. "Introduction: Siam's/Thailand's Constructions Of Modernity Under The Influence Of The Colonial West". *South East Asia Research*, vol 17, no. 3, 2009, pp. 325-360. *JSTO*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23750879>. Accessed 24 Dec 2019.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions". *The Invention Of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 1-14, Accessed 17 Feb 2022.

Holley, Gary Stewart. "From Classical To Music Theatre: A Vocalist'S Experience". Griffith University, 2017.

Hutnyk, John. "Hybridity". *Ethnic And Racial Studies*, vol 28, no. 1, 2006, pp. 79-102. Informa UK Limited, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000280021>.

*Impression Si Phaendin The Musical 2560 Preview Performance*. 2017, <https://www.maamjourney.com/2017/%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%B5%E0%B9%88%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%9C%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%94%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%99-%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%94%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%B0%E0%B8%A1%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%84%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%A5/>. Accessed 28 Mar 2021.

Infogram. "Favourite Musicals Around The World - Infogram". *Infogram*, 2020, <https://infogram.com/favourite-musicals-around-the-world-1h8n6m78qwpz6xo>.

Jennings, Colleen Ann. "Belting Is Beautiful : Welcoming The Musical Theater Singer Into The Classical Voice Studio". University Of Iowa, 2014.

KalamareTV. *Boy Takonkiet Sehn Thang Su Broadway Mai Klai Kern Uam*. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGhniKTrzdE>. Accessed 11 Jan 2021.

Kapook. *Si Phaendin The Musical 2560 Sending Hope, Encouragement*. 2017, <https://drama.kapook.com/view176942.html>. Accessed 26 Mar 2022.

Kenrick, John. *Musical Theatre*. The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008.

Kerdarunsuksri, Kittisak. "The Transposition Of Traditional Thai Literature Into Modern Stage Drama: The Current Development Of Thai Theatre". University Of London School Of Oriental And African Studies.

Kijchaijareon, Rangsimun. "Musical Lab". Interview by Kamolnun Ruddit. 2021.

King Chulalongkorn. *Personal Letters Of King Chulalongkorn On His Trips To Malayu In Rattakosinsok 108, 109, 117, 120*. 2021.

Komchadleuk. *9 October 2538 Mom Rachawongse "Kukrit Pramoj" Passed Away*. 2021, <https://www.komchadluek.net/today-in-history/487388>. Accessed 26 Mar 2022.

- Kongthawon, Kwanjai. "The Evolution Of Lakhon Nai". *Journal Of Humanities And Social Sciences Ubonratchathani Rajabhat University*, vol 10, no. 1 (January - June), 2019, Accessed 9 Sept 2022.
- Kraidy, Marwan M. "Hybridity In Cultural Globalization". *Communication Theory*, vol 12, no. 3, 2002, pp. 316-339. *Oxford University Press (OUP)*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00272.x>.
- Kukrit 80 Foundation. *Kukrit Phut: Wannagam Gub Sangkom*. 1st ed., Kukrit 80 Foundation, 2010.
- Lasalle College of the Arts - Musical Theatre. *Into The Woods (2015)*. 2015. Accessed 4 Mar 2022.
- Latartara, John. "The Timbre Of Thai Classical Singing". *Asian Music*, vol 43, no. 2, 2012, pp. 88-114. *Project Muse*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/amu.2012.0013>.
- Lee, Benjamin, and Edward LiPuma. "Cultures Of Circulation: The Imaginations Of Modernity". *Public Culture*, vol 14, no. 1, 2002, pp. 191-213. *Duke University Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-14-1-191>.
- Lerdpunyanut, Sarawut. "Nan Sarawut Lerdpunyanut". Interview by Meaw Khon Khon. 2017.
- Lim, Anna, et al. *Boy Story: 20 Phee Reak Nai Cheewit Kan Tam Nhan Khong Boy Takonkiert*. Scenario, 2013.
- Lim, Patricia Pui Huen. *Through The Eyes Of The King*. Silkworm Books, 2009.
- Lo, Jacqueline, and Helen Gilbert. "Toward A Topography Of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis". *TDR/The Drama Review*, vol 46, no. 3, 2002, pp. 31-53. *MIT Press - Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1162/105420402320351468>.
- Loos, Tamara. "Competitive Colonialisms: Siam And The Malay Muslim South". *The Ambiguous Allure Of The West: Traces Of The Colonial In Thailand*, Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson, Hong Kong University Press, 2010, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Luang Sitsayamkan. *The Greek Favourite Of The King Of Siam*. Chuan Printing Pr., 1976.

