

YOUTH IDENTITY AND REGIONAL MUSIC
IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND

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Abstract

Music in the northeastern region of Thailand comes in several forms, including *luk thung*, which has been identified by scholars such as Craig Lockhard (1998) and James Mitchell (2015) as the most popular genre of music in Thailand, and *mo lam*, a local style of singing and dancing mainly performed only in this region. Both these genres trace their origins to Isan, the northeastern region of Thailand, and are strongly associated with the country's Lao minority and rural identity. In the 1990s a new Isan musical genre combining musical characteristics of *luk thung* and *mo lam* became popularized throughout Isan and the rest of Thailand. Scholars such as Sanong Klangprasri (2541/1998) and Tinnakorn Attapaiboon (2554/2011) have referred to this genre as *luk thung-mo lam*. While still firmly situated in the Isan region, this genre has gone through various stylistic changes. Resembling the changing job market of the northeast region, this music is experiencing the effects of urbanization, while still maintaining regional flavor in the sonic effect and sentiment. This study will explore expressions of regional identities in contemporary *luk thung-mo lam* music as experienced by young people in the Isan region. Through analysis of interviews with university students, lyrical translations, music videos, musical transcriptions, and observations of live performance environments, I examine the relevance of the various forms of *luk thung-mo lam* among university students at Ubon Ratchathani University and argue that this new musical form brought on by the region's urbanization is used to assert a newly emerging, regional identity while still maintaining cultural values from the past. For a new generation, the popularity of *luk thung-mo lam* shows both the international connections of Isan and its regional value as an integral part of the national culture and economy.

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Conventions and Orthography

Throughout this project I will be adhering to the Royal Thai General System of transcription or RTGS to romanize Thai words. All Thai language words will be italicized throughout the paper, excluding proper names. Because of linguistic differences, there are several aspects of Thai language pronunciation that are not conveyed well using Latin script, such as the proper tones of words or the length of vowel sounds. To help make these words clear, at first mention of any Thai terms the Thai spelling will be included in parenthesis behind the romanization. This is done with the intent to be helpful to readers who speak or are learning Thai, and to promote collaboration and the exchange of ideas between Thai-speaking and English-speaking researchers.

Proper names will also be romanized according to the RTGS, except where there is a preferred or commonly accepted spelling, which has been used in other publications. In addition, this research cites several sources that are entirely or mostly in Thai. These sources will be cited including both the Western (Common Era) year and Thai (Buddhist Era) year of publication. In Thailand, the calendar system begins 543 years before the beginning of the Common Era (CE) calendar, also believed to be the year of Guatama Buddha's death. The two years will be separated in the citation by a slash (/) with the Thai Buddhist Era (BE) appearing first, followed by the Common Era (CE) year. For example, the year of this thesis would be written as 2560/2017. In addition, all Thai sources cited will be alphabetized by the romanization of the authors' names, which will be listed with the first name preceding the last name, according to standard Thai practice.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The northeast region of Thailand is a place populated with people of diverse backgrounds and histories. Inhabitants of this area are Thai citizens, but many also have Lao, Khmer, and Vietnamese ancestry and cultural practices. This is evidenced by the variety of food from these neighboring countries that is available near Thailand's eastern border and by temples around the area which each feature diverse architectural styles and practices representing the varying ethnicities that live here. Though this region is home to people of many backgrounds, they are united under the term *Isan* (อีสาน), a word of Pali/Sanskrit origin that simply means “northeast,” and which has come to refer to the region, its people, and the dialect of Thai spoken there. This complex regional identity has been defined more clearly at certain times, particularly in opposition to initiatives put forth by the central government, such as national standardized educational programs, which enforce the teaching of central Thai language and history in schools. These kinds of policies are aimed at affirming a national, cultural homogeneity, but find opposition among minority groups, who see such policies as an attack on their unique cultural identity. Meanwhile, many central Thais have associated the Northeast with the negative image of a backward society of simple, strange country folk and with the extreme poverty that defined this region in the past. In the modern day however, northeastern identity as expressed by Isan people and as perceived by other Thai peoples is beginning to change to reflect an urbanizing region.

Regional and local identities are expressed through many avenues of cultural practice, such as food, textiles, language, and architecture. One of the most prominent symbols of regional, rural identity is found in regional popular music styles such as *mo lam* (หมอลำ), and *luk*

thung (ลูกทุ่ง). This research will discuss a new genre of regional music in northeastern Thailand called *luk thung-mo lam* (ลูกทุ่งหมอลำ), which combines elements of *luk thung* and *mo lam* genres, but also brings in elements of specific international genres that have not been incorporated into regional music before. Within the last twenty years, this new style hybridizing *luk thung* and *mo lam* characteristics has come to prominence and is gaining popularity among Isan audiences of all age groups. *Luk thung-mo lam* is not only significant because of these new musical changes, but also because of its strong connection to modern regional identity in the northeast region. I will argue that this music and new regional identity in the northeast region of Thailand are reactions to a long-standing and continually evolving political and economic tension between this region and the central Thai government. Scholars such as James Mitchell and Priwan Nanongkham have observed that the popularity of Isan music styles, such as *luk thung* and *luk thung-mo lam*, has helped to create a more positive image of the Isan region (Mitchell 2009, 2015; Nanongkham 2011). My work builds upon this research by showing how the adoption of the global is essential to the construction of modern Isan identity and gives specific examples of how this identity change is being established and expressed through regional music.

Luk thung-mo lam is a vehicle for identity expression that is built upon previous genres and has a fascinating mix of influences. Both its predecessors, *mo lam* and *luk thung*, are at least somewhat hybrid genres, which use various Western pop-song musical styles mixed with those of the region. While *mo lam* is mostly popular only in Isan and in parts of Laos, *luk thung* has evolved to become popular with audiences throughout the country. *Luk thung-mo lam* is also beginning to achieve very wide popularity, by incorporating more outside musical genres while keeping many signifiers of Isan identity, which cater specifically to a northeastern audience. These northeastern elements include regional singing styles and instruments, heavy use of the

Isan language, and content referencing rural life, all of which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The research for the project took place with local artists in the province of Ubon Ratchathani, a well-known center for *luk thung* and *mo lam* musical styles. The main pool of data is comprised of interviews with several local composers and performing artists from the region. This study also focuses on youth involvement in this new genre, and presents interviews with students at Ubon Ratchathani University and Ubon Ratchathani Ratchabhat University. Both universities are located in the city of Ubon Ratchathani, the main urban hub within the province sharing its name. Many varieties of regional music are prevalent there and enjoyed by students from a diverse range of majors. Their engagement with regional music is varying in nature. Many students sing, dance, or write lyrical poetry as hobbyists, revealing a deep connection to and active participation in both traditional musical styles and new *luk thung-mo lam* songs. This phenomenon is evidence of the continued relevance of these musical styles as part of Isan identity and cultural expression.

Significance and Conceptual Framework

In this thesis, the discussion of musical development and the shifting sociopolitical terrain of the Isan region will be used to investigate shifts in modern Isan identity. This argument will be framed according to several previous examples of theories on identity. Before diving into the literature on identity, however, I would like to briefly clarify the term “modern Isan identity,” which will refer to the most recent form of Isan identity. As Barbara Andaya has written in her article, “Historicizing ‘Modernity’ in Southeast Asia,” the word “modernity” tends to carry with it connotations of incorporating Western influence at the expense of traditional beliefs and practices, but from a historical perspective, societies in Southeast Asia have been part of

complex systems of trade and intercultural interaction long before contact with the West. There is a willingness in many of these areas to adopt outside influence and adapt it to local ways of life, and this process of localization through combining imported elements with endemic elements is the true definition of “modernity” in Southeast Asia (1997). In a later work by Arjun Appadurai, he states, “it may be time to rethink monopatriotism,” as he discusses the emergence of what he calls “transnations,” groups whose primary identity is not defined within a particular nation-state (1998, 174). This is the context from which this research will use the phrase “modern Isan identity”. It will be evident through later examples that the adoption of the modern into Isan life and music is not focused specifically on the West, but on the global influences and ties within the Southeast Asian region. It has certainly been shown that the adoption of other Asian musical styles is a common practice in other musical genres of Thailand as well (Wong 1998; Siriyuvasak 2009; Miller 2010; Ware 2011).

Throughout this thesis the terms local and regional will both be used to discuss musical styles, culture, and identities. The word “local” is in reference to small-scale areas such as a village, city, or province. This includes communities that are part of an ethnic minority, which may have distinct nuances of cultural practices that exist in a broader sense across Northeastern Thailand. Historically, this local community level is the primary way people had identified themselves and their places of origin. The term “regional” will refer to cultural practices which are widespread throughout Northeastern Thailand. Regional aspects of culture may be found in various local forms, but exist generally across the region and are distinct from country-wide practices or those found in the more metropolitan central Thailand. It is more common in the present day for people in this area to identify themselves according to region, as Isan, a transition that will be outlined further in Chapter 2. In some instances, I will also reference the region

surrounding the Mekong river basin, which includes Isan as well as parts of China, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The shared geographical environment within this area has resulted in similar agricultural pursuits among these various communities and shared rural experience. Trade and idea exchange within this region is expanding and is an important contribution to Isan's growing economy. When discussed, this area will be referred to as the Mekong basin region.¹

The musical mingling of international and traditional styles used to discuss modern Isan identity in this thesis will be framed in terms of the localization theory laid out by O.W. Wolters in his book, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (1999, 55–57). Wolters uses the term “localization” to refer to the process by which foreign materials are brought into a new cultural context, broken down, so as to alter their original significance, and then restated to take on new meanings. He elaborates that “the materials, be they words, sounds of words, books, or artifacts, [have] to be localized in different ways before they [can] fit into various local complexes of religious, social, and political systems and belong to new cultural ‘wholes’” (1999, 55). The research for this thesis covers the localization of foreign musical styles and techniques, which have been brought into *luk thung-mo lam* songs and altered to aid in the expression of Isan ideals rather than those of their original creators.

Modern Isan identity has a complex position in Thailand today. As previously stated, the soft power of Isan culture being shown through music and television across the country is contributing to a higher status for Isan people in Thailand (Mitchell 2009; Nanongkham 2011;

¹ The name Mekong comes from Thai and Lao terms for this river, *mae nam khong* (แม่น้ำโขง), frequently shortened to *mae khong* (แม่โขง), which means “the Khong river,” making the English name redundant for Thai speakers. Since Mekong river is the familiar and common English name, I will refer to the river as such, but when referencing the region, I will simplify the phrase to “Mekong basin region.”

Yano 2013). Nevertheless, the tension between Isan and central Thailand has far from disappeared. People in Ubon Ratchathani have certainly not forgotten the friction that led Red Shirt protestors to set fire to local city hall buildings in 2010 (Elinoff 2012).² I contend that while the overall political tension between Isan and the central government has been improving, the assertion of Isan independence and capability is still an important goal for many Isan people. As Martin Stokes points out, “For regions and communities within the context of the modernising nation-state that do not identify with the state project, music and dance are often convenient and morally appropriate ways of asserting defiant difference” (1994, 12). Music allows people to profess their identity in a positive manner and express regional pride in a non-threatening fashion, which bolsters self-awareness among their communities.

It is also important to keep in mind that, as Simon Frith claims, music is an active agent of identity, not only serving as a reflection of its creators and consumers, but also as a continual reiteration of that identity, which is in turn reabsorbed and reinterpreted (1996, 109). This new genre of *luk thung-mo lam* uses musical stylings, content, and language to maintain and assert Isan identity in a new way. It is inseparable from the cultural context in which it is created and is also inherent to the continuing political discourse present between Isan and central Thai governmental entities.

² The Red Shirts is a group of political protesters connected to rural communities in the Northeast that has been active in expressing discontent with the central government since 2006. This group will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Review of Literature

Ethnomusicological Studies of Isan Musics

As previously stated, this research will focus on the genre known as *luk thung-mo lam*. Since it has not yet been extensively studied, this emerging compositional style is sometimes difficult to categorize. It first emerged during the 1970s as *mo lam* artists began to compose in a popular song format. Since *luk thung* was already a widespread genre of popular regional music, many artists would develop their new songs by mixing the two. In some cases, *luk thung-mo lam* songs would very clearly alternate between a faster *mo lam* section and a slower *luk thung* section. Despite its mainstream influences this style continued to be referred to as *mo lam* due to the persistence of traditional melodies within the vocal part. As artists continued to integrate more harmonies and instruments from international genres, the music started to be called *luk thung-mo lam* by radio DJs (Nanongkham 2011, 206). One example of this is the common use of brass instruments, which can cause *luk thung-mo lam* to sound similar to a ska band. Since this genre emerged mainly out of traditional *mo lam*, but, like *luk thung*, began adding Western elements to become popular as a commercialized genre, it is still sometimes simply referred to as *mo lam*. This genre has been little discussed in academic writing, except by certain Thai academics (Sanong 2541/1998; Tinnakorn 2554/2011; Nanongkham 2011). Each of these researchers discuss *luk thung-mo lam* while categorizing various forms of Isan musical styles, though it is not the sole focus of any of these works. Nanongkham offers the most elaboration on this genre in her dissertation, which gives a comprehensive discussion of contemporary Isan musical styles and their cultural contexts.

Since *luk thung-mo lam* incorporates elements of many other genres, this research will also build upon the works of previous scholars on other types of regional music as well. One of

the earliest works on this subject is the dissertation research of Carol Compton, which takes a linguistic approach to texts sung in Laotian *mo lam* traditions (1979). The most prominent voice in Western scholarship regarding music in the northeast region of Thailand is Terry Miller. This began with his dissertation in 1977, which was followed by numerous publications on various Thai music traditions, including central Thai court music, as well as other genres from Thailand's diverse musical milieu (Miller 1985; Miller 1992; Miller and Chonpairot 1994). These works give a good overview of the many different forms of Isan music and performance styles. Among Terry Miller's later works is one of the earliest articles on *luk thung*, focusing on how Isan identity has been cast in a more positive light through the spread and adoption of this genre across Thailand (2005).

There have been several other scholars who have talked about *luk thung* and other genres of popular music. It is important to note that there are different categories of *luk thung* songs based on location, including *luk thung klang* (ลูกทุ่งกลาง), the word *klang* meaning “central,” which is an urban genre and popular throughout Thailand, but has origins in rural areas, and *luk thung Isan* (ลูกทุ่งอีสาน), which is more popular in the Northeast, more heavily mixed in with northeastern regional musical elements, and makes use of Isan language. Most of the music studied in the following articles is *luk thung klang*. This includes the work of Amporn Jirattikorn, who has looked at how the lines between central Thai popular music and *luk thung* have become increasingly blurred as *luk thung* has become more popular (2006). Another scholar of popular *luk thung* music is Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, who has written and spoken extensively on music commercialization in Thailand including *luk thung* and other popular genres (1990, 2007, 2008).

Additionally, several scholars have discussed popular music in Thailand as an avenue for political commentary (Pamela Myers-Moro 1986; Craig Lockhard 1989; Daniel Ledingham

2000; Mitchell 2011, 2015; Tausig 2016). Research on Thai popular music also includes Michael Hayes' work on the development of Thai pop music styles throughout post-World War II economic expansion in Thailand (2004), and Vicki-Ann Ware's writing on popular fusion music as an avenue for identity maintenance in central Thailand (2011).

In addition to these English language works on Thai music, Thai language resources were used as references. These include thesis research by Sanong Klangprasri (2541/1998) discussing developments in specific subgenres of *mo lam*, a collaboratively written book outlining the ways *luk thung* songs were influenced by earlier folk traditions (Anok et al. 2532/1989), an historical record of *luk thung* music in the Isan region (Waeng 2545/2002), and a case study on the music of *mo lam* artist Banyen Rakkaen (Tinnakorn 2554/2011).

In summary, these collective works have outlined a very basic history of Isan music styles, identified some unique musical elements of these styles, discussed how the widespread popularity of these styles has helped raise the status of Isan peoples in the eyes of other Thais, and chronicled the utilization of Isan musics for protest during recent Thai political conflicts. Additional research on Thai popular music has shown how modernization has influenced the development of new urban identities within central Thailand. This thesis will add to the existing literature by investigating newly developing regional identities within the Northeast region specifically, outlining changes in Isan music through a regional perspective, and analyzing new music that has not been explored in previous studies.

Ethnomusicological Studies of National and Regional Musics

Thailand is certainly not the only place where regional identity has been expressed through music or where musical fusion has helped to redefine local identities. This research will contribute to an already significant group of studies regarding these topics in other locations.