- Manivat, Vilas. "The Universal Man". *M.R. Kulrit Pramroj: His Wit And Wisdom*, Steven Van Beek, 1st ed., Duang Kamol, Bangkok, 1983, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Marwan Kraidy, Kraidy. *Hybridity, Or The Cultural Logic Of Globalization*. Temple University, 2005.
- Master. "Broken Chords The Musical". *Boom Channel*, 2019, <https://www.boomchanneltv.com/content/627/>.
- Mathews, Gordon. *Global Culture - Individual Identity*. Routledge, 2006.
- Mejubot, Worachat. *King Vajiravudh*. [https://vajiravudh.ac.th/OVtoVC/OVtoVC\\_164.htm](https://vajiravudh.ac.th/OVtoVC/OVtoVC_164.htm). Accessed 28 Mar 2022.
- Mejudhon, Patravadi. "Kheun Neung Kab Patravadi". Patravadi Hua Hin Channel, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_7uV8s4oGtK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7uV8s4oGtK). Accessed 9 Jan 2022.
- Meskimmon, Marsha. *Contemporary Art And The Cosmopolitan Imagination*. Routledge, 2011.
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Border Thinking And Decolonial Cosmopolitanism". *Routledge International Handbook Of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Gerard Delanty, 2nd ed., Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, pp. 159-179, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Miller, Terry E. "The Theory And Practice Of Thai Musical Notations". *Ethnomusicology*, vol 36, no. 2, 1992, p. 197. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/851914>. Accessed 2 Sept 2022.
- Mitchell, James. "78S And The "Golden Age Of Thai Song": Content And Analysis Of The Thai 78 Rpm Discographical Framework". *Journal Of Social Issues In Southeast Asia*, vol 31, no. 2, 2022, pp. 413-462. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24779811>. Accessed 24 Oct 2020.
- Morraget. "Review Si Phaendin The Musical". *Blogger*, 2012, <https://morraget.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post.html>. Accessed 6 Oct 2020.
- MTEA. "About — MTEA (Musical Theatre Educators' Alliance)". *Musicaltheatreeducators*, 2022, <https://www.musicaltheatreeducators.org/about>.



- Muangthai Rachadalai Theatre. *Trailer "Si Pan Din The Musical"*. 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCXyU68kck>. Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Muangthai Rachadalai Theatre. *Kwam Roosuek Khong Phoo Chom Lakhon Wea Tee Si Pan Din The Musical 2560*. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihPCOOGmb-A>. Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Myers-Moro, Pamela. "Musical Notation In Thailand". *Journal Of Siam Society*, vol 78, no. 1, 1990, pp. 101-108., <https://www.jstor.org/stable/851914>. Accessed 4 Sept 2022.
- Nagavajara, Chetana. *Comparative Literature From A Thai Perspective*. Chulalongkorn University Press, 1996.
- Nagavajara, Chetana. *Khrun Kid Pinij Neuk*. Phraphansan, 2002.
- Nagavajara, Chetana. "Kheu Phoo Apiwat". *Phalang Wijan: Silapa Kan Lakhon*, Parichat Jeungwiwatthanaporn, et al., Na Petchkasem Press, Bangkok, 2004, Accessed 9 Sept 2022.
- Nagel, Joane. "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating And Recreating Ethnic Identity And Culture". *Social Problems*, vol 41, no. 1, 1994, pp. 152-176. *Oxford University Press (OUP)*, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.1994.41.1.03x0430n>.
- Nattayakul, Sirimongkol. *Pakawalee: Tam Nan Lakhon Waetee Khong Thai*. Intanil, 2012.
- Ngamthin, Sunisa. "Kan Saneuh Khao Kan Muang Khong Nangseuh Phim Siam Rath". Thammasat University, 1981.
- Nongpol, Arun. "Si Phaendin The Musical". *The Standard*, 2019, <https://thestandard.co/four-reigns-the-musical>.
- Numbeo. "Cost Of Living In Bangkok". *Numbeo*, 2021, <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Bangkok>.
- Octobre, Sylvie, and Vincenzo Cicchelli. *Aesthetico-Cultural Cosmopolitanism And French Youth: The Taste Of The World*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- One31. *Si Phaendin The Legend Musical @ Lhong1919*. 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBNF7W\\_rpq0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBNF7W_rpq0). Accessed 25 Mar 2022.