There are several studies that give examples of how innovations in musical genres associated with particular communities have localized an element borrowed to reinvent local traditions (Dent 2005) or develop a cosmopolitan culture and encourage nationalism (Turino 2000). Anderson Sutton's work on fusion music in Korea emphasizes the distinct Koreanization of fusion styles and reminds the reader that "authentic" regional musics are built on histories of borrowing and new variations seen today are part of the same musical innovations that have always occurred (2011). In some cases, the clash between the incorporation of new features and the maintenance of tradition has resulted in split responses and alternative modernities (Cooper 2015). Frederick Lau has outlined a similar situation regarding regional musics in China and makes the important point that the contexts of these musics and the processes which create them are indispensable from the pursuit of defining and describing their meaning (2015). These works will be used as comparative references throughout this study.

Methodology and Research Plan

The goal of this study is to investigate the importance of new innovations in the genre of *luk thung-mo lam* to young people in the northeastern region. More specifically, this study will explore this style's representation of a modern Isan identity and its influences on the regional social landscape of northeastern Thailand. To gather data surrounding this topic, several qualitative data collection methods were employed, and results were evaluated through interpretive analysis. The data collection methods utilized included interviews, participant observation, and musical analysis.

The first portion of the data consists of interviews with two main groups of informants: university students and local singers/songwriters. The university students were enrolled in a variety of degree programs at the University of Ubon Ratchathani (UBU) and Ubon Ratchathani

Rajabhat University (UBRU). Ubon Ratchathani, the second largest city in the northeastern region, is a notable home to many famous composers and performers of Isan music. The city is known for its particular style of traditional music performance, which, due to its proximity to the border of Laos, is similar to Lao forms of *mo lam*. Ubon Ratchathani has become famous as a center for musical study and performance, particularly with renowned composers originating from this province, such as Sala Khunwut (สลา คุณวุฒิ). As UBU is a very prominent and respected university, the student population comes from both the immediate area and the Isan region. In contrast, UBRU's students come mainly from Ubon Ratchathani province. These two universities and Ubon Ratchathani's history as an important site for Isan musical development made it a good fieldwork location to have access to students and to conduct interviews. Students were interviewed about the value of different Isan musical styles and how they engage with and enjoy this music. Students who perform either casually or professionally were also asked about the importance of performing. Sample interview questions can be found in Appendix B, and notes on conducting interviews in Thai are discussed at the end of this chapter.

The second group of people interviewed includes a handful of local composers of *mo lam* or *luk thung-mo lam* songs. These included hobby composer Rapeepan Pitakaso, who goes by the stage name Doctor Tat (ต๊อดเตอร์ทัช), *mo lam* singer and band leader Noppadon Duangpon (นพดล ดวงพร), noteworthy singer/songwriter Chalernporn Malakham (เฉลิมพล มาลาคำ), and famous singers Tai Orathai (ต่าย อรทัย) and Banyen Rakkaen (บานเย็น รากแก่น), who is one of Thailand's National Artists. All these artists are from the Ubon Ratchathani area and are celebrated and admired throughout the northeast region. Songwriters were asked about what musical elements they include in their

songs to express regional identity as well as how they write songs for younger audiences and what they see as traditional elements of musical composition (See Appendix B).

In addition to interviews with students and local artists, data was also gathered about musical engagement through participant observation at regional *luk thung-mo lam* musical performances. These kinds of concerts are frequent, especially during festivals and holiday celebrations, which occur roughly once a month. As small-scale, informal musical performances, these concerts cater to the local populace. Information gathered from these performances is important for gauging the age and socioeconomic composition of an average concert audience. It also provides first-hand information about how locals engage with music at musical performances. Data was collected regarding local engagement in the form of written notes and video recordings.

Musical analysis was the final method of data collection. Throughout this investigation, I gathered musical recordings and lists of songs and styles of Isan music that are significant to informants. To facilitate analysis of elements which represent the Isan region and its culture, sections of some popular songs have been transcribed and included in Chapter 4. In this analysis I rely on the comments of informants to ascertain the importance of these songs and to understand underlying meaning of poetic song lyrics, but I also use this musical analysis data to discuss the kinds of musical characteristics employed. This includes analysis of the types of Western music that are used in the composition of the song, as well as elements of musical performance taken from traditional Isan performance styles. This analysis serves to outline the basics of how *luk thung-mo lam* can be musically understood as a new genre and to show how regional identity is expressed musically in addition to lyrically.

Notes on Conducting Interviews in Thai

This research utilizes interviews with both regional music performers and university students. For these interviews, efforts have been made to allow students and artists to interview in their native language. This has been done primarily because most performing artists in the Isan region do not speak English. While some university students may be able to answer questions in a simple fashion in English, they will be able to express themselves more fully and accurately in Thai.

This language barrier leads to several complications. The first of these issues is the problem of translating some ideas from English to Thai. Concepts such as “identity” or “hobbies” do not exist in the Thai language as they do in English, or are only words used commonly by academics in particular contexts. In cases where these words are used, questions may have to be altered or require additional explanation to get the interviewee to understand what is being asked.

Secondly, the accuracy of response translation can be difficult due to a number of reasons. One of these is the phenomena of foreigner “baby talk,” wherein a native speaker will simplify their statements and ideas when speaking to a foreigner to compensate for a perceived lack of in-depth knowledge or language ability. To avoid this, translations of questions were carefully composed and utilized appropriately complex and professional language whenever possible. This was achieved through the proofreading assistance of both professor of Thai language at the University of Hawai’i Mānoa, Dr. Yuphaphann Hoonchamlong, as well as by, International Relations officer and graduate student of English language teaching at the University of Ubon Ratchathani, Thanawoot Pakdeeya.

Another issue that can come up in translating interviewees' responses is the fact that Thai is a compounding language and certain combinations of words or phrases can be used to create several different meanings based on context. In addition, due to the nature of Thai as a tonal language, certain aspects of feeling and idea expression are conveyed through particle words that often do not have a direct translation in English. This makes it important to have native speakers advising in the translation process. After interviews were transcribed and translated, I depended on the expertise of the previously mentioned individuals, as well as that of Atchara Simlee, a native speaker of Isan and a professor of English at the University of Ubon Ratchathani, to answer translation questions and proofread anonymous sections of interviews.

Finally, anyone performing ethnographic research as an outsider in a community realizes that there are fundamental differences in how locals see the topic of research and how a researcher will come to approach these topics. The important things to consider throughout this research are what local people think about their own music and culture, how music is important to them, and what issues concern them most. Originally, this research intended to discuss the expression of sexuality through regional musical genres, but many people are uncomfortable with such sensitive topics, so sufficient data could not be collected from interviews. Notably, several people responded that such aspects of songs have no other meaning besides that they are humorous. This made it necessary to alter the focus of this study slightly, because of a lack of information or unwillingness to discuss sexuality as a topic. This topic could potentially be re-examined in future research with a revised approach and further field experience.

A related issue emerged when I spoke with well-respected Thai professors who have researched regional music. This research is heavily focused on youth involvement in these types

of music, but many Thai researchers tend to place greater value on people of a high, or official status not only within the genre, but also within the national Thai framework. On occasion such individuals would emphasize that the opinions of students are not important and that I should only be talking to classic or renowned genre artists. Navigating carefully through these cultural nuances was challenging, but I attempted to maintain an impartial perspective throughout the interview process and to remain aware of the bias from both my informants and from myself as a researcher. In this thesis, I hope to have presented an unbiased, critical view, while simultaneously respecting the unique viewpoints of both performing artists and university students.

Chapter 2 – Country Life

This chapter will create for the reader an image of life in rural Thailand by connecting the history of the northeast region to its current economic and political situations. In addition, these cultural changes will be connected to the traditional and modern roles of music in Isan society. This background will set the stage for the following discussions of how Isan music has evolved and how the current *luk thung-mo lam* genre is reflective of modern Isan identity.

Isan history and the Region's Incorporation into Thailand

The Isan region's complex history and cultural ties to people in Laos and Cambodia are major factors when observing modern day relations between Isan and the central Thai government, as well as regional feelings of nationalism and identity. Even from before the establishment of Thailand as a kingdom, the area along the banks of the Mekong river in Southeast Asia has been home to people of various ethnic backgrounds. Many settlements in the areas that are today included in Laos and Thailand were part of the Mon-Khmer empire, or were smaller Lao settlements preceding the entry of Thai peoples into mainland Southeast Asia from what is now Southern China around the twelfth century (Baker and Phongpaichit 2009, 4). The Thais gradually moved south, developed a main center at Ayutthaya around the late fourteenth century, and eventually came to control the land on the Korat plateau to the west of the Mekong, which is today called Isan.

As the Thai kingdom continued to expand, frequent military interactions Burmese and Lao forces resulted in frequently changing boundaries of border control. After the destruction of the first Thai capital in 1767 and the transition of Thai central powers to the present-day Thai capital of Bangkok, increased militarization led to efforts to expand the Thai state through conquering neighboring lands, populating those lands, and building a strong trade economy

(Baker and Phongpaichit, 26-29). Throughout this process, many people from invaded areas were forcibly relocated to sparsely populated regions within Thai control such as the Northeast. These conquered peoples were used to grow rice in rural areas, help rebuild the capital in the central region, and establish a fixed presence in border territories. This type of relocation increased the diversity already found within populations of this region.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, this process of state establishment was expedited by the entrance of opposing British and French colonial forces on the Southeast Asian mainland. While the Thais avoided coming under colonial control, the encroachment of Western powers on all sides necessitated careful negotiation of border lines along the periphery of their control. This threat of foreign takeover motivated the Thai government to assert control over the country as part of a cohesive whole, though the northeast region had more linguistic and cultural similarities with people across the newly-drawn border than with those in the Thai capital. Significant resistance movements were encountered during the initial effort to incorporate areas in the Northeast. Many Isan people desired to create an independent state, separate from both the central Thai monarchy and the French forces farther east (Baker and Phongpaichit 2009, 56). However, these movements were not sufficiently equipped to succeed against the central military force and the northeast region remained part of the new Thai nation-state.

The maintenance of unity and creation of Thai nationhood remained an integral part of proving the new Thai state's sovereignty amid neighboring states run by colonial invaders. Throughout this early time of state formation, the monarchy focused on unification through religion, language, and history. In 1921, the Thai government instated compulsory education, which included the teaching of central Thai language, Buddhism, and a code of discipline. While people in northeastern Thailand were already following the Theravada Buddhist tradition,

regional practices of Isan people differ significantly from central Thai Buddhist teachings and are intermixed with elements of animism and spirit or ancestor worship. Additionally, Northeastern Thai and Lao Buddhist practices include more festivals and celebrations surrounding the harvest season and rural life, such as Bun Bangfai (บุญบังไฟ), the Rocket Festival, where Isan peoples fire a large rocket into the sky to call upon the gods for rain during the dry season. These festivals take place within a version of Buddhist practice, but also incorporate elements of belief predating Buddhism in this region (Somchai 2011; Lefferts and Cate 2012).

Policies aimed at enforcing standardized education and religion met resistance in the Northeast and were perceived as an attempt to supersede local language and culture. Tensions between people in the Northeast and the central government became more pronounced throughout the 20th century. Preceding World War II, Plaek Phibunsongkram (แปลก พิบูลสงคราม) was one of the military leaders who staged Thailand's 1932 coup d'état, and six years later took over as Prime Minister and commander of the Thai military. His fascist leanings and desire to build an intense sense of nationalism led to twelve cultural mandates, one of which outlawed the use of minority languages such as Isan. Phibunsongkram's style of nation-building also emphasized creating a "modern," Westernized culture. As a result, many traditional art forms, including both regional folk music and Thai court music traditions, were banned.

Following a change in leadership in 1957, these harsh policies were redacted. Focus shifted toward preserving Thai traditions rather than forcing Thai culture to fit international standards, but the interdiction of local customs was not quickly forgotten by people in the Northeast. In addition to these types of policies, which threatened the local way of life, economic differences have also led to resentment in Isan. As a section of Thailand that is located atop the dry Korat plateau and dependent on agriculture, this region had experienced greater rates of

poverty than any other area of the country. Discontent continued to grow when the government ignored requests for developmental investment in projects such as roads and healthcare.

Frustration among rural communities fueled a burgeoning interest in socialist ideals as a possible avenue to fulfill economic needs. Home to a third of both Thailand's land and population, Isan's political power and proximity to communist Laos made the Northeast a legitimate threat to Thailand's nascent constitutional monarchy. Fears of communist sentiments led the central government to enforce standardized education policies in the northeast region, which was seen by local people as an attack on their way of life and identity.

During this period of growing tension between the Northeast and the central government, Charles Keyes documented a shift in how people of this region identified themselves. He noted a trend toward identifying primarily as Isan rather than as a member of a local village or city, which had been more common historically (1966; 1967). Later research by Patrick Jory observed the increase in identification by region in many areas of Thailand (1999). He connects this emergence of regional identities with the relaxation of assimilationist policies and to rapid economic development throughout Thailand since the 1960s. Duncan McCargo and Krisadawan Hongladarom confirm the findings of Keyes and Jory, and note an increasing tendency toward identifying with one's region in the Northeast, though they also note a greater complexity in what being Isan means to different people (2004).

This shift in identity occurred in opposition to nationalization policies, but also in connection to another significant trend in this region. Along with an increase in regional identity through the latter half of the century, it became more common for Isan peoples to leave their villages to pursue work outside of the northeastern region (Kirsch 1966). While migratory work had been a longstanding part of rural life, this trend became more pronounced in conjunction

with the economic expansion within Thailand following World War II. Keyes observed during his later research in a Northeastern village that children were often forced to find work in the cities rather than follow in their parents' footsteps as increasing population growth made it difficult for families to live entirely on sustainable agriculture. He remarked that by the 1980s nearly every man in the village he studied had worked away from the village at least temporarily and many had worked abroad (2012, 350-2). The increase in Isan peoples finding urban work has not only increased the numbers of Northeasterners permanently taking up residence in central Thailand, but has also led to a different kind of relationship between Isan and central Thailand. In her research on labor migration of both men and women in Thailand, Mills states that, "Urban wage work is not only an increasingly necessary source of cash income for rural residents, it is also a desired source of material and symbolic capital with which villagers can challenge their marginal location within the nation's moral and geographic hierarchies (2001, 179)." This labor migration is not limited to work within Thailand's borders, but many Isan peoples have taken up residence abroad to make money to send back home as well (Plambech 2016). These trends have contributed to what Keyes has termed "cosmopolitan villagers," who view themselves as part of a rural community of global citizens (2012, 2014). In my own experience I was consistently surprised to learn of the travelled nature of some people I interacted with, such as the religious leader of a small village who had worked in the U.S. in his younger years, a student whose mother sent money back home from working in Europe for months at a time, and university staff members who had visited several other Southeast Asian countries on holiday. Many of them still depend on an agricultural lifestyle, but unlike the fifty-year old stereotypes that some Bangkokians have of people in this region, many Isan peoples are well traveled, engaged in national politics, and part of a growing regional economy.

This growing economic independence is also connected to the ongoing difference of political opinions between urban and rural peoples in Thailand. The most recent of these was the periodic Red Shirt and Yellow Shirt protests which occurred between 2006 and 2014 in connection to the military coup that deposed then-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (ทักษิณ ชินวัตร), or Thaksin. He was widely favored by rural peoples for instituting policies which funded healthcare and education for such communities. After Thaksin's overthrow in 2006, the Red Shirt group, formally known as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), began holding protests in Bangkok. During this time, the Yellow Shirts, formally known as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and primarily comprised of urbanites from central Thailand, also began demonstrating in support of keeping Thaksin out because of the financial corruption that occurred while he was in office. Thaksin has been in exile since then, but the tension and protests have continued between the two groups, at times violently. Experiencing eighteen coups since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, Thailand's government has not been known as historically stable. The divide between peoples living around Bangkok and peoples living in rural areas of the country, such as Isan, continues to grow (BBC 2012; Elinoff 2012; Shay 2014).

Past studies on Isan identity show the clear cultural difference and distance between people in this region from Central Thai identities and a long history of conflict. Most Thais are not eager to discuss their political opinions openly, particularly with unfamiliar newcomers, however I was able to discuss feelings on the topic with a few Isan friends during my fieldwork. While the present political situation between the two entities is not hostile, many Isan people, including young people, hold onto memories of how they perceive their communities have been wronged by governmental policies. Some of these memories, such as Red Shirt and Yellow Shirt

protests resulting in violence, occurred during their lifetime and they witnessed first-hand the tumultuousness of protests. Other memories, such as the historical governmental policies which outlawed the use of their regional language and restricted other cultural practices like regional music performance, had been passed down to them by their parents and grandparents. Even these inherited memories roused strong feelings of resentment in young people however, and those I talked with would express a firm desire to protect regional cultural practices and cultivate them for future generations. They did not want to forget these grievances, but use the memory of them to fuel feelings of regional pride and support aspirations to develop and strengthen their regional community.