Papastergiadis, Nikos. "Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism". *Routledge International Handbook Of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Gerard Delanty, 2nd ed., Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, pp. 287-303, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.

Patravadi Hua Hin Channel. *Lakhon Weatee Lilit Phra Lo*. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcjwRRia62w>. Accessed 21 Nov 2021.

Patravadi Hua Hin Channel. *Inao Choraka Rock Opera 2537*. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=El9KkCGUnuE&t=479s>. Accessed 30 Nov 2021.

Patravadi Hua Hin Channel. *Khui Kab Khru (Lehk) EP19: Khui Rheung Krabuankan Feuk Pheuah Sadeang "Kheun Neung Kab Patravadi"*. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cdgFScZ66M&list=PLXPaDZyrEVMGNp3CHTeIxuOKBYn382Oui&index=16>. Accessed 22 Nov 2021.

Patravadi Hua Hin Channel. *Khui Kab Khru (Lehk) EP21: Khui Rheung Saeng Si Siang Khong "Kheun Neung Kab Patravadi"*. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izES3HySJIY&list=PLXPaDZyrEVMGNp3CHTeIxuOKBYn382Oui&index=14>. Accessed 26 Nov 2021.

Patravadi Hua Hin Channel. *Khui Kab Khru (Lehk) EP18: Khui Rheung Prasobkan Nai New York*. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUXYXfuEVnk&list=PLXPaDZyrEVMGNp3CHTeIxuOKBYn382Oui&index=17>. Accessed 30 Nov 2021.

Patravadi Hua Hin Channel. *Khui Kab Khru Lehk EP20: Kohn Ja Pen "Kheun Neung Kab Patravadi"*. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1A6NP1299g&list=PLXPaDZyrEVMGNp3CHTeIxuOKBYn382Oui&index=15>. Accessed 7 Jan 2022.

Peleggi, Maurizio. *Lords Of Things*. University Of Hawaii Press, 2002.

Peleggi, Maurizio. *Thailand*. Reaktion, 2007.

Phiphitkul, Nimit. "Thai Theatre Scene". Interview by Kamolnun Ruddit. Bangkok, 2022.

Phiphitkul, Wilasinee. "The Role Of Siam Rath". Interview by Kamolnun Ruddit. Bangkok, 2021.

- Phra Chen Duriyanga. *Thai Music In Western Notation*. The Fine Arts Department, 2015.
- Phukarn, Sombat. *Kukrit*. 1st ed., Rhong Phim Khruang Thep, 1998.
- Phu-ngamdee, Sakon. "Kukrit Pramoj And His Genius In Literature, Culture, And Journalism". *Journal Of Academic Services*, vol 23, no. 2, 2020, Accessed 3 Nov 2020.
- Phuwaphiromkwan, Phanisa. *Kwamkhid Cheewit Tuaton Patravadi: Dek Ying Na Rimnam*. Freemind Publishing, 2008.
- Pogge, Thomas W. "Cosmopolitanism And Sovereignty". *Ethics*, vol 103, no. 1, 1992, pp. 48-75. *University Of Chicago Press*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/293470>.
- Positioning Admin. "Rhong Lakhon Haeng Cheewit - Boy Takolkiet Virawan". *Positioning*, 2007, <https://positioningmag.com/10459>. Accessed 2 Mar 2020.
- Posttoday. "Lhong 1919: The 168-Year Legend Of Harbour". *Posttoday*, 2018, <https://www.posttoday.com/life/travel/562868>. Accessed 8 Oct 2020.
- Prachachat. "The Legend Musical @ Lhong 1919". *Prachachat*, 2022, <https://www.prachachat.net/public-relations/news-392615>. Accessed 6 Oct 2020.
- Pramoj, Kukrit. *Lohk Suantua Khong Phom*. Kao Nah, 1968.
- Pramoj, Kukrit. *Si Phaendin*. 11th ed., Dok Yah, 2011.
- Puttikulangura, Chutimta. "Musical Lab And Musical Theatre In Thailand". Interview by Kamolnun Ruddit. 2021.
- Rachadalai Theatre. "About Theatre". *Muangthai Rachadalai Theatre*, 2019, <https://www.rachadalai.com/en/กับโรงละคร>.
- RCAC. "Nikorn Seatang". *Rcac84.Com*, <https://www.rcac84.com/artist/นิกร-แช่ตั้ง>
- Regev, Motti. "Cultural Uniqueness And Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism". *European Journal Of Social Theory*, vol 10, no. 1, 2007, pp. 123-138. *SAGE Publications*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431006068765>. Accessed 3 Aug 2021.
- "Rheung Khong Rheung.". Channel Five, 2011.
- "Rheung Khong Rheung.". Channel Five, 2012.

- Richard, Meredith. "Hybridity: Its Definition And Its Place In Our Reading Of Artwork". *Modern Latin American Art*, 2014, <https://modernlatinamericanart.wordpress.com/2014/09/01/hybridity-its-definition-and-its-place-in-our-reading-of-artwork>.
- Rinpoche, Tsenzhab Serkong. "Samsara Brings Suffering, Dharma Brings Happiness". *Study Bhuddism*, 1980, <https://studybuddhism.com/en/tibetan-buddhism/path-to-enlightenment/the-graded-path/samsara-brings-suffering-dharma-brings-happiness>.
- Roadanant, Nisha. "Musical Theatre Scene In Thailand". Interview by Kamolnun Ruddit. 2021.
- Rosky, Nicole. "Sierra Boggess Will Lead Reading Of Maltby And Shire's DANCERS AT A WATERFALL". *Broadway World*, 2019, <https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Sierra-Boggess-Will-Lead-Reading-of-Maltby-and-Shires-DANCERS-AT-A-WATERFALL-20190507>.
- Rutnin, Mattani. "The Transformation Of Values As Seen Through “Si Phaen Din”". *M.R. Kukrit Pramoj: His Wit And Wisdom*, Steven Van Beek, Duang Kamol, Bangkok, 1983, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Rutnin, Mattani. *Dance, Drama & Theatre In Thailand: The Process Of Development And Modernization*. 2nd ed., Silkworm, 2000.
- Saengsinchai, Thongyoy. "Satima". *Dhamma Serichon*, 2019, <http://dhamma.serichon.us/2019/08/31/สติมา-คำไทยก็ดี-คำบาลีก็/>.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st ed., Random House US, 1979.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture And Imperialism*. Vintage Books, 1993.
- Santiratphakdee, Sasivimol. *Chak Chiwit Si Phaendin*. 1st ed., Amarin, 2004.
- Sassatelli, Monica. "Festivals, Museums, Exhibitions: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism In The Cultural Public Sphere". *Routledge International Handbook Of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Gerard Delanty, 2nd ed., Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, pp. 270-286, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Scenario and Muangthai Rachadalai Theatre. *Siang Tob Rab Jak Phoo Thii Dai Ma Chom Si Phandin The Musical Rob Gala [Feedback From Audiences In The Gala Performance*