This desire to bolster regional growth is undeniably affecting changes in the Isan economy, which grew by forty percent from 2007 to 2011 (Carsten & Temphairojana 2013). Today, Isan is dotted with several impressive urban centers, which continue to grow. These cities include what is known as the “Big Four of Isan,” Khorat, Khon Khaen, Udon Thani, and Ubon Ratchathani, the site of this research. Through this process of urbanization, more students are finding their way into universities after secondary school and attaining degrees in varying fields outside of agriculture. From my discussions with students in Ubon Ratchathani, families will expend a majority of their earnings to send a child to university, even at times when it makes village life difficult. Most of these institutions primarily serve students of the Isan region, but are beginning to gain traction as renowned regional institutions, building international programs and connections outside Thailand as well. While interviewing students, I found that there is an increasing interest among students of varying fields of study to travel outside of Isan. Even so, it was also clear that most of them envisioned themselves settling down somewhere close to or within their own communities, either locally, or regionally. Most students are very closely tied to

their own culture, though many of the students I talked to envisioned themselves abroad for short periods of time to learn or gain experiences that they could then bring back to their home communities. Since many of their chosen career paths are urban centered, the landscape of the Isan region is slowly changing. This multifaceted alteration is simultaneously physical, as urban spaces are growing, economic, as businesses develop and expand, and social, as increasingly greater sections of the Isan population are located within or near an urban environment. This transformation of space coincides with the development of modern regional identity. One of the factors helping to form and reflect this new identity for young people is music.

Cultural Importance of Music in Isan

Throughout the history of the northeast region, there have been continued tensions between local culture and central Thai government policies of varying intensity. While feelings that the central government does not put Isan's economic interests first contributes to these feelings of discontentment, one of the main reasons for these tensions is that Northeasterners feel their regional and local identities are being threatened. Music is an essential part of cultural identity, both in the past and the present, for people in Northeastern Thailand. Before showing how *luk thung-mo lam* music is representative of modern Isan regional identity, the following section will show how music as an integral part of traditional cultural practices.

The oldest musical style heavily associated with the region is *mo lam*, which has existed in Lao communities throughout the Mekong river basin area since before Thai peoples migrated into the region in the 12th century. The name of this genre, comprised of the word *mo*, meaning “expert performer,” and *lam*, a type of singing, or together meaning “singing expert,” is used to

refer to the person performing, as well as to the musical genre.³ Many subgenres of *mo lam* have evolved from ancient practices within the past century, which are generally classified by either musical form or by region of origin. Many genres will have distinctive names in various parts of the region or songs could simultaneously fall under multiple categories (Miller 1985). There are also multiple theories about the origins of *mo lam*, including that it was a way to communicate with spirits that could protect villages, a method used by monks to communicate folk tales or stories of moral importance, or as part of ancient courtship rituals where men would go to a woman's house at night and gain her attention through the exchange of skillful prose (Miller 1985). The breadth of diversity of *mo lam* subgenres will be shown in more depth in Chapter 3.

Mo lam is necessary for celebrations of monthly festivals called the twelve hit (สิบสอง), which are part of unique religious beliefs of people in the Isan region, as well as for any other types of celebrations including births, weddings, funerals, and the ordaining of monks, among others. It is listened to on every occasion, formal and informal, or just to relax. *Mo lam* consistently features a narrative element in its performance, is found in both religious and secular contexts, and is common not only in Northeastern Thailand, but also throughout Laos.

The second style of music in Northeastern Thailand that is a component of *luk thung-mo lam* is *luk thung* music, which is a more recent musical development associated with rural life. *Luk thung* is a fusion genre which developed into what it is today by borrowing from various other genres both from within Thailand and internationally (Mitchell, 2015; Lockhard 1998). The words *luk thung* literally means “child of the field,” referring to the fact this genre was built on

³ The word *lam* on its own can be used to talk about a specific style of *mo lam*. For example, *mo lam khu* could simply be referred to as *lam khu*. In this thesis however, I will simply refer to all genres using the term *mo lam*, and will talk about performers as singers, performers, vocalists, etc.

catering to a rural audience where it first developed popularity. Today however *luk thung* music has become one of the most widely popular genres of music throughout Thailand and among audiences of all kinds. It has also developed various styles, including the previously mentioned *luk thung Isan* and *luk thung klang*. *Luk thung* music has mainly been a commercially produced pop genre, but is performed at concerts throughout the Isan region and beyond. Historic lyrics of *luk thung* songs often feature songs about country life, particularly from the point of view of someone working in an urban center. These songs often feature strong images of longing, either for home and a simpler life, or for a lover who is far away. This music reflects the heartache felt by those who are part of the labor migration trend throughout the northeast region and a reinforcement of the ideals and benefits of rural life.

Both *mo lam* and *luk thung* have fulfilled several functions in local societies, including narrating stories important to local beliefs and how people live their lives, providing entertainment at major, local events, and as a medium for people to express aspects of the Isan lifestyle. The three main ways that these musical styles are connected to Isan culture; content, purpose/use, and attitude. In the next chapter, there will be additional discussion of the musical characteristics of each of these genres and how they represent Isan sonically. These musical styles are woven into Isan lives on every level, which was clear to me when talking to local people and students about what this music meant to them.

Importance of Isan Cultural Maintenance to Students

It has been shown that regional music styles are heavily integrated into Isan lives and are a multifaceted representation of what it means to be Isan. This was certainly true in the past, but to look at the evolutions of modern-day Isan society, one needs to examine how young people view regional music and the maintenance of traditional culture. This is especially true for those

young people who are moving away from the traditional, agricultural career path and into urban careers, which is one of the reasons this research focused on university students.

Before delving into interactions with students themselves, I will briefly outline institutionalized efforts to promote and maintain regional cultural identity to present a picture of the environments in which these students are developing. The two major institutions in Ubon Ratchathani, Ubon Ratchathani University (UBU) and Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University (UBRU), regard regional progress and development as a primary goal. The mission statement of UBU is “to be a leading teaching and learning university in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, producing graduates of high quality, and creating knowledge and innovations for a sustainable society (UBU International Relations Office 2017),” while the UBRU slogan is “to create wisdom and lead in local development (Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University n.d.).” Both universities place their goals firmly within a regional context, seeking to improve their societies through introspective examination and advancement. UBU has a yearly agricultural fair to promote local agricultural endeavors, where local farmers and those who sell farming equipment come to show their wares. This week-long festival is also accompanied by *luk thung-mo lam* performances every evening. UBU was also the host of a conference promoting the exchange of sustainable agricultural practices throughout the Greater Mekong Sub-region, which includes areas of Laos and Cambodia. This gathering prominently displayed Ubon Ratchathani’s developing sustainable farming practices and promoted collaboration not only across the Isan region, but also across national borders within the Mekong basin region. The conference emphasized that these connections will be beneficial for international rural communities, who share agriculturally-based economies and many cultural traits.

Not only were these types of events centered around economic goals and preservation of local livelihoods, but there were also events aimed at the promotion of regional cultural arts. I was fortunate to attend a conference at UBRU surrounding *luk thung Isan* and musical development of the region. One of the main focuses of attending scholars was the maintenance of traditional forms of *mo lam* from around the region. Musicians from several universities across Isan were in attendance and several musical performances and examples were part of this exciting gathering.

Issues of maintaining regional identity and regional development are certainly a valued discourse within the university setting. Moreover, it is also relevant for young people in this area. Through looking at personal involvement of students in these art forms and interviewing students from varying backgrounds, I gained a better understanding of the importance of these art forms from their perspective.

I will begin by looking at the groups of students with whom I interacted who actively participated in the production of regional music, either as hobbyists or with a goal to pursue music as a career path. The first of these groups comprise the student dancers and singers from UBRU, who were all majoring in performing arts. I interacted with these students while attending several of their performances outside of the university, both on their own and in conjunction with another very well-known performer, Banyen Rakkaen. The students were generally paid a very small amount for these performances, but mostly participated to practice what they were learning and contribute to community music performances which were typically orchestrated by their professors. Every dance student that I talked with had a professional goal of becoming a teacher. It is quite common for children to be taught the basics of traditional dance. When I asked them where they would like to work, the recurring response was that anywhere in

the Isan region would be fine. They wanted to remain close enough to Ubon Ratchathani that they could see their families frequently, and continue to be a part of Northeastern culture. I frequently asked if any of them wanted to be performers and they would all respond saying that they weren't good enough to perform on stage outside of these smaller performances, generally informing me that most professional dancers come from larger universities closer to central Thailand, but that they wanted to teach and pass on their cultural traditions. The few vocal performance students also stated that while they would still participate in local performances at temples or city festivals such as the ones I had seen, they would make their money mainly through teaching. Since performing arts is their chosen career path, these students are obviously particularly focused on the importance of music and dance, but even if they are not doing so as performers, there is still a need for teachers to pass on these traditions.

On the occasions when I went to watch the UBRU student dance group, I would also encounter student musicians who played for the performances. Most of the musicians were male, and did not seem overly eager to talk to me, but agreed to answer a few questions. These students played a variety of instruments and all came from outside the performing arts department. When I asked about what they studied, each of them were from different departments. All these students performed for fun or for a little extra money, but intended to take up careers in other fields. They were asked to perform these gigs either because there was not a strong music program at the university for instrumentalists of that kind, or because the students who were working toward being professional performers were busy doing more highly-paid work. When I asked about interviewing them about their music, no one seemed interested, and a couple of students would consistently insist on behalf of the group that they were not the people I should be interviewing, because they were not professional musicians. This echoed the kind of

sentiment that I received previously from a professor as well. If it wasn't professional, it wasn't worth looking at and I was wasting my time talking to hobbyists. This discrediting of casual performance participation was very interesting to me, and I believe reflected on the undeniable fact that to become a well-known performer, especially of traditional style performance practice, takes a great deal of skill and dedicated training with an already respected performer. This may also reflect cultural norms which value humbleness and deference to those of higher status, particularly elders or those with more skill, in lieu of drawing attention to oneself. Nonetheless, the prevalence of small, local performances of regional music means that there are numerous opportunities for these musicians to participate, even as hobbyists, and bring skills learned at their village homes into the city as well.

In addition to the UBRU students who perform as hobbyists, there is also a student music club at the University of Ubon Ratchathani (UBU) for students from various faculties who want to participate in regional style music performance. While there are a couple of other music clubs on campus, including pop and rock style music, and Thai classical or court tradition music, there is no established music program at UBU outside of hobby groups. This group meets almost every week to practice several types of *mo lam*, *luk thung*, and *luk thung-mo lam* songs. They perform frequently for on-campus events and festivals, and are occasionally hired for outside events. When I asked about whether they are paid for their performances, they equated the money they receive to charity, because they usually would not be given enough money for the entire group, which includes musicians, singers, and dancers. They participate in performances because they love performing, want to continue contributing to their communities, and have a desire to perpetuate their traditional art forms. Much like the UBRU student musicians, these students come from a wide variety of faculties and grade levels, including a couple of alumni. Their

performances are certainly a labor of love. One student described why he joined: “there are two reasons, because it’s fun and I like it, and because it’s part of my identity, part of my family/country (UBU Student Music Club – Group 1 2017).” He elaborated on this, saying that after graduation, even though he would go work as a civil servant or politician, he would never discard this music and will always try to play when he has time.

When I interviewed these students, most expressed the desire to continue to perform after graduation within hobby groups around the region, time permitting. While this and the other groups would perform many types of Isan music, including traditional forms of *mo lam*, *luk thung Isan*, *luk thung-mo lam*, and sometimes Thai or Western pop songs, they repeatedly stated that *mo lam*, particularly *mo lam sing*, was a favorite of theirs and of their audiences. One student explained that, “people won’t be sleepy later in the evening when they are watching *mo lam* often, so we will alternate them [with the *luk thung* songs]” (UBU Student Music Club – Group One).

Creating an atmosphere of enjoyment at celebrations is part of what makes this musical style so important for Isan people. Through time *mo lam* has certainly evolved, but entertainment and celebration has always been a strong feature of this traditional Isan genre, which has contributed to its ongoing appreciation. The students that I interviewed were very accepting of the malleable nature of traditional forms of music. One student explained that this continuous change was part of *mo lam* style being “applied” to various other musical genres throughout its evolution (UBU Student Music Club – Group One). The same student later elaborated that in the future Isan music may be able to remain entirely as it is, or it may evolve through the incorporation of international music elements, but regardless, regional music styles will remain a

part of Isan culture through adaptation to the preferences of the public within specific historical contexts (UBU Student Music Club – Group One).

I asked some of these students to give examples of *luk thung-mo lam* songs they liked and where they thought the genre would go in the future. A very commonly mentioned song, which will be further analyzed in Chapter 4, is “O-la-no (โอละน้อ),” by Kong Huayrai (ก้อง ห้วยไร่), which incorporates a section of rap. When asked to elaborate as to why this song was important, one student responded that, “it has an aura of being from Isan (UBU Student Music Club – Group Two).” Another student gave this song as an example of how this style of music won’t disappear, but it will “gradually evolve according to context” (UBU Student Music Club – Group Two). Many of the students listed the music they listen to for enjoyment including the music that they play, such as *luk thung Isan* and *mo lam*, but also international genres, such as Korean pop songs and English-language popular music. One student suggested that in the future there might be *mo lam* songs that mixed in elements of K-pop, or that perhaps a well-known singer like Siriporn might do a cover of an Adele song (UBU Student Music Club – Group Two). The incorporation of these new elements into Isan musical forms, though moving farther away from typical *mo lam* songs, represents something significant to these students.

More evidence of this can be found in a viral video seemingly showing American pop music artists, Jay-Z and Linkin Park, performing the well-known *mo lam* song, “Sing Kha Nong Lam (สิงคขนองลำ)” by Monkhaen Kaenkhun (มนต์แคน แก่นคูน) and Maithai Jaitawan (ไมไทยใจตะวัน) (kavara jank 2012, <http://youtu.be/NGMdi579mzg>). The video editing was so convincing that it was forwarded to me by several Thai friends asking if it was real. While American pop artists did not, in fact, do a live performance of a *mo lam* song in Philadelphia, this video affirms the imagination of Isan music as part of global popular culture. For young listeners, hybrid songs are

not viewed as tainting older musical forms, but are taking their region into a new era. Emerging musical changes which reflect how the Isan region is urbanizing and growing in economic power will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

Life in Northeast Thailand is a product of diverse roots and historically inseparable from rural living revolving around agriculture. People from this region have been struggling to assert their own identity vis-à-vis the central Thai mindset for decades. They continue to negotiate their own identity and grow their own economic strength. Regional styles of music are an integral element of Isan culture which maintain, describe, and perpetuate developing ideas surrounding regional identity. The opinions of young people in this region are focused on maintaining their culture in an entirely new way. Incorporation of outside elements is not something viewed as polluting the original, but rather as a means of reinforcing traditional culture by bringing it into a modern world.

Chapter 3 – Characteristics of Isan Music

This chapter will discuss in depth the different types of Isan music, their common musical characteristics, and how they have evolved into the contemporary songs being discussed in this thesis. This will touch on the audiences for these genres, what musically makes these genres Isan, and how composers write for their desired audiences. To begin I will identify some of the typical musical characteristics of styles previously discussed. I will also add to this existing knowledge with data collected from my own observations and interviews with Isan artists.

Each of the genres that are discussed in this chapter feature some level of musical characteristics that express Isan identity. Many signifiers are held in common across all of them. One of these is the use of instruments associated with the northeastern area, including the *khaen* (แคน), a free-reed, bamboo mouth-organ, and the *phin* (พิณ), a two-, three-, or four-stringed, plucked chordophone, which give regional musics a distinct timbre (See Image 1). The use of these instruments is a signifier of not only the Isan region, but rural life in Thailand and Laos.

In addition, many of these genres employ regional singing styles and vocal ornamentations on melody lines. The first of these is *uean* (เอื้อน), a style of note-bending which, like a portamento, starts above or below the final pitch and slides to reach it. *Uean* is also found in Thai court music singing, but with a higher, straighter tone, which changes pitch at a much slower, more precise rate (Latartara 2012). In musical transcriptions in Chapter 4, *uean* will be notated as a glissando. The second technique is *luk kho* (ลูกคอ), a heavy fluctuation around a given note which can sound like overstated vibrato or a slow trill. *Luk kho* can either be sustained for only the partial duration of a note, or for the entire duration at the performer's discretion and

more similarly to vibrato, it is used very frequently in traditional *mo lam*, sometimes on strings of consecutive notes, or to transition between different notes. In later transcriptions, *luk kho* will be noted with a mordent over the specified note. These ornamentation styles are more frequently used in older styles of *mo lam* and to a lesser extent in more Westernized genres like *luk thung*. As Terry Miller points out, historically vocal music is thought to be more important than instrumental music due to its association with the reading of religious texts (Miller 1985, 22). Therefore, many of the ornamentation styles utilized by instruments in *mo lam* singing coincide with and mimic traditional singing ornamentation. Many *phin* accompaniments utilize bending notes or fast, fluttery trills that mimic these types of vocal ornamentations and give *mo lam* performances a distinctive flavor.



Image 1: Khaen (right) and phin (left) being performed. Image from music video for the song “O-la-no” (SOUND ME HANG Official 2017, “โอ้ละน้อ ก้อง ห้วยไร่ feat ปุ๊จ่าน ลองไหมค์ [Official MV]”).

Finally, the preservation of the Isan language through these musical styles is becoming increasingly important as the northeast region of Thailand is rapidly changing and this language is predicted to be less utilized in the future (McCargo and Hongladarom 2004; Draper 2015). Increasingly, young people are moving away from their family legacy of farming and are instead taking up urban forms of employment, becoming business-people, doctors, lawyers, and engineers. As career choices change, the regional culture and connection to rural living are also transforming. Regional music genres are helping to maintain local language, as with vocal ornamentation, more regional language is used in older styles while newer genres tend to only sprinkle in a few regional words. The following section presents a more focused discussion of each of these genres and their features.

Mo lam

In the previous chapter I briefly discussed the importance of *mo lam* and other regional music genres within Isan society. Here I will continue to outline some subgenres of *mo lam* and their musical characteristics. These are important types of *mo lam* found throughout Isan region, which are relevant to the discussions within this thesis, though it is not an exhaustive list. The first subgenre is called *mo lam phuen* (หมอลำพื้น) which is considered one of the oldest forms of *mo lam*, used to tell stories including local histories, or the *Jataka* (ชาดก), a collection of tales concerning the previous lives of the Buddha. *Mo lam phuen* is now nearly extinct and only found very rarely, but it is the basis for many contemporary types of *mo lam*.

Mo lam klon (หมอลำกลอน) and *mo lam khu* (หมอลำคู่) are styles performed by two performers, a male and a female. *Mo lam klon* is a type of performance that lasts all night long as a battle of wits between the sexes, consisting of clever, flirty banter between the two singers as they pretend

to fall in love and then tragically part. This is likely a genre that evolved from older practices of using *mo lam* songs in courting rituals (Compton, 1979). *Mo lam khu* performances also take up an entire night, but the content centers on a call and response style narrative to relate stories that would also require the performers to dance.

Mo lam mu (หมอลำหมู่) is a style of performance emerging around the 1930 which also relies on theatricality in its performance. *Mo lam mu* generally relates tales from the Jataka and popular folktales, just like *mo lam phuen*, but these stories are related by a much larger cast of singers and dancers dressed in intricate, flashy costumes performing on a larger stage featuring elaborate, colorful stage sets (See Image 2).



Image 2: *Mo lam mu* style stage set-up (Photo by Author, Ubon Ratchathani, 2017).

Mo lam sing (หมอลำซิ่ง) is one of the newest styles of *mo lam* and is the style most popular among young listeners. This style of *mo lam* is more lighthearted, consisting of sets of classic folk songs or any other kinds of popular Isan songs, generally those that allow the audience to dance. These are alternated with comedic performances that often consist of slapstick humor commonly featuring male performers cross-dressing. These performances are generally more Westernized, featuring fewer Isan instruments in a Western rock ensemble. These groups are attired in more Western costumes reminiscent of a cabaret dance group or a Western pop star rather than the historic outfits used in more traditional *mo lam* performances (See Image 3).

Figure 1: Subgenres of Mo lam

	Time of Origin	Ensemble Type	Primary Audience	Lyrical Content
Phuen	Oldest genre, precursor to other styles	Single vocalist accompanied by <i>khaen</i>	Small village settings, for festivals or religious events (rarely performed today)	Local histories, Jataka stories
Klon	Late 1800s/ Early 1900s	Male and female performer with varying accompaniment	Performed for people of all ages	Battle of wits between the sexes featuring flirty banter
Khu	Late 1800s/ Early 1900s	Male and female performer with varying accompaniment	Performed for people of all ages	Traditional stories performed in call and response form
Mu	Around 1930s	Large ensemble of 20-50 performers with ornate stage set and ensemble featuring Western instruments	Performed for people of all ages	Traditional folk songs and Jataka stories
Sing	1980s	Usually 1 or 2 main performers accompanied by back-up dancers and ensemble featuring Western instruments	This style is more popular with young audiences and is primarily for dancing	Lighthearted subject matter, usually love songs or covers of folk songs and popular music



Image 3: Traditional mo lam costuming (Photo by Author, Ubon Ratchathani, 2017).



Image 4: Mo lam sing costuming (Photo by Author, Ubon Ratchathani, 2017).

Within the varieties of *mo lam* there is significant overlap in musical characteristics, but also some features unique to specific forms of *mo lam*. These features are important because they are carried into contemporary *luk thung-mo lam* songs as a representation of the Isan region. Below I will outline a few primary musical traits of *mo lam* and offer quick descriptions of the subgenres that most commonly exemplify them.

Mo lam Musical Characteristics

First, I will briefly discuss the unique singing style of different *mo lam* songs. Since traditional songs are based on the recitation of poetry in various forms, much of the singing style for *mo lam* is elaborate and based heavily on the intonation of the Lao or Isan languages. Frequently, sections of a performance would be spoken as poetry or left open for the *mo lam* singer to improvise a small section relevant to the occasion for which the song was being performed (Miller 1985, 101; Nanongkham 2011, 208). In some instances, this gives the singing style a lilting, spoken-language sound to it—something that is especially typical of older forms of *mo lam*, such as *mo lam phuen*. After 1940, older genres like *mo lam phuen* began to decline in popularity, but the recitation style of singing is still frequently found in many types of *mo lam* performances as part of the vocal timbre. This vocal style in between speaking and singing is most frequently inserted between songs to send well-wishes to fans or discuss the occasion of the performance. A speech-rhythm section preceding the performance of modern versions of *mo lam* songs is also a continued traditional practice. These introductions involve the phrase “*o-la-no* (โถ้ ละโน้)” to call the listeners to attention before the singing begins. Singers occasionally use the same phrase between or to conclude songs.

In addition to a near-spoken word style of singing, the complex poetic patterns of *mo lam* lyrics contribute to certain rhythmic patterns in *mo lam* performances. The rhyming structure

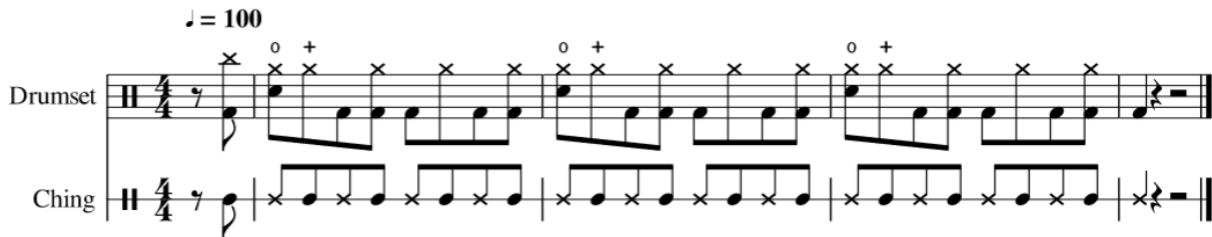
relies on length of words, which is a prominent feature of normal spoken language. Additionally, the Lao and Isan languages are tonal and depend on pitched inflections to convey meaning. Many old forms of *mo lam*, such as *mo lam phuen*, were performed by a single vocalist accompanied by *khaen*. In this case, a free-rhythm performance style prevailed where rhythm was dictated mostly by the flow of the poetry. In fact, *mo lam* singers insert any number of small words or phrases into improvised sections to match the song's rhythmic or poetic structure. Some of these types of words and phrases include *meua nan* (เมื่อนั้น), or “in that moment,” *jing laew* (จริงแล้ว), or “actually,” *de no* (เด น้อ), or “I beg you,” *si* (สี่), a word indicating future tense, *la maen wa* (ละแม่นว่า), “certainly,” and some words and phrases that do not have a direct translation, such as *doe* (ดื้อ), *la* (ละ), or *nang oei* (นางเอ้ย), which is a kind of title for a female, but with added emphasis. Each of these words may only be added at appropriate parts of poetic structure. For example, several words may only be used to conclude phrases or to tie two phrases together. As Terry Miller wrote of using these patterns, “Singers who use poor quality poetry or whose rhythm is mediocre cannot be successful in their careers” (Miller 1985, 105-6).

While this rhythmic poetry recitation was essential to older forms of *mo lam*, such as *mo lam phuen* and *mo lam klon*, as ensembles became larger this type of complexity in poetry began to decline. This is particularly true of theatrical forms such as *mo lam mu* and forms developed for dancing, like *mo lam sing*. For these types of performances, which required a larger ensemble and involved more audience participation, *mo lam* became defined by a quick, staccato rhythm that maintained the same basic beat throughout the entirety of the song. This beat would traditionally be played on a small pair of hand chimes called *ching* (ฉิ่ง) which keeps time with

two sounds: the open, undamped “ching” stroke and the damped, accented “chap” stroke.⁴ In more recent *mo lam* styles, performers generally add a drum-set and the resulting *mo lam* rhythm would look like the transcription below.

Typical Mo Lam Rhythm

Transcribed by Author



Transcription 1: Typical *mo lam* rhythm featuring drum-set and ching.

In addition to this spoken style of singing and rhythmic definition, many *mo lam* performances are often characterized by clever, poetic lyrics, which are commonly found in *mo lam klon* and *mo lam khu* performances. *Mo lam klon* performances, which involve exchanges between two singers, very prominently feature wit and banter as part of the performance style. The most popular style of this performance involves *lam chot* (ลำจ้อ), “problems” or “questions,” where singers alternate in asking each other riddles regarding aspects of Lao culture, including topics such as religion, literature, history, or geography (Miller 1985, 45). This requires the singers not only to have a strong command of poetic language but also to use their ingenuity to battle with their opponent for hours at a time (Rakkaen, personal interview, 2017). In *mo lam khu* performances, this back and forth banter takes the form of flirting between the two parties and often uses poetry to create double entendre that could refer to sexual desire and courtship

⁴ In this transcription the “ching” stroke is notated as a normal eighth note, while the “chap” stroke is notated as an eighth note with an “x” note-head.

through words that have innocent surface-level meanings. In the past, this type of *mo lam* singing was frequently employed in courtship rituals where a quick wit and beautifully recited prose were much more attractive than good looks (Rakkaen, personal interview, 2017).

Closely related to this idea of the expression of sexual desire through banter is the incorporation of humor into *mo lam* performances. Often this banter, whether sexual or simply a battle of wits will be for the audience's amusement and mischievously creates humor around a somewhat taboo topic. Awkward humor also manifests itself in more recent *mo lam* performances through use of small comedy shows between song performances or during costume changes for larger, theatrical styles of *mo lam*, such as *mo lam mu*. Cross-dressing and comically presented unrequited love are common themes for these short performances, showing the light-spirited nature of *mo lam* and a tendency to treat generally aberrant or somber topics in a comical fashion.

A final important characteristic of *mo lam* performance that has persisted through the years is a story-telling feature in *mo lam* lyrics. This was particularly true of older genres such as *mo lam klon*, sometimes also called *lam rueang* (ลำเรื่อง) which means “story,” or in more modern, large-scale performances of *mo lam mu*. This aspect has remained important in *mo lam* songs of all kinds. It is also true of commercially produced *mo lam* music and *luk thung-mo lam* music, which is condensed into a four or five-minute, radio-ready format. In these cases, viewing the music video is often necessary in order to interpret the lyrical meaning of a song. I discovered this while asking questions about my own translations of song lyrics and having several of my Thai friends ask what happened in the music video, because they could not tell the exact meaning from the words alone. These music videos tend to carry a large portion of the narrative element of newer songs.

As a genre evolving from an historical folk genre associated with religious stories into many divergent musical forms found throughout the northeastern region of Thailand today, *mo lam* is an undeniably important component of Isan society. While many elements of performance have been transformed through time, traditional musical characteristics persist in current forms. The spoken singing quality and ornamentation styles from traditional performance have continued to live on, along with a distinct rhythmic structure. In addition, important features of poetic lyrical content have also led to the continuation of witty banter, comedic interludes, and narrative form in many *mo lam* performances.

Luk thung

The second musical genre that has influenced and contributed to present-day *luk thung-mo lam*, is *luk thung* or “child of the field.” *Luk thung* is a fusion genre, which first emerged in Thailand emerged in the 1930s and was primarily popular among rural audiences (Lockhard 1998, 181). Artists contributed elements to *luk thung* from other Western-influenced, popular musics that preceded it, such as *phleng Thai sakon* (เพลงไทยสากล), or “new style Thai music,” and *phleng phuea chiwit* (เพลงเพื่อชีวิต), or “songs for life,” in addition to folk genres, like *ramwong* (รำวง), literally “circle dance music,” and *phleng Thai doem* (เพลงไทยเดิม), part of central Thai court music tradition. Within this genre, performers developed a pattern of borrowing melodies and performance practices from many other styles, including Western pop and rock music as well as other international musical genres such as salsa, K-pop, Japanese enka, and Indian Bollywood songs (Jirattikorn 2006).

Emerging simultaneously with *luk thung* was the genre *luk krung* (ลูกกรุง), which was also eclectically built on borrowing. The literal meaning of this genre’s name, “child of the city,”

suggests the different origins of the two genres. Both share similar influences, but there are some key differences in sound and subject matter. *Luk krung* tends to feature slower rhythms and focus on more romantic, carefree content, rarely commenting on social issues (Lockhard 1998, 183). *Luk thung* on the other hand, being more popular in rural areas, features themes of rural life in its lyrics and is more likely to critique economic and political problems faced by people living in these areas (Lockhard 1998, 185).

Over time, *luk thung* has gained popularity in the city as well as the country and branched into the previously outlined *luk thung klang* and *luk thung Isan* subgenres, which connect with different sections of its audience. In its formative years, *luk thung* was also heavily influenced by contributions from Isan musicians, which have left the genre with additional elements reminiscent of the Isan region. The transition of *luk thung* from its status as a rural genre to widespread, country-wide popularity is due in large part to the migratory work practices of the Isan community discussed in Chapter 2. Rural peoples working in Bangkok or abroad would bring their music with them, exposing Thais across the country to their unique styles. Migratory work practices also contribute to the content of *luk thung* songs. A prominent lyrical theme is the description of the Isan landscape and the romanticization of rural life, which serves as a comforting reminder of home for migrant workers (Mitchell 2015, 22). Because of its large audience living away from home, *luk thung* songs also tend to feature songs themed around longing, either for a distant absent lover or a romanticized pastoral life that was left back home.

Musically, these songs tend to be ballad-like, with slower rhythms than *mo lam* which complement the tender, melodic delivery of their romantic lyrics. *Luk thung* music typically includes the use of regional instruments and some Isan language, though usually to a lesser extent than *mo lam* songs. Generally, *luk thung* songs can be identified by Isan-style vocal

ornamentation and instruments over a smoother, Western pop song-style of singing. Known as “Thai country music,” *luk thung* from any part of Thailand conjures up images of rural, Northeast Thailand through use of regional music characteristics and country-centered lyrics.

Luk thung-mo lam

Luk thung-mo lam has come to be the genre that is most popular in the northeast region among a widely varying audience. As noted previously, *luk thung-mo lam* originated in the 1970s from the performance of *mo lam* in a popular song format. This genre’s incorporation of Western elements similar to that of *luk thung* songs eventually led to its designation as a separate genre by Isan radio DJs. *Luk thung-mo lam* is unique as a popular, commercialized genre created specifically for Isan listeners. At times, *luk thung-mo lam* can be difficult to distinguish from other regional musical genres that have fused with pop and rock styles, such as *luk thung Isan*. A defining characteristic of *luk thung-mo lam* is that it remains more connected to traditional *mo lam*. In her dissertation, Priwan Nanongkham argues that *luk thung-mo lam* singing follows traditional *mo lam* style and sounds more closely connected to the poetic structure based on linguistic rhythms (Nanongkham 2011, 208). Performers of *luk thung-mo lam* also tend to use more Isan language in their songs. This focus on Isan listeners is one of the reasons it has become so popular throughout the region.