- Of Four Reigns The Musical*. 2017,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHQBDSzXKzs>. Accessed 2 Oct 2020.
- Scenario. *Si Phaendin The Musical*. Scenario, 2011.
- Siam Rath. "Wannakhadee Thai Khab Sangkhom". *Siam Rath*, 1995, Accessed 3 Nov 2020.
- Silpa-Mag. *Fashions From The Third To Ninth Reign*. 2021, [https://www.silpa-mag.com/culture/article\\_35511](https://www.silpa-mag.com/culture/article_35511). Accessed 28 Mar 2022.
- Silpawattanatham. "Monthienthong Theatre". *Silpawattanatham*, 1993, Accessed 9 Sept 2022.
- Siriwat, Supatra. "Khanom Mongkol". *Khao Ram Kham Haeng*, vol 33, no. 47, 2022,  
<https://www.lib.ru.ac.th/miscell2/?p=2158>. Accessed 3 Dec 2021.
- Smith, Malcolm. *A Physician At The Court Of Siam*. 5th ed., Saengdao Printing, 2017.
- Steger, Manfred B. *Globalizaion: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Stockhammer, Philipp Wolfgang. "Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization In Archaeology". *Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization: A Transdisciplinary Approach*, Philipp Wolfgang Stockhammer, Springer, New York, 2012, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Stockhammer, Philipp Wolfgang. "Questioning Hybridity". *Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization: A Transdisciplinary Approach*, Philipp Wolfgang Stockhammer, Springer, New York, 2012, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Straczowski, Joanna Tamara Maria. "From Paideia To Transaesthetics: The Concept Of Aestheticization And Its Significance In The Digital Age". University Of Liverpool, 2018.
- Sudbantad, Sukanya. "Nak Nang Seuh Phim Cheu Kukrit". *Khon Thai Gub Bukkon Samkan Khong Lohk Cheu Kukrit*, Ban M.R.Kukrit Company, Ban M.R.Kukrit Company, Bangkok, 2010, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Suharto, Imthip. *Journeys To Java By A Siamese King*. Buasuang, 2012.
- Sukhee, Phansak. "Lodiloklomfah". Chulalongkorn University, 2019.

- Surangkanang, Kor. "Kwam Kid Kham Neung Lang Jak Aan Si Phaendin Dai Song Phaendin". *Pikhroh Kukrit Pinit Si Phaendin*, Suwit Wongweera, 1st ed., Dok Yah, Bangkok, 1991, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Suveeranon, Pracha, and Kasien Tejapira. *Attaluk Thai*. Fah Diew Kahn Press, 2015.
- Swangviboonpong, Dusadee. *Thai Court Singing*. Routledge, 2016.
- Tan, Marcus Cheng Chye, and Charlene Rajendran, ed. by. *Performing Southeast Asia: Performance, Politics, And The Contemporary*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Tan, Shzr Ee. "Cultural Anxieties, Aspirational Cosmopolitanism And Capacity Building: Music Criticism In Singapore". *The Cambridge History Of Music Criticism*, Christopher Dingle, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, pp. 542-567, Accessed 9 Sept 2022.
- Tantikarn, Janchitra. "Si Phaendin THE LEGEND MUSICAL @ LHONG 1919". 2019, <https://www.harpersbazaar.co.th/LIFESTYLE/ENTERTAINMENT/four-reigns-the-legend-thai-musical-lhong-1919>. Accessed 9 Oct 2020.
- Thai Theatre Foundation. "ABOUT THAI THEATRE FOUNDATION". *Thai Theatre Foundation*, 2021, <https://www.thaitheatre.org/history>.
- ThaiHealth Promotion Foundation. "Thai Health Promotion Foundation (Thaihealth)". *Thai Health Promotion Foundation (Thaihealth)*, 2021, [https://en.thaihealth.or.th/WHO\\_WE\\_ARE/THAIHEALTH\\_INTRO/](https://en.thaihealth.or.th/WHO_WE_ARE/THAIHEALTH_INTRO/).
- ThaiPost. 'Scenario' Sent Si Phaendin To Screen On 'Trueid' For The First Time. 2021, <https://www.thaipost.net/main/detail/115017>. Accessed 29 Mar 2022.
- Thammanachote, Atsiri. "Ha Lehm Nai Dungjai (Five Books In My Heart)". *Khon Thai Gub Bukkon Samkan Khong Lohk Cheu Kukrit*, Bahn M.R. Kukrit Company, Bahn M.R. Kukrit Company, 2010, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Thanonnangseuh. *Phut Khuy Gub Kukrit (Talking To Kukrit)*. Thanonnangseuh, 1985.
- The Showhopper. "The Showhopper On This Day". *Facebook.Com*, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/theshowhopper.th>.
- Tomba, Massimiliano et al. *Marx's Temporalities*. Brill, 2013, p. 163.