Evidence of *luk thung-mo lam*’s popularity is found when one realizes composers and singers, including older, well-known artists, who specialize in the performance of many different traditional styles also sing newer music (Rakkaen, personal interview, 2017; Malakham, personal interview, 2017). Most of the artists that I spoke with viewed *luk thung-mo lam* music quite favorably and did not seem to perceive it as a threat to older styles. Chalernporn Malakham was approving in his discussion of new *luk thung-mo lam* songs and proudly showed off his son’s

reggae-style compositions, one of which will be examined in Chapter 4, as fascinating innovations in Isan music. Another composer with whom I spoke with described how audiences listen to new fusion music, but also continue to listen to *luk thung Isan* and *mo lam*, making the average Isan person's tastes quite eclectic. He asserted that his music was more Western than anything else, but that Isan character was added in through Isan language, Isan instrumentation, and stories about the lives of Isan people (Pitakaso, personal interview, 2017). Artists who perform many styles are able to tap into the popularity of more modern genres while maintaining traditional *mo lam* styles as well.

The coexistence of traditional and modern musical styles was also evident at the many concerts I attended. In most cases, songs tended to get livelier toward the end of the night and include more fusion genres. As an example, at one religious concert the opening songs were very traditional, including songs meant specifically as offerings to honor the Buddha and the holiday celebration. The songs that followed became increasingly upbeat and mainstream as the night progressed. Toward the end of the evening, the performers covered popular *luk thung-mo lam* songs, such as “Phua Phai (ผ้าผี)”, which will be discussed more in the Chapter 4, and “Kho Jai Thoe Laek Boe To (ขอใจเธอแลกเบอร์โทร)”, which is sung by an artist from Isan, but is musically no different from central Thai pop. Surprisingly, this did not coincide with changing audience makeup or dwindling crowds toward the end. Most of the audience remained through the entire performance, including not only young people, but also middle-aged listeners, older audience members and families. This was also true of a funeral concert and several other local concerts I attended.

Luk thung-mo lam is most accurately described as a form of Isan pop music, which combines various musical characteristics from preceding *luk thung* and *mo lam* genres. It is

continually growing in the range of international genres that it borrows from and expanding the boundaries of what is considered Isan music. The musical characteristics discussed in this chapter, which connect *mo lam* and *luk thung* songs to a rural, Isan identity, will be exhibited further in specific examples of *luk thung-mo lam* songs in Chapter 4. I will show how these characteristics are carried on and conjoined with new, international musics to present traditional Isan ideas in a new way. As an active agent of identity, this localization of global genres is both a reflection of modern Isan identity and as a reiteration of this identity for the listener community.

Chapter 4 – Transcription and Musical Analysis

This chapter will show how contemporary songs are expressing a new modern Isan identity both lyrically and musically in connection to the previously related social, political, and economic changes. This will be done by examining the types of international music genres that are incorporated into new *luk thung-mo lam* songs, how those imported genres fit naturally into Isan musical performance contexts, and how these songs maintain Isan identity while adding in new characteristics.

Introduction

As shown in the previous chapters, genres from the Isan region such as *luk thung* and newer styles of *mo lam* are already genres built heavily upon borrowing international musical elements. Though *luk thung-mo lam* was a fusion genre from its inception, the following examples are of international styles only recently incorporated into this developing form. The process of incorporating these genres marks the openness of the Isan region toward global connections as a means of modernization. I also argue that the addition of specific international musical genres to *luk thung-mo lam* is important because these new genres not only harmonize with traditional Isan musical characteristics, but also express sentiments that mesh with the ideas articulated by these regional songs. The following examples reflect the changing sentiment of Isan peoples regarding their position within Thailand.

Reggae

One of the most recently incorporated international genres is reggae. Reggae originated as a conduit for spreading messages of peace, love, and resistance within the context of economic hardship and political turmoil in post-colonial Jamaica (King et al. 2002). It has since

developed into a global genre associated with relaxation and laid-back, simple living outside of its original cultural context (Manuel et al. 2012).

There are a few examples of reggae in *luk thung-mo lam* from previous years, such as I “Nang Oei (นางเอ๋ย)” by Noom Misor (หนุ่ม มีซอ) featuring “Hak Jam Jaew (ฮักจ้ามจั่ว)” in 2014, and Petch Saharat’s (เพชร สหรัตน์) song “Kon Kham (ก้อนคำ)” from 2015, but I will focus on two songs from this past year, Noom Misor’s “Dai Baw (ไต่บ)” and “Phu Sao Kha Lo (ผู้สาวขาละ)” by Lamyai Haithongkham (ลำไย ไหทองคำ). Instead of the driving high hat that defines many *mo lam* songs or the slow, ballad style of *luk thung Isan*, these songs incorporate a relaxed off-beat rhythm typical of reggae or ska music. In addition to this laid-back musical feeling, many of these songs seem to focus on the comedic elements of Isan music or a light love story, and have care-free content to their lyrics. I propose that part of the use of a reggae approach in these songs is to invoke a relaxed mood that matches the sentiment presented in their lyrics. Furthermore, the Isan region has long been associated with a simple, country lifestyle, which this genre perfectly embodies. In the past, stereotypes of Lao and Isan peoples as lazy or unproductive have been prevalent in central Thai society, but the previously mentioned easing of negative stereotypes has allowed Isan natives to prominently display their pride in being a fun-loving society that values simple, rural living. I argue that this sentiment is reflected in the following musical examples.

The first example is “Phu Sao Kha Lo,” or “Gadabout Girl,” which jumped into popularity during my fieldwork in the summer of 2017. This song was Lamyai’s first big hit and she experienced massive popularity following its release, not only in Isan, but all over Thailand as evidenced by the Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha (ประยุทธ์ จันทร์โอชา) making comments in June regarding how inappropriate the outfits and hip thrusting at her concerts are (Smith 2017).

This song mixes Isan language lyrics and regional instrumental idioms with a strong reggae feel. The background rhythms change from the quick high hat tapping typical of *mo lam sing* tunes and takes a more laid-back approach which can be seen below in the transcription of the basic beat for this song, including the off-beat, staccato, rhythm pattern of reggae music in the guitar and beginning few measures of the vocal line, as well as a more relaxed rhythm on the drum-set (See Transcription 2).

Phu Sao Kha Lo
ผู้สาวขาละ

Lamyai Haithongkham
ลำไย ไททองคำ
Transcribed by Author

♩ = 90

Alto

Electric Guitar

Drumset

4

A.

yo! ma! ma! hey, hey, whoo!

El. Guit.

Drs.

Transcription 2: Phu Sao Kha Lo Introduction (ไททองคำ เรคคอร์ด [November 24, 2016], http://youtu.be/xir5VPhIJ_M, 0:00–0:13).

While this song only uses Western instruments, there are imitations of the sounds of traditional instruments in the introduction and instrumental breaks. There is a collaboration of electronic keyboard played on an organ setting mimicking the sound of a *khaen*, and guitar being picked in a *phin*-style fashion. This can be clearly seen below in a transcription of the song's introduction (See Transcription 3).

Phu Sao Kha Lo

ผู้สาวขาละ

Lamyai Haithongkham

ลำไย ไหทองคำ

Transcribed by Author

$\text{♩} = 90$

Acoustic Guitar

Keyboard (organ)

Guit.

Kyb.

Transcription 3: *Phu Sao Kha Lo Instrumental Break* (ไหทองคำ เรคคอร์ด [November 24, 2016], http://youtu.be/xir5VPhIJ_M, 0:12–0:23).

The lyrics of this song also seem to match this laid-back, reggae sentiment, relating the feelings of a girl who likes to relax or party rather than study and who is willing to wait for her crush to break up with his current girlfriend (see Appendix A). This lighthearted, carefree attitude not only fits well within a reggae musical context, but also matches the humor found in *mo lam* and reflects a stereotypical view of the relaxed, rural lifestyle of Isan people.

A second example of a reggae-influenced song is “Dai Bo” by Noom Misor. Noom is the son of famous *mo lam* singer Chalernmpol Malakham (เฉลิมพล มาลาคำ). Noom has followed in the footsteps of his father by entering the *luk thung-mo lam* scene, but he is revolutionizing the genre by adding his own interpretations and incorporating reggae styles into his music. Most of his songs seem to follow this style and are even more noticeably reggae-influenced than the previous example. This song only shows Noom playing the electric guitar, but the music video shows the

main character playing a *phin* in several scenes, matching up with a *phin*-like ornamentation style that can be heard throughout the song. The music video of Noom's earlier song, "I Nang Oei," shows him playing a different instrument with rural aesthetic, which he seems to have created using a modern, fretted fingerboard with six strings like a guitar mounted onto a makeshift, bamboo-wood body (See Image 4).



Image 5: Noom Mesor's Isan-style guitar in the music video for the song *I Nang Oei* (พ้องเพื่อนฟิล์ม โปรดักชั่น 2014, <http://youtu.be/GTMTTtzqX2s>).

Even though he is making modern-sounding music, Noom is including Isan-style instruments, even piecing together his own hybrid creations to localize a foreign instrument and make it representative of rural identity. Supposing sections that sound like a *phin* are in fact played on a guitar, or this new, country-style guitar, they nonetheless mimic traditional Isan sounds and create the same musical environment. The vocal style of this song does not have Isan style vocal ornamentation, but does sound almost spoken rather than sung, in a very *mo lam*-style aesthetic, and it includes parts of many phrases, such as *de no* and *o-la-no*, that remind the

listener of a traditional *mo lam* performance. Below is a transcription of the instrumental break found between the verse and the chorus (See Transcription 4). Within this example you can hear a guitar playing a *phin*-like, ornamental part in addition to the vocalist drawing out the *mo lam* phrase “*o-la-no*” over a reggae, back-beat rhythm.

This reggae feel again matches the carefree sentiment that defines the lyrical content of this song. This song is mainly a discussion of the main character’s love for a girl and his disbelief that such a wonderful person returns his feelings of affection (see Appendix A). The music video further reveals the main character to be a pudgy guy, who loves to eat while the object of his affection is a very cute, demure girl. This unlikely pair makes the song not only very sweet and carefree, but also adds an element of humor, especially when during one scene of the music video the girl is pushing the guy in a large cart.

Both songs exemplify the addition of reggae musical themes into *luk thung-mo lam* music to emphasize a carefree sentiment that incorporates a preexisting humor and relaxation-focused aspect of Isan traditional music. They combine elements typical of regional music, such as spoken-word style singing, poetic phrases typical of *mo lam* performance and musical phrases made to sound like Isan instruments, into a reggae ensemble. This international musical style has been localized to represent Isan. The ideals of freedom and simplicity found in reggae music reflect the freedom that Isan people are feeling to display rural identity and express pride in regional values.

Dai Bo

ได้บู

Noom Misor

หนุ่ม มีซอ

Transcribed by Author

$\text{♩} = 90$

Vocals

O - la - no dai - bo

Lead Guitar

Rhythm Guitar

Bass Guitar

Drumset

4

L. Voc.

no Doe doe doe di doe doe di doe di doe Doe doe doe di doe doe di doe di doe

L. Gtr.

R. Gtr.

B. Guit.

Drs.

7

L. Voc.

Oi o - oi

L. Gtr.

R. Gtr.

B. Guit.

Drs.

Transcription 4: Dai Bo (Mesor [March 26, 2016], <http://youtu.be/aeYu5tNH2wo>, 2:35–2:54).

Rock

One of the first musical genres brought into *luk thung-mo lam* songs, and the most common international style of music used, is rock. While it has evolved to be a multifaceted genre with many sub-groups and off-shoots of its own, from its outset, rock and roll music was associated with dancing and frequently criticized as a genre associated with sex, drug use, and rebellion (Gracyk 1996). As it further developed, rock began to cater to a listener base that respected artists who broke boundaries of what was musically and socially acceptable, and that embraced the idea of musicians who were pursuing freedom to follow their desires (Dettmar and Richey 1999). Historically *mo lam* has been a genre that has allowed for the expression of sexual desire, especially through wit and humor. In the following examples, I will show how hard rock idioms are used to deliver accentuated elements of sexuality and humor in *luk thung-mo lam* lyrics in a new way.

Since this international genre has evolved so much in its own right and has become the basis of so many forms of popular music, many *luk thung* or *luk thung-mo lam* songs seem to contain some elements of rock music. This section will examine two recently-popular *luk thung-mo lam* songs that have taken the use of rock music idioms beyond the usual; “Phua Phai (ผัวไผ่)” by Phraew Phraw Saengthong (แพรวพราว แสงทอง), and “Ploi Nam Sai Na Nong (ปล่อยน้ำใส่นาน้อง)” by Petch Saharat and Praew Praw Saengthong. Some of the characteristics that rock music has in common with Isan genres include the use of stringed instrument solos on a *phin* or guitar, and the shared draw of listeners to the dance floor. And since it was originally heavily associated with rebellion and sexuality, this genre is a fitting addition to songs with sexually charged lyrics.

The first of these two songs has rock elements that contribute to the increased sexuality of the lyrics and the humor of the song's narrative. I include sexuality and humor as part of the same element because the use of sexual lyrics contributes heavily to the humor present in many Isan songs. From my own experience, when asked about sexuality in song lyrics most people will state that sexuality is present only because it is funny, and will not discuss further. While sexual explicitness has been a historical part of some *mo lam* styles, Isan society today is very conservative, therefore many people are not comfortable discussing it openly or in certain contexts. One could surmise that there is a connection between the generally restrained, conservative nature of everyday life, and the openly sexual environment of musical performances. It is certainly interesting to note the drastic change of acceptable behavior on and off the *mo lam* stage, which could be analyzed as a type of liminal space. For this research however, I will capitalize on the connection between sexuality and humor in Isan songs, especially since the examples that I will analyze display a connection between the two. In addition to the use of sexual expression and humor in the lyrics, these songs also maintain the prevalence of Isan musical instruments and ornamented singing styles over the incorporated rock music sounds to maintain a regional aesthetic.

The first example is the song "Phua Phai," which keeps the driving high-hat beat of *mo lam sing* and prominent background picking on the *phin* while also adding in rock-style electric guitar accents. Additionally, the vocal line is sung using a mix of spoken-word style singing from *mo lam* and a more forward, aggressive manner like a rock singer, which frequently adds in sections of Isan-style vocal ornamentation. This combination of traditional *mo lam* sounds and loud, sporadic, rock idioms is evident in the below transcription of this song's chorus and following instrumental break featuring a *phin* solo (See Transcription 5). Here one can observe

the use of similar eighth note idioms played by the *phin* and guitar, which uses a continual *cambiata* within the pentatonic scale to ornament the root chord note in measures 6 – 7 of the electric guitar and throughout the *phin* solo starting at measure 24.

“Phua Phai” is a humorous song about a girl who is interested in a boy she sees walk past her, but he is so handsome that she is convinced he must be with someone already. She spends the whole song wondering whose husband he is until she finally discovers he does in fact have a partner already and is gay. The lyrics clearly reveal her sexual attraction to the man in question with lines such as, “I really like it, both long and big,” which from the music video is in reference to the man’s penis, or the line “I can’t restrain myself, he is too handsome.” In the line at the end of the chorus, “*ko si dai bo*” (ขอสิได้บ่), which means “can I have him?” there is a word-play used to create two meanings. The word *si* (สี่), a future tense particle in Isan, is purposefully used because it sounds like the word *si* (สี่), which means to have sex. This gives the lyric a double entendre meaning of, “can I have him?” or “can I sleep with him? (see Appendix A).”

Phua Phai

ผัวไฟ

Phraew Phraw Saengthong

ผะรุ่พรพรวะ ผะรุ่พรพรวะ

Transcribed by Author

$\text{♩} = 150$

Lead Vocals

Phin

Electric Guitar

Bass Guitar

Brass

Drumset

8

L. Voc.

Phin

El. Guit.

B. Guit.

Brass

Drs.

14

L. Voc.

Phin

El. Guit.

B. Guit.

Brass

Drs.

The musical score is divided into three systems, each containing six staves. The staves are labeled as follows:

- L. Voc.:** Lead vocal line, featuring a melodic line with some grace notes and rests.
- Phin:** Phin instrument, playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- El. Guit.:** Electric guitar, playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- B. Guit.:** Bass guitar, playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Brass:** Brass instrument, playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Drs.:** Drums, playing a complex pattern with various rhythms and accents.

The score is marked with measure numbers 20, 26, and 30 at the beginning of each system. The music is written in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature.

Transcription 5: Phua Phai (TOPLINE Music Official [Feb 27, 2015], <http://youtu.be/DquQ1DQ3wFU>, 1:08–1:59).

This discussion of sexual desire is more blatant than is typical, but is made more acceptable by the humorous end to the song's plot where the female character is let down by her crush not even being attracted to women. The presence of the rock musical elements adds an over-the-top intensity to this song that matches the desire shown in the lyrics and helps to show that this song is outside of the normal level of sexual expression, even to the point of being ridiculous.

The second song that I would like to discuss which uses the intensity of rock music to set exceptionally sexual lyrics is “Ploi Nam Sai Na Nong,” which blends rock guitar solos with a driving *mo lam* rhythm under *mo lam klon*-style lyrical banter between the male and female singers. This song is a modern-day setting of the kind of back and forth singing where *mo lam* singers would pretend to flirt with one another using complex, poetic lyrics dripping with euphemisms, or even instances in villages in the past where men would use back-and-forth singing to woo a woman who had caught their eye (Banyen 2017). The lyrics to this song are sexually explicit enough that they would occasionally cause a student or two to blush, though it is immensely popular. In this song, Petch Saharat and Phraew Phraw Saengthong utilize rock idioms to intensify sexual elements present in the lyrics of this flirty, innuendo-drenched duet. As in *mo lam klon*, this song's alternating lyrics could literally be interpreted as a depiction of the realities of rural, agricultural life, but are a clever way to disguise a proposal for a less than innocent liaison. The lyrics to the chorus read as follows.

“หญิง: อ้าย อ้ายจำ ขยับเข้ามาปล่อยน้ำใส่มาให้แทน

Female: Boy, dear, really, come in and release the water into the field

ชาย: น้อง น้องจำ ปวด คันแทนหาน้องคือใหญ่คักแท้

Male: Girl, dear, wow! Your walkway is really great

หญิง: นาฟ่งน้อย ๆ ยังขาดคนดูแล

Female: This tiny field still lacks someone to take care of it

ชาย: อ้ายสีอาสาเป็นคนคอยเทคแคร์

Male: I will volunteer to be the caretaker

หญิง: ปลอยน้ำใส่แทน ปลอยน้ำใส่น้ำให้แทน

Female: Release the water, please put it in, please release water into the field

ชาย: ปลอยน้ำใส่แท้ ปลอยน้ำใส่น้ำ้องแทน

Male: Certainly, I can release the water, release water into the field for sure”

(Translation by Author, see Appendix A)

The musical structure of this song features several Isan elements, such as the slow, lyrical introduction, heavy with vocal ornamentation (See measures 1–4 of vocal part in Transcription 6). The music video, unlike many that support the narrative element of a song, displays only the performance by the band and two singers, likely due to the explicit content. This video shows Isan identity very clearly through the costuming on Phraew and the backup dancers, as well as Petch’s guitar strap, all of which feature cloth with the checkered pattern of a *pha khao ma* (ผ้าขาวม้า), or a multifunctional, rectangular cloth traditionally worn in the Isan region. In addition to Isan elements, however, this video also shows hard rock elements such black clothing, heavy eyeliner, and dark lipstick on the band members. While the music video doesn’t show Isan instruments, there is clear use of *phin*-style picking in the introduction and the instrumental break. Other than this, and the ornamented singing style employed by the two vocalists, the rest of the song features only rock musical elements (See Transcription 6).

Ploi Nam Sai Na Nong

Petch Saharat & Phraew Phraw Saengthong

ปล่อยน้ำไสนาน้อง

เพชร สหรัตน์ และ แพรวพราว แสงทอง

Transcribed by Author

$\text{♩} = 80$

Female Lead Vocals

Phin

Electric Guitar

Acoustic Guitar

Bass Guitar

Piano

Drumset

5 *accelerando* $\text{♩} = 160$

L. Voc.

Phin

L. Gtr. with distortion pedal

R. Gtr.

B. Guit.

Pno.

Drs.

10

L. Voc.

Phin

L. Gtr.

R. Gtr.

B. Guit.

Pno.

Drs.

Transcription 6: *Ploi Nam Sai Na Nong* (TOPLINE Music Official [August 29, 2016], <http://youtu.be/ZxZfR0VcgIw>, 0:19–0:45).

For these song examples, elements of rock music seem to dominate the musical characteristics of the song, but aspects of Isan performance remain in the rhythms, ornamentation, and instrumentation, in addition to the back-and-forth exchange between singers as a revitalization of an older style of *mo lam*. The harder rock idioms have been altered to clearly display Isanness in modern *luk thung-mor lam* context. They are used to convey the sexually intense lyrics and add in and over-the-top sense of humor. This rock style, frequently associated with rebellion, is well suited to singing lyrics that are sexually charged within a more conservative cultural environment.

Rap

Rap music is the international genre that has been most recently incorporated into *luk thung-mo lam* and Isan musical styles. Rap music is an attention-drawing genre because of its

explicit lyrics and dynamic delivery style that often speak from the personal experiences and hardships of the artist. This genre is tied to the black artists who originated it to draw attention to the continuing problems of racism and economic oppression of their communities within American society (Rose 1994; Pinn 1999). At its core, rap music is a genre focused on asserting the identity of a specific community, expressing its worth, and calling for freedom. I argue that this origin and the forward, spoken, delivery style of rap has made this genre appealing to Isan artists.

The group Rap Esan emerged just within the past year doing Isan-style rap music, but also for the first time in 2017 rap music was incorporated into *luk thung-mo lam* with the song “O-la-no (โอ้ละน้อ),” by Kong Huayrai (ก้อง ห้วยไร่) and Pujan Long Mic (ปูจ่าน ลองไมค์), or PMC. The title of this song clearly invokes the traditional *mo lam* introductory phrase, which is sung to close out the first section of this song sung by Kong over rock influenced background music, and brings the listener into the second section rapped by Pujan. Unlike Kong, who is from Sakon Nakhon province, Pujan hails from the Northern region of Thailand and this collaboration not only asserts Isan identity, but solidarity between rural communities all over Thailand. This song was the most commonly cited by students as an example of what they thought Isan music would continue to look like in the future. Students value both the modern, musical style and the lyrical content of this song, which speaks to the way many young people in Isan view their own evolving identities. Through incorporating new musical elements to talk specifically about life in rural Thailand, it is a perfect example of emerging perspectives in the Isan region that are internationally focused.

The musical elements in this song that embody Isan identity are mainly found in the lyrical content and the heavy use of Isan language. The opening verse states that even though

Kong lives his life following Korean pop culture, listening to widely varying styles of music, and freely experimenting with his own style, his identity is also founded on his Isan roots, to which he will always return. The chorus of this song continues to outline aspects of Isan identity.

“เกิดเป็นคนอีสานเลือดก็คนอีสาน

I was born Isan, my blood is Isan

มีบุญมีงานก็ต้องมีหมอลำ

Where there are festivals, there is always *mo lam*

มีลาบมีก้อยมีจุ๊ชอยจำ

We have *lab*, *goi*, and *ju soi jam*⁵

ยังจดจำวิถีบ้านเฮา

I still remember our way of life

เสียงพิณท่าวเสียงแคนหย่าว

The sound of *phin* and *khaen* are playing

หย่าวเจ้าหย่าวหมอลำเจ้าหย่าว

Dance, everyone dance to *mo lam*

ยังเต้นรำวงโตดตีโต่งเกี้ยวสาว

I still dance *ram wong* to flirt with girls

บ่ลืมเรื่องราวบุญฮีต 12 และคอง 14

I don't forget about monthly festivals and 14 ways we should follow⁶

(see Appendix A).

This song's lyrics are an expression of the artist's pride in this own region, but are also being used to actively paint a picture of what Isanness looks like by listing aspects of Isan culture that define Kong's sense of belonging. While Kong does not rap, the nearly spoken delivery style of his singing reminds one of a *mo lam* performance. The music video reaffirms this Isan identity

⁵ The words listed here are all types of food from the Isan region; lab (ลาบ) is spicy minced pork, goi (ก้อย) is rare lab, sometimes with fresh blood, and ju soi jam (จุ๊ชอยจำ) is fresh cow meat dipped in sour/bitter sauce.

⁶ The monthly festivals and fourteen kong (คอง), or “ways,” in this line refer to a series of religious festivals and common beliefs of people in the Isan region, closely associated with agricultural life.

through its rural setting, the display of a *khaen* and *phin* both hanging on the wall behind the band and being played, and a depiction of a Bun Bangfai, or rocket festival celebration.

The following rapped section of this song reiterates the sentiment of staying loyal to one's roots, while adding an element of pride in rural identity generally, including peoples from all over Thailand. He states his pride in being a village boy and in continuing Thai arts, but also brings in a line stating, "from the North to Isan, we are all the same," unifying rural communities from different sections of Thailand, and then in the next line solidifying his message of togetherness by adding "We are all Thai just the same." It is a rousing sentiment of togetherness for rural communities all over Thailand while musically bringing the global onto the traditional stage.

Using rap as a delivery system in this song has two effects. The first of these is that due to its standing as an international genre, the incorporation of rap music adds an example of the song's lyrical content by describing the international tastes of young people in Isan and weaving them into the song's framework. Secondly, as a genre which emerged to assert identity and call attention to the needs of the performers through personal experience, rap music has a statement-making, deliberate tone, which helps Pujan to relay rousing sentiments of unity. While rap music is sometimes associated with negative messages, Pujan chooses to articulate inspirational ideals through his own rapping. He spoke in an interview with the *Bangkok Post* about his personal change from originally embracing a more typical rap persona by swearing and making critical statements, to adopting a more encouraging, positive viewpoint in his songs after realizing that many young people look up to him (Sukprasert 2016). It is also likely that if Pujan wishes to tap into markets outside of Northern Thailand and take advantage of a national market, he would need to produce music that could be a rallying cry for any Thai listener. Like Isan, Northern

Thailand has had related issues with assertion of local identities and maintenance of village culture. Patrick Jory outlines the trends toward resurgence of regional culture in many parts of Thailand in his writing over the last twenty years (1999). Pujan's goal is to make his music positive and inspirational to his listeners, which he certainly does through sentiments of unity and promotion of local identity.

Musically this song does not actually utilize any regional instruments, but it is identified as Isan through the singing style used by Kong, which features regional ornamentation. In addition, an Isan sound environment is created by the keyboard player mimicking a *khaen* through short, rhythmic chords played on an organ setting. Pujan's contribution to this song does not include any of the melodic, Northern style singing of some of his own songs, but only the international element of rap. This aesthetic meshes well with the traditional spoken word style used frequently by *mo lam* performers to improvise and interact with their audience. This almost recitative-like practice has been compared to rap by several previous scholars (Hillier 2000, Miller F. et al 2010). But these Isan sounds are not as heavily pronounced as the content of the lyrics, which has gained popularity among young people.

The Isan region is currently at the beginning of burgeoning prosperity and development in conjunction with a growing positive image throughout the country. While violent protests did not improve previous negative images of Isan (Sporanzetti 2012), these have been gradually countered by the soft power and national popularity of Isan genres like *luk thung*. This newfound acceptance has brought confidence to young people in the Isan region who are proud to proclaim their heritage, but also to express transnationalism in their enjoyment of popular culture from all around the world. The incorporation of rap into this song is another example of the freedom Isan people feel to express pride in local culture as they gain social and economic power. The origins

of rap music as a genre that focuses on social commentary and transformation also makes it a fitting addition to a song of this nature in its assertion of identity and solidarity between rural peoples. I would also argue that rap music is another symbol of the international in a song touting the international nature of interests of Isan young people, as well as their strong rootedness in their home culture. It represents the eclectic and ever-expanding tastes of its listener base. I would not be surprised if this kind of musical experimentation continues to gain traction in *luk thung-mo lam* music in the future.

Pride in Incorporation of International Musics

Pride in Isan musical culture incorporating international elements is displayed constantly. As previously discussed, students are very excited about musical innovations that merge regional and international musics. Another example of this that was brought to my attention frequently throughout my fieldwork is singer Rasmee Wayrana (รัสมิ์ เวระณะ), an Isan native, who, after moving to Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand, began to perform with an African jazz musician, adding her own Isan singing style to his performances. This collaboration initially occurred when she observed that the musical styles were highly compatible. The improvisatory vocal ornamentation style of *mo lam* lends itself very well to working within a jazz performance context, and the tendency to play with keys and incorporate nontraditional accidentals in jazz traditions also gives Rasmee a lot of room to innovate her own style of Isan vocal performance (Sukprasert 2016; Stuart 2016). Her performance style is unique, but this kind of innovation is becoming increasingly common. Rasmee was brought to my attention by students and professors as someone that they were immensely proud of. They would strongly assert that their region can make any kind of international music, “there is even Isan jazz,” they would add in. Not only the localization of international musics within Isan music, but the creation of international music

with an Isan flair is a point of pride, and a display of Isan peoples' international awareness and engagement.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have shown several examples of new international music styles which have been brought into *luk thung-mo lam* music to heighten certain Isan aspects of these performances and develop an even more internationalized genre that is simultaneously created specifically for Isan people. These urban genres represent calls to freedom and independence in their original contexts, making them localized vehicles for the expression of these ideals once again in modern Isan society. Amporn Jirattikorn showed that in the 1990s innovations in *luk thung* music were “part of an attempt to reconstruct ‘Thai-ness’ in the modern world of that period” through taking an “authentic” genre representative of Thailand’s countryside and rural peoples and bringing it into a globalizing world (2006, 31). These new *luk thung-mo lam* songs are continuing the same process, but are promoting rural culture on a new level, not as a representation of “authentic” Thai culture based on an often imaginary, rural ideal, but as a unique regional culture, which is a developing, relevant contributor to Thailand’s economy and political layout.

These new musical developments are undeniably international, but also distinctly Isan, including an unwavering narrative element in songs, some inclusion of Isan musical elements either through vocals, instruments, or style, and lyrical content that prioritizes Isan language, and Isan perspectives and experiences. Great importance is placed on the maintenance and assertion of Isan identity, but also in reinventing this identity to incorporate the international and the modern, just as Isan society is evolving to include more urban areas and diverse employment opportunities for young people. The Isan economy is no longer solely dependent upon

agriculture, but through repackaging signifiers of rural identity within urban music genres, its people have created a new hybrid identity that merges the two. Rural identity will continue to be an important part of how Isan people see themselves within Thailand, particularly as it is modernized through association with global experience.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Isan's unique history and combination of cultural backgrounds makes it a place where people frequently identify with multiple groups or backgrounds. They are nationally Thai, culturally Isan, historically Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, or any number of other smaller local groups. Travelling with friends to a small temple in Surin for a short holiday break, I was viewing sculptures of the lifestyle and characteristics of four different ethnic groups that had historically lived in that area. As I observed differences in these museum-like depictions, one friend, much to my astonishment, went on to identify the group he was from as well as those of other two friends travelling with us, all of whom were from the same province.

Before the last century's various policy-based conflicts between Northeast Thailand and the central government, these local, village groups are the identities that people in this region would have most readily offered up when asked who they were. Isan people are still strongly connected to their local identities by the patterns woven into traditional clothing, the recipes from their village, and the dances performed during festivals at their local *wat*. However, desires to combat governmental policies and maintain cultural practices shared across the region led to the feelings of unity and nationalism felt within this region today. What began as simple definition through opposition to central Thailand has developed into vibrant pride in modern Isan culture.

The northeast region of Thailand is rapidly changing. The historical stereotype of a region heavily reliant on agriculture and struggling with the nation's highest poverty rates is an inaccurate reflection of modern-day Isan. The region is still invested in agriculture and the development of sustainable farming practices, but is now home to rapidly growing urban centers and communities that are spearheading the expansion of urban employment opportunities and the

augmentation of valuable economic connections both within Thailand and abroad. The long-established tradition of Isan peoples migrating to other regions or even other countries for work opportunities has resulted in a travelled, internationally-minded community, ready to engage in business and education on a global level (Kirsch 1966; Mills 2001; Keyes 2012; Plambech 2016). The “cosmopolitan villagers” discussed by Charles Keyes are anxious to learn from international experiences, but will ultimately settle within their home region, contributing their knowledge and skills to the development of their home communities.

This desire for development in the Isan region was established throughout the past several decades. It was built on the struggle with past economic difficulties and policies that stifled local identities within the region. The initial establishment of a strong regional identity was unquestionably tied to feelings of resentment toward nationalization policies (Keyes 1967; Jory 1999; McCargo and Krisadawan 2004), but has evolved into the feelings of devotion and pride that people in this region have toward their culture and way of life.

This modern regional identity can be seen clearly through *luk thung-mo lam* songs in their incorporation of new international genres. Each of the new genres brought into *luk thung-mo lam* songs are characterized by urban-based musical styles that are associated with freedom and independence. The use of these genres to express ideas such as praise for simple living and acceptance of others, sexual expression and rebellion, or assertion of identity and desire for social transformation, has led to their conscription as mediums for the asseveration of modern Isan identity. These genres have been localized and combined with traditional Isan musical characteristics to express and reinforce the conviction that the region is developing a more powerful role within Thai society.