- Trust Magazine. "Kid Tang Yang "Boy Takonkiet". *Trust*, 2016, <https://www.tiscowealth.com/trust-magazine/issue-38/people.html>. Accessed 5 Jan 2021.
- Upparamai, Wimon Sri. *Nattayakam Lae Kahn Lakhon*. Chula Book Press, 2012, pp. 146-167.
- Van Beek, Steven. *M.R. Kukrit Pamoj: His Wit And Wisdom*. 1st ed., Duang Kamol, 1983.
- Vercelloni, Luca. *The Invention Of Taste*. Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Virawan, Takonkiert. "The Evolution Of Musical Theatre In Thailand". Interview by Kamolnun Ruddit. Bangkok, 2015.
- Wiehardt, Ginny. "How To Write Fiction From Third Person Limited Point Of View". *The Balance Careers*, 2019, <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/writing-fiction-in-third-person-1277122>.
- Wingworn, Saowanit. *Lakhon Nok Baeb Luang: Khan Pinij Tua Bot Su Krabuankan Sadaeng*. Kasetsart University, 2022, pp. 92-124, <https://kukr2.lib.ku.ac.th>, Accessed 20 Dec 2021.
- Winitchaikul, Woh. "Mae Phloi Pehn Yat Thang Nai Khong M.R. Kukrit Pramoj (How Does Mae Phloi Relate To M.R.Kukrit Pramoj?)". *Pikhroh Kukrit Pinit Si Phaendin*, Suwit Wongweera, 1st ed., Dok Yah, Bangkok, 1991, Accessed 16 Feb 2022.
- Wirunruk, Suraphol. *Wiwatthanakan Nattayasin Thai Nai Krung Rattanakosin (The Evolution Of Thai Dance In Rattanakosin Era)*. Chulalongkorn University Press, 2004.
- Wongwisetphaibul, Khanapol. "A Symphony Of Empathy". *The Potential*, 2020, <https://thepotential.org/creative-learning/sukanya/>.
- Wongwisit, Thanapat. "Bangkokian (2020, Fahfan Production)". *Facebook*, 2020, <http://facebook.com/photo/?fbid=3646722442039271&set=a.3309944349050417>.
- Woodward, Ian, and Zlatko Skrbiš. "Performing Cosmopolitanism. The Context And Object Framing Of Cosmopolitan Openness". *Routledge International Handbook Of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, Gerard Delanty, 2nd ed., Routledge, Abingdon, 2019, pp. 196-210, Accessed 17 Feb 2022.
- Wuttikanokkarn, Tattape. *Lakhon Rong Baeb Chantarophat Rhueang Rosita Chabab Yo: Rosita Musical Show*. 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH-iQ77qFaI>. Accessed 16 Nov 2021.

Wuttipong, Nalin. "The Thai Popular Music Industry: Industrial Form And Musical Design".  
University Of Nottingham, 2012.