The urbanization and internationalization of Isan culture has captured the minds of young people in the Isan region. Their pride in new genres of music reflects a cultural landscape that is changing from a largely agricultural base to one that is urbanizing, while maintaining regional and local values. When I talked to students about where future developments will take their music, they put their opinions in terms of the global, rather than in terms of the national. Discussions what might take place in future *luk thung-mo lam* songs included discussions of British singer Adele, K-pop artists, the Isan jazz of Rasmee Wayrana, and emerging styles of Isan rap.

Developments in *luk thung-mo lam* music are reflective of the perspective of young people in the Isan region, who will go on to create the future of the Isan region. One student said, “as long as there are Isan people, there will always be *luk thung* and *mo lam*, because it is associated with [the Isan] way of life (UBU Music Club – Group One, 11).” He went on to say that these traditional genres would never disappear, but continue to transform along with their social context. This is exactly the role that *luk thung-mo lam* music is playing in Isan society today. It reflects the capability of regional identity to express regional pride, while simultaneously combatting outside stereotypes of Isan as a backwards, economically drained region. Through use of musical characteristics which signify rural, Isan cultural identity in combination with new aspects of international music genres, this style has transformed to reflect a changing sentiment in Isan communities. This contemporary perspective maintains its rural roots, but promotes regional modernization by urbanizing and embracing global influence.

Appendices

Appendix A – Full Lyric Translations

Translations are listed in alphabetical order according to the English romanization of the song title. All translations are done by the author with proofreading assistance from Thanawoot Pakdeeya.

Bloi Nam Sai Na Nong, by Petch Saharat and Praew Praw Saengtong

(ปล่อยน้ำใส่นาน้อง เพชร สหรัตน์ และ แพรพรรณว แสงทอง)

Intro (Female)

นาท่งน้อยน้องแห้ง อยากให้อ้ายเข้ามาสอยน้อง

My small field is dry, I want you to come help me

อยากให้ลอง ปล่อยน้ำใส่นาน้องแทน

I want to try, release water into my field too

Verse 1 (Male)

ปีนี้ฝนบ่ดี นากะแล้ง นากะแล้ง

This year hasn't had good rain, the fields are very dry

แห้งแสง คักแท้นอ คักแท้นอ คักแท้น้อง

So dry, that would be very good, very good, you are very good

ให้สอยบ่ น้องจำ นาน้องต้องการน้ำ

Should I help you dear? Your field needs to be watered

Verse 2 (Female)

นาท่งน้อยที่อี่แม่ให้มา ปั้นคั่นนาจนว่าใหญ่ ๆ ๆ

The small field that my mother gave me, I've made the pathway into it larger and larger⁷

ยังบ่เคยได้หว่านไถ รอแต่อ้าย เอ้ามาคัน ๆ ๆ

I still haven't plowed/sowed, I waited for you to come pressure me

นั่งหลกหญ้าไปวัน ๆ ทั้งสบทั้งคัน บักหอยมันดำตรีน

I've mowed the grass, I'm sore and itchy from stepping on a shell in the grass⁸

ฮอดฤดูสีทำกิน เอากล้าปักลงดินบ่ได้

We've come to the season for making a living, I didn't dare plunge into the dirt

Verse 3 (Male)

สีให้อ้ายเฮ็ดจั่งได้ หรืออ้ายต้องไปปล่อยน้ำใส่นาน้อง

How do you want me to act? Do I have to go release water into your field?

สีเอนน้ำเข้าหลายสำได้

You want water spread throughout the field?

บอกมาไว ๆ อ้ายพร้อมจะปล่อยน้ำ

Tell me quickly, I'm ready to release the water

อ้ายสีไปปล่อยใส่นาคณงาม

I will go put water in the field of someone beautiful

นาน้องแห้ง ๆ พอสีได้มีน้ำ

⁷ In this lyric ปั้นคั่นนา means the small, raised walking pathways between rice fields. Making the pathway wider is a reference to masturbation.

⁸ In the lyric there are two words with alternate meanings. First is บัก, which can also be a rude word for penis, roughly the same feeling as the slang “cock” in English. The second is หอย, which can mean vagina.

Your field is so dry, enough to need for water

สีได้คราดดำทำนาตามฤดู

I can harrow/rake the field according to the season

Chorus (Alternating)

(Female) อ้าย อ้ายจำ ขยับเข้ามาปล่อยน้ำใส่นาให้แห้ง

Boy, dear, really, come in and release the water into the field

(Male) น้อง น้องจำ ปวด คันแทนหาน้องคือใหญ่คักแท้

Girl, dear, wow! Your walkway is really great

(Female) นาท่งน้อย ๆ ยังขาดคนดูแล

This tiny field still lacks someone to take care of it

(Male) อ้ายลือสาเป็นคนคอยเทคแคร์

I will volunteer to be the caretaker

(Female) ปล่อยน้ำใส่นา ปล่อยน้ำใส่นาให้แห้ง

Release the water, please put it in, please release water into the field

(Male) ปล่อยน้ำใส่นา ปล่อยน้ำใส่นาน้องแทน

Certainly, I can release the water, release water into the field for sure

(Female) อ้าย อ้ายจำ ขยับเข้ามาปล่อยน้ำใส่นาให้แห้ง

Boy, dear, really, come in and release the water into the field

(Male) น้อง น้องจำ ปวด คันแทนหาน้องคือใหญ่คักแท้

Girl, dear, wow! Your walkway is really great

(Female) นาทุ่งน้อย ๆ ยังขาดคนดูแล

This tiny field still lacks someone to take care of it

(Male) อ้ายลือสาเป็นคนคอยเทคแคร์

I will volunteer to be the caretaker

(Female) ปล่อยน้ำใส่แห่ ปล่อยน้ำใส่นาให้แห่

Release the water, please put it in, please release water into the field

(Male) ปล่อยน้ำใส่แห่ ปล่อยน้ำใส่นาน้องแห่

Certainly, I can release the water, release water into the field for sure

(Female) ปล่อยน้ำใส่ แห่ ๆ

Release the water, really, really...

(Male) ปล่อยน้ำใส่นาน้องแห่

I'll really release the water into your field

[Instrumental break]

[Repeat chorus]

Dai Bo, by Noom Misor (ได้บ่ หนุ่ม มีซอ)

Verse 1

เมื่อคนหนึ่งคนที่ต้องทนกับเหงา

There was a person who must endure loneliness

ถูกพาด้วยความเศร้าปกคลุมหัวใจ

Blown about by sadness until he covered his heart

เคยมีรักแต่ต้องจากกันไป

He had love but was separated from it

ไม่เคยสมดังใจไม่มีใครที่รักจริง

He had never thought he wouldn't have anyone to really love

โอ้...ละหนอ... หนอ...

Oh... la no... no...

Verse 2

และแล้ววันนี้ก็มีเธอเข้ามา

And then today she has come

เพียงแค่มองสบตา ความเหนื่อยล้าก็หายไป

He just stares and meets her eyes and his exhaustion disappears

ใจที่มันอ่อนแอก็เลยยอมแพ้ให้เธอทั้งใจ

His heart becomes weak and he surrenders it entirely to her

ถูกความเหงาบังคับไปให้ใจดวงนี้

Loneliness has been forced out of this heart

Pre-Chorus

อยากบอกว่าคิดจัง อยากพูดดังๆว่าฉันรักเธอ

I want to say what I think, loudly that I love you

อยากให้รู้ว่าใจมันแพ้...ถึงแค่เธอนะคนดี

I want you to know that my heart is delirious that you so good

อยากจะมีเธอเคียงข้างกาย... อยู่ตลอดไปอย่างนี้

I want to have you next to me... always like this

มันก็คงจะดีถ้าหากคนดีไม่เปลี่ยนไป

It would be great if this good person never changes

Chorus

แต่อย่ามาตัวให้คิดฮอด อย่ามาหลอกให้คิดถึง

But don't lie to make me miss you, don't trick me into thinking of you

อย่ามาทำให้ซึ้ง แล้วก็เดินจากไป

Don't impress me and then walk away

คืนที่ไม่แสงดาว วันที่เหน็บหนาวคงหายไป

On a night without starlight, the cold numbness could disappear

เพียงแค่เธอจะจริงใจได้ไหม... คนดี

If only you could be sincere, and good

[Instrumental Break]

โห้... ละหนอ... ได้บ่นอ...

Oh... la no... can it be?

เดอ เดอ เดอ ดี เดอ เดอ ดี เดอ ดี เดอ

Doe doe doe di doe, doe di doe di doe

เดอ เดอ เดอ ดี เดอ เดอ ดี เดอ ดี เดอ

Doe doe doe di doe, doe di doe di doe

ออย โอ ออย

Oi, o-oi

[Repeat Pre-Chorus, follow by Chorus twice]

O-la-no, by Kong Huayrai and Pujan Long Mic (ไอ้ละน้อ ก้อง ห้วยไร่ และ ปูจ่าน ลองไมค์)

Verse 1

It's my life man free style⁹

จนใครๆ มองเราไม่ดี

Everyone looks at me funny

บ่าวบ้านนอกแต่ตัวเกาหลี่

A country boy with Korean outfit

ฟังเพลงอินดี้ป๊อปแดนซ์และบอยแบนด์

Who listens to Indie music, pop, dance, and boy bands

ใช้ชีวิตที่มันแตกต่าง

I live a different life

กิน นอน นั่ง ก็ออบโคเรีย

Eat, sleep, sit, copying Korea

⁹ In this line “man” is an Isan word, หมั่น, which usually means “yes,” but can also mean “to be,” or pen (เป็น) in central Thai.

จนอีพอเฟ้นใจละเหี่ย

Until my father's heart is withered

สุดท้ายจั่งฮู้โตตนเฮเป็นจั่งได้

In the end I know the way that I am

Chorus

เกิดเป็นคนอีสานเลือดก็คนอีสาน

I was born Isan, my blood is Isan

มีบุญมีงานก็ต้องมีหมอลำ

Where there are festivals, there is always *mo lam*

มีลาบมีก้อยมีจู้ซอยจำ

We have *lab*, *goi*, and *ju soi jam*¹⁰

ยังจดยังจำวิถีบ้านเฮา

I still remember our way of life

เสียงพินท้าวเสียงแคนหย่าว

The sound of *phin* and *khaen* are playing

หย่าวเจ้าหย่าวหมอลำเจ้าหย่าว

Dance, everyone dance to *mo lam*

ยังเต้นรำวงโตดตีโต่งเกี้ยวสาว

¹⁰ The words listed here are all types of food from the Isan region; lab (ลาบ) is spicy minced pork, goi (ก้อย) is rare lab, sometimes with fresh blood, and ju soi jam (จู้ซอยจำ) is fresh cow meat dipped in sour/bitter sauce.

I still dance *ram wong* to flirt with girls

บ่ลืมเรื่องราวบุญฮีต 12 และคอง 14

I don't forget about monthly festivals and 14 ways we should follow¹¹

Verse 2

บ่ินให้ส่ำได้กะตายบ่ละ

How hard I try to be someone else to death

ยังได้คืนกลับมาเมื่อเฮือนคือเก่า

I still come back to my hometown

คงสืคือคำผู้เฒ่าว่า

It would be told by the elders

ค้นเจาะเลือดเจ้าสิเห็นแต่ลาวอ้อยด้อย

Open a vein, you can only see Lao within

[Repeat Chorus]

[Instrumental Break]

[Repeat Verse 2 followed by Chorus]

เสียงพินห่าว (เสียงแคนหย่าว หย่าวเจ้าหย่าว ยาว ยาว ยาว ยาว)

¹¹ The monthly festivals and fourteen kong (คอง), or “ways,” in this line refer to a series of religious festivals and common beliefs of people in the Isan region, closely associated with agricultural life.

The sound of *phin* (the sound of *phin*)

โอโสะโอละหนอ โสะโอโสะโอละหนอ โอโสะโอโสะโอ

O-ho-o-la-no ho-o-ho-o-la-no O-ho-o-ho-o

ยังเป็นบ่าวไทบ้าน (ยังเป็นสาวไทบ้าน)

I am still a country boy (I'm still a country girl)

ยังเป็นบ่าวไทบ้าน ปลื้มเชื้อชาติเผ่าพันธุ์

I am still a country boy, I never forget my roots

ยังเป็นบ่าวไทบ้าน โสะโอโสะโอละหนอ โอโสะโอโสะโอ

I am still a country boy, ho-o-ho-o-la-no, O-ho-o-ho-o

ยังเป็นบ่าวไทบ้าน ยังเป็นบ่าวไทบ้าน

I am still a country boy I am still a country boy

ยังเป็นบ่าวไทบ้าน ปลื้มเชื้อชาติเผ่าพันธุ์

I am still a country boy, I never forget my roots

ยังเป็นบ่าวไทบ้าน โสะโอโสะโอละหนอ โอโสะโอโสะโอ

I am still a country boy, ho-o-ho-o-la-no, O-ho-o-ho-o

Rap

เพราะอัตลักษณ์มันปักที่ใจ

Because our identity is embroidered on our hearts

ไปอยู่ที่ใดฉันก็ไม่ลืม

Anywhere we go we won't forget

แม้จะอยู่ในที่แห่งไหนใด

Though wherever we live

ฉันเชื่อว่าไทยนี้แหละที่เย็น

If there is something that is Thai, it is a place we belong

อ้ายเป็นผู้บ่าวไทบ้าน

I'm a country boy

ไม่ต้องกลัวต้องย่านว่าอ้ายจะลืม

Don't have to be afraid that I will forget my roots

จะสืบจะสานชาติศิลป์ไทย

I will inherit/continue Thai arts

จะบ่มอันใดที่มาจากดิน

Nothing will replace it

ยังยืนอยู่บนวิถียังใช้ชีวิตเหมือนเดิมทุกวัน

I will still stand on the path, just like in the past every day

จะเห็นอีสานออกตก

From the North, Isan, East to West

พวกเราทั้งหมดยังไทยเหมือนกัน

We are all Thai just the same

ต้นไม้ถ้าไม่ลืมราก

A tree won't forget its roots

มันก็เติบโตไปทุกๆ วัน

It will continue to grow every day

แต่หากต้นไม้ฉันนั้นลืมรากเหง้า

But if you split this tree to forget its roots

ก็กลายเป็นเถ้าขี้ผงเหมือนกัน

It will all turn to ashes just the same

Phu Sao Ka Lo, by Lamyai Haitongkam (ผู้สาวขาละ ลำไย ไททองคำ)

Verse 1

เฮแค่ผู้สาวขาละ บ่แม่นผู้สาวขารเรียน

I'm just a gadabout girl, not a girl predisposed to study¹²

บ่ได้ขยันหมั่นเพียร ปากกาเขียนยังได้ยืมหมู่

I haven't been diligent, even a pen for writing I will need to borrow

การบอกการบ้านบ่เคยมี ข้อสอบสือกบตไต่ยังบ่ฮู้

I never have homework, I still don't know which unit the test is on

แต่ที่พอฮู้วันนี้พรุ่งนี้และเมื่อวาน นั้นเป็นบุญบ้านได้

I only know today, tomorrow and every day where festivals will be

Chorus

เพียงแค่จอบแนมขอมเบิ่งอ้ายอยู่ไกลๆ หัวใจน้องนี้ก็มีแสง

¹² Phu sao kha lo (ผู้สาวขาละ), or “gadabout girl,” literally means “girl with wandering legs,” but is reference to someone who likes to party a lot. Later in the first line, a similar pattern, phu sao kha rian (ผู้สาวขารเรียน), or “girl with legs for study,” is used to describe a girl who studies a lot.

Just a glance at you from a distance, fulfills the desire of my heart

รู้ว่าอ้ายมีเขา น้องกะสิบ่ขอแข่ง

I know you have her, so I won't ask to compete

บ่อาจสิไปแย่ง แต่น้องขอสแตนดบาย

I might not be able to get you, but I will ask to standby

ซอมเบิ่งอยู่เด้อ ถ้าหากว่าเธอ นั้นเลิกกันกับเขา

I glance at you often, to see if you'll break up with her

เรื่องของสองเฮาสีเป็นไปได๋บ่

Then might there be a chance for us?

บ่ได้เข้ามาเพื่อกดดัน แต่ว่าฉันนั้นแค่รอ

I haven't come in to pressure you, but just sit and wait

ฟ่าวเลิกกันไหนเถาะ ผู้สาวขาละ อยากรู้เป็นผู้สาวอ้าย

Please break up with her quickly, the gadabout girl, wants to be your girl.

Verse 2

บ่ฮู้สิมีโอกาสนั้นบ่ บ่ฮู้ว่าอ้ายนั้นคิดจั่งไต่

I don't know if I'll have the opportunity, I don't know how you think

ติด ร. ยังพอแก้ได้ แต่ติดใจอ้ายน้องไปบ่เป็น

My grades are still bad, but I haven't stopped being enamored with you

จักเป็นจั่งไต่ดอกใบปริญญา ฮู้แต่ว่าเอามาอยากเย็น

I don't know what a degree looks like, only that it's very hard to get

หลับตาลงยังคงฝันเห็น เป็นเพียงหน้าอาย

When I close my eyes, I still dream only of your face

[Repeat last four lines of Chorus twice]

ผู้สาวขालะ สีสม้ายบ่

Will this gadabout girl be well-matched with you?

Phua Phai, by Praew Praw Saengtong (ผัวไผ่ แพรวพราว แสงทอง)

Verse 1

เดินผ่านมาน้องก็ยั้งง ะ

He walks toward me and I'm taken aback

บอกตรง ะ อ้ายก็คงตกใจ

I speak directly, he might be afraid

ก็ย้อนบ่รู้ว่าอ้ายเป็นผัวไผ่

Because I don't know whose husband he is

คนผู้ไขก้ามใหญ่บึก ะ

A handsome person with a big, strong muscles

Verse 2

เดินผ่านมาน้องก็ยั้งคักคัก

As he walks toward me, I'm still so excited

น้องยังนึกอยากลิเป็นแฟนอ้าย

I still have the desire to be his girlfriend

มักอิหลิ ทั้งยาวทั้งใหญ่

I really like it, both long and big

เฮ็ดให้หัวใจ น้องมันเต้น ตึก ๆ

It makes my heart dance, thump thump

ตึก ๆ ตึก ๆ ตึก ๆ ตึก ๆ ตึก ๆ

thump thump, thump thump, thump thump, thump thump, thump thump...

อยากลิฮู้ ที่น้องฮักอยู่ เป็นผัวผู้ใด

I want to know whose husband is the one I love

Chorus

เป็นผัวผู้ใด เป็นผัวผู้ใด เป็นผัวผู้ใด

Whose husband is he? Whose husband is he? Whose husband is he?

มันถักใจคักแท้ เดอ เดอ เดอ ให้กอดนำแนได้บ่

He has really to my liking... Can I embrace him too?

อดใจบ่ได้ อ้ายคือหล่อแท้

I can't restrain myself, he's so very handsome

ห้ามใจบ่ได้ ยามอยู่ใกล้คนหล่อ

I can't suppress my feelings, when close to someone so attractive

จักแม่นัวไผหนอ ขอสิได้บ่

He must be someone's husband, can I have him?¹³

[Repeat Verse 2]

อยากสิรู้ ที่น้องฮักอยู่ เป็นผัวผู้ใด

I wants to know whose husband is the one I love

[Repeat Chorus two times]

ผัวไผหนอ ขอนำขอสิได้บ่

Someone's husband... can I have him also?

¹³ In this line the word สิ, which is a future tense particle, is purposefully used because it sounds like the word สี้, which means to have sex. This give the lyric a double entendre meaning of, “can I have him?” or “can I sleep with him?”

Appendix B – Interview Questions and Translations

Interview Questions – University students

1. Record age, home province/city, faculty where they study

คุณชื่ออะไรคะ มาจากจังหวัดไหนคะ เรียนที่คณะไหนคะ

2. How do you view *mo lam* and *luk thung* as different?

คุณคิดว่าดนตรีแนวลูกทุ่งและดนตรีแนวหมอลำต่างกันยังไงคะ

3. Which styles or performers are most important to you? Why?

เวลาคุณฟังเพลงดนตรีแนวลูกทุ่งหรือหมอลำ คุณคิดว่านักดนตรีแนวเพลงใดมีความสำคัญกับคุณมากที่สุดและทำไม
คุณคิดว่าเพลงประเภทใดสำคัญมากที่สุด และทำไม

4. Do you personally know any of the performers that you like?

คุณรู้จักนักร้องคนใดเป็นการส่วนตัวหรือเปล่า

5. What do you enjoy about going to a concert in person?

คุณชอบอะไรในการไปดูการแสดงสด

6. When you go to a concert, how do you enjoy the music?

เวลาคุณไปดูการแสดงสด คุณมีส่วนร่วมในการชมการแสดงอย่างไร

7. How do you participate in regional music? Do you sing? Do you dance? Do you listen?
Do you write?

คุณเคยทำอะไรเกี่ยวกับดนตรีพื้นบ้านบ้าง เช่น ร้อง รำ ฟัง หรือแต่งเพลง

8. How do you think this music is connected to Isan?

คุณคิดว่าดนตรีชนิดนี้เชื่อมโยงกับความเป็นอีสานอย่างไร

9. Why do you think people all over Thailand enjoy this music?

ในความคิดของคุณ ทำไมคนไทยส่วนใหญ่ชื่นชอบเพลงแนวนี้

10. What are your opinions on new *luk thung* music versus older *luk thung* music?

ถ้าให้เปรียบเทียบเพลงลูกทุ่งแบบเก่าและเพลงลูกทุ่งแบบใหม่ คุณมีความคิดเห็นอย่างไร

Interview Questions – Local composers and songwriters

1. Record age, home province/city

คุณชื่ออะไรคะ มาจากจังหวัดไหนคะ

2. Is this your full-time job or do you do it as a hobby?

คุณแต่งเพลงเป็นอาชีพหรือเป็นงานอดิเรก

3. What inspires you to write this type of music?

อะไรคือแรงบันดาลใจให้คุณประพันธ์เพลงลูกทุ่งและหมอลำ

4. Who do you write most of your music for? Who performs your music?

คุณแต่งเพลงเพื่อร้องเองหรือให้แต่งให้คนอื่นร้อง

5. (If they write for many different artists) Which different artists do you write songs for?
How do you write specific songs for specific artists' personalities?

(หากคุณแต่งเพลงสำหรับนักร้องหลายคน) โปรดระบุบุชื่อนักร้องที่คุณประพันธ์เพลงให้ และคุณประพันธ์เพลงให้เข้ากับบุคลิกของแต่ละคนได้อย่างไร

6. Who is the biggest audience for your songs and how do you try to write songs that they will like?

ใครคือกลุ่มเป้าหมายหลักของคุณ และคุณประพันธ์เพลงเพื่อให้คนกลุ่มดังกล่าวชอบได้อย่างไร

7. How do you get feedback from your audience and learn what they like?

คุณทราบได้อย่างไรว่ากลุ่มเป้าหมายของคุณชอบแนวเพลงของคุณหรือไม่อย่างไร คุณทราบแนวเพลงที่กลุ่มเป้าหมายชอบได้อย่างไร

8. What types of musical styles do you like to include when you write your songs?

คุณมักจะผสมเพลงแนวใดในเพลงที่คุณแต่ง

9. How many different genres of music do you write?

คุณประพันธ์เพลงแนวใดบ้าง

10. Many Isan songs typically have complex lyrics, which have double meanings or innuendo hidden in them. Do most of your songs have a below the surface meaning?

เพลงในภาคอีสานส่วนใหญ่ก็มีเนื้อร้องที่ซับซ้อน และสองแง่สองง่าม ไม่ทราบว่าเพลงของคุณมีเนื้อร้องประเภทนี้หรือไม่

11. (If music is commercially produced) How do you usually sell your music? What recording company primarily produces your music?

(หากเพลงของคุณได้ออกเทป) คุณขายเพลงของคุณอย่างไร คุณเคยออกเทปกับค่ายเพลงใดเป็นค่ายแรก

12. Are there any restrictions placed on you by recording companies?

ค่ายเพลงมีข้อจำกัดในเพลงของคุณที่นำไปออกเทปหรือไม่

Appendix C – Human Subjects Approval



UNIVERSITY
of HAWAII®
SYSTEM

Office of Research Compliance
Human Studies Program

DATE: April 26, 2017
TO: Lau, Frederick, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Music, Center for Chinese Studies
DeKievit, Megan, MA, Music, University of Hawaii at Manoa
FROM: Magno, Norman, Dir, Animal Welfare and Biosafety Prog, Intm Dir Human Stds Prog, Social&Behav Exempt
PROTOCOL TITLE: Youth Identity Expression Through Regional Music Styles in Northeastern Thailand
FUNDING SOURCE: NONE
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2017-00152

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On April 26, 2017, the University of Hawaii (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46.101(b) 2.

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at the OHRP Website www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html.

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via email at uhirb@hawaii.edu. (The subject line should read: Exempt Study Modification.) The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program by phone at 956-5007 or email uhirb@hawaii.edu. We wish you success in carrying out your research project.

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Telephone: (808) 956-5007
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An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

Appendix D – National Research Council of Thailand Approval

สำนักงานคณะกรรมการวิจัยแห่งชาติ
196 ถนนพหลโยธิน เขตจตุจักร
กรุงเทพฯ 10900
โทรศัพท์ 0-2940-6369, 0-2579-2690
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OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL RESEARCH
COUNCIL OF THAILAND
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No. 0002/240๕

12 April B.E. 2560 (2017)

Dear Ms. DeKievit,

We are pleased to inform you that the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) has permitted you to conduct the research on "Youth Identity and regional Music in Northeastern Thailand" in Ubon Ratchatani Province from May to June 2017 in collaboration with Dr. Tinnakorn Attapaiboon, Faculty of Education, Nakhon Phanom University. In this connection, you must submit a copy of your complete report both in hard copy and CD-ROM copy to NRCT within one year after the project is ended.

According to immigration regulations, it is recommended that you contact the Royal Thai Embassy for obtaining non-immigrant visa (RS) prior to your arrival in Thailand. Additionally, you are required to report to the Division of International Affairs, NRCT within seven days after your arrival in Thailand in order to obtain concerned documents and pay a deposit of THB 10,000 for guaranteeing the submission of the complete report. A map of NRCT with its office hours is attached herewith for your information.

Should you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at webmaster@nrct-foreignresearcher.org or Tel. +66-2-940 6369.

We look forward to welcoming you soon.

Yours sincerely,

(Prof. Dr. Sirirung Songsivilai)
Secretary General

Ms. Megan DeKievit
2469 Audrey Street,
Jenison,
Michigan 49428,
USA

Encl.

Glossary

The following words have been alphabetized according to the romanization of the Thai text according to the Royal Thai General System (RTGS) of transcription, but include the Thai written form in parenthesis. All definitions are my own.

Bun Bangfai (บุญบั้งไฟ): one of the monthly festivals in the Isan region called the “rocket festival.”

This festival takes place in the spring when Isan peoples will fire a large rocket into the sky to call upon the gods for rain during the dry season.

ching (ฉิ่ง): small pair of hand chimes. This instrument is found throughout Thailand as a main colotomic part of both folk ensembles and central Thai court music ensembles.

de no (เด๋นอ): a common Isan phrase that is frequently used by mo lam singers to fit improvised sections of verse into a song’s rhythmic structure. This phrase means “I beg you.”

doe (เต๋อ): a common Isan particle word used to add a particular emphasis to statements, it is frequently used by mo lam singers to fit improvised sections of verse into a song’s rhythmic structure.

hit (ฮิต): refers to a series of monthly religious festivals celebrated by people in the Isan region, closely associated with agricultural life.

Isan (อีสาน): a word used to refer to the northeastern region of Thailand. This word is of Pali/Sanskrit origin and simply means “Northeast.”

Jataka (ชาดก): The Jataka is a body of literature originally from India, which is comprised of stories from the various previous lives of Gautama Buddha.

jing laew (จริงแล้ว): a common Isan phrase that is frequently used by mo lam singers to fit improvised sections of verse into a song’s rhythmic structure. This phrase means “actually,” or “really.”

khaen (แคน): a free-reed mouth-organ made of bamboo. This musical instrument is an important part of Lao cultures throughout mainland Southeast Asia.

khong (คอง): literally means “ways,” refers to a series of fourteen common religious beliefs of people in the Isan region, which outline how one should live their life.

la (ละ): a common Isan particle word used to add a particular emphasis to statements, it is frequently used by mo lam singers to fit improvised sections of verse into a song’s rhythmic structure.

la maen wa (ละแม่นว่า): a common Isan phrase that is frequently used by mo lam singers to fit improvised sections of verse into a song's rhythmic structure. This phrase means "certainly," or "truly."

lam chot (ลำจ้อย): this literally means, "problems" or "questions," and refers to sets of riddles or trivia questions that are sung in a call-and-response fashion during mo lam klon performances.

lam rueang (ลำเรื้อง): another name for mo lam klon, which uses the word rueang (เรื้อง), meaning "story."

luk kho (ลูกคอ): a type of vocal ornamentation used in traditional Isan and Lao style singing, which consists of a heavy fluctuation around a given note which can sound like overstated vibrato, or a slow trill.

luk krung (ลูกกรุง): this literally means "child of the city," and refers to a fusion musical genre that became popular in urban areas in central Thailand in the 1930s and 40s.

luk thung (ลูกทุ่ง): this literally means "child of the field," and refers to a fusion musical genre associated with the northeast region and sometimes called "Thai country music."

luk thung-mo lam (ลูกทุ่งหมอลำ): a new fusion genre of popular music in the northeastern region, which combines elements of preceding luk thung and mo lam genres.

luk thung klang (ลูกทุ่งกลาง): Luk thung music from central Thailand, generally sung in central Thai and popular throughout the country.

luk thung Isan (ลูกทุ่งอีสาน): Luk thung music from the northeastern region, typically using more Northeastern dialect language and primarily listened to in the northeast region.

meua nan (เมื่อนั้น): a common Isan phrase that is frequently used by mo lam singers to fit improvised sections of verse into a song's rhythmic structure. This phrase means "in that moment."

mo lam (หมอลำ): a traditional form of music in Lao communities throughout mainland Southeast Asia, which literally means "expert singer." This term can refer to either the performer, or the music. Sometimes the music itself is simply referred to as lam (ลำ).

mo lam klon (หมอลำกลอน): a subgenre of mo lam that involves a call-and-response style battle of wits between a single male and single female performer.

mo lam puen (ลำพวน): the oldest style of mo lam, usually sung by an individual performer accompanied by khaen relating local histories, folk tales, or religious stories.

- mo lam khu (หมอลำคู่): a subgenre of mo lam that is sung by a single male and single female performer that relates traditional stories through call-and-response singing.
- mo lam mu (หมอลำหมู่): a subgenre of mo lam which involves on theatrical performance style, featuring large, colorful sets and groups of twenty to fifty performers.
- mo lam sing (หมอลำซิ่ง): a subgenre of mo lam that is very popular among younger listeners, it sounds most like Western pop music of any subgenres and has the primary musical characteristic of having a good beat for the audience to dance to.
- nang oei (นางเอ๋ย): a common Isan phrase that is frequently used by mo lam singers to fit improvised sections of verse into a song's rhythmic structure. This phrase is a kind of title for a female, but with added emphasis.
- o-la-no (โอละโน้): a phrase used by a mo lam singer to call the listeners to attention before the performance begins, can also be used on occasion to conclude songs or act as a segue between two different songs.
- pha khao ma (ผ้าขาวม้า): a multifunctional, rectangular cloth traditionally worn in the Isan region, which is generally made of hand-woven cotton featuring checkered pattern of two to three colors.
- phin (พิน): a two to four-stringed, plucked chordophone from the northeastern region of Thailand, which has become part of the standard mo lam ensemble.
- phleng phuea chiwit (เพลงเพื่อชีวิต): literally means “songs for life,” which refers to a fusion genre of music in Thailand that is heavily influenced by Western folk and rock styles and was very popular in the 1970s.
- phleng Thai doem (เพลงไทยเดิม): this literally means “traditional Thai music,” which refers to various court music traditions and older Thai musical genres.
- phleng Thai sakon (เพลงไทยสากล): this literally means “international Thai music” or “new style Thai music,” which refers to the first genres of popular Thai music that mixed traditional, Thai music with Western instruments and notation.
- uean (เอื้อน): a type of vocal ornamentation used in traditional Isan and Lao style singing, which consists of a style of note-bending which like a portamento starts above or below the final pitch and slides to reach it.
- ramwong (รำวง): common folk dance found in Thailand and throughout Southeast Asia where participants dance in a circular fashion.
- si (สี่): a common Isan word indicating future tense, it is frequently used by mo lam singers to fit improvised sections of verse into a song's rhythmic structure.

wat (วัด): a Thai Buddhist temple

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