

Transnationalization of Music Through the Composition of Fon Ngiao

Ming Yan¹, Veera Phansue² and Metee Punvaratorn³

¹Graduate School Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

^{2,3}Faculty of Fine Arts. Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand

E-mail: ¹mingyan103114@gmail.com; ²veerap@swu.ac.th; ³matee@swu.ac.th

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the concept of original and contemporary Ngiao music, a traditional Thai musical form, and create a new sonata composition for piano and Thai string chamber ensemble. The study focused on the music, history, and culture of Fon Ngiao, examining the syncretism of Thai and Western music through the analysis of contemporary Ngiao compositions. The research explored ways to effectively convey the aesthetic standard of Thai music to Western audiences through performance, despite the challenges of harmonizing Thai and Western music systems. The research was conducted in Bangkok, Thailand using qualitative research methodologies such as surveys, interviews, and participant observation. The goal was to compose a new work blending Thai with Western music, promoting understanding and appreciation of Thai traditional music among university musicians, and showcasing its beauty to a wider audience. The research also documented and analyzed the piano compositions of Natchar Pancharoen and Bruce Gaston, who devoted themselves to the preservation and promotion of Thai music. Furthermore, the study examined the role of the piano in Thai music and its integration into traditional Thai string ensembles, providing insights into the influence of Western classical music on Thai culture and society. Overall, this research presented a comprehensive analysis of Fon Ngiao and its adaptations to inspire the creation of modern musical works with Thai characteristics.

Keywords: Traditional Thai Music; Sonata Composition; Fon Ngiao; Chamber Music

Introduction

French missionaries introduced Western music to Thailand in the 16th century, utilizing trumpets in Catholic churches and the royal family. In the period of King Narai of Ayutthaya era.

While, the Western classical music was officially introduced in the mid-19th century during the reign of King Rama V, with Miss Fanny Knox bringing the piano. (Arisara Matakunakorn, 2018) The piano had a significant influence on Princess Dara Rasmi and Christian schools.

In King Rama VI's era, Western culture had a profound impact on Thai arts, particularly music. Western musicians and educators were employed to teach in Thailand, promoting the development of Western classical music education. (Yamprai Jinttapim, 2011) Today, Thai public schools and universities incorporate Western classical music into their curricula.

Contemporary music in Thailand combines traditional Thai music with global genres, experimenting with traditional instruments and contemporary styles. Digital technology is used to create new sounds while preserving Thai music heritage. Cross-cultural collaborations and notable ensembles and composers, such as Fong Naam Ensemble, Boy Thai, Bangkok Xylophone, Chamras Saewataporn, Professor Natchar Pancharoen, and Professor Narongrit Dhamabutra, contribute to the evolution of contemporary Thai music.

The addition of the piano to Thai string ensembles created a new ensemble. Notable piano players like Klaew Watcharobol and Sumitra Sucharitkul played with traditional Thai strings ensembles, preserving Thai classical tunes. Choochart Pitaksakorn arranged Thai classical works for Western orchestras, while Natchar Pancharoen created piano notations for his compositions. Chamber music, known as "the music of friends" in European classical music, has similarities and differences with Thai chamber music. The researcher discovered works played by Natchar Pancharoen and her partners, leading to the release of four CDs titled "Listening to the Compositions of Sound: Piano Notes, Thai Songs."

The integration of Western classical music in Thailand has significantly influenced Thai music's development. The piano and Thai string ensembles have added new dimensions to traditional Thai music. Composers like Sumitra Sucharitkul and Choochart Pitaksakorn have enriched Thai classical music. The fusion of Western and Thai music has created a unique and dynamic musical culture in Thailand.

Despite the impact of Western classical music on Thai culture, research on the contributions of Thai composers, particularly those who disseminate Thai music to the West, is lacking. This study aims to explore the history of music development in Thailand, document and analyze Fon Ngiao and related music, and develop a new performance form based on the achievements of these composers. The research also aims to make their works more accessible and appreciated by a wider audience, fostering a better understanding and appreciation of Thai music's history and culture.

Research Objectives

1. To present the development of Ngiao music from its original compositions to contemporary variations
2. To create the piano quintet sonata incorporates Western and Thai instruments.
3. To promote cultural interaction and understanding through piano and Thai string chamber music.

Literature Review

The literature review examined the composition of piano and Thai string instrument ensembles and its academic foundation in musicology and anthropology. The research focuses on key questions and gaps in these areas.

Thai String and Percussion Ensemble

The Mahori ensemble is a mixed instrument ensemble that provides a pleasant sound without any dancing. It consists of woodwinds, plucked instruments, percussion melody instruments, and percussion rhythm instruments. In Thailand, there are five categories of Mahori ensembles with varying sizes and instrumentation. The Mahori Kherungn Si is a small ensemble with four instruments that create a unique sound. The Mahori Kherungn Hok is an ensemble with six instruments, including the Ramana and the Khлуй, adding complexity and depth to the music in a call-and-response style. The Mahori Kherueng Diew, Mahori Kherueng Khu, and the Mahori Kherueng Yai are other categories of Mahori ensembles that differ in size and instrumentation.

The Khap Mai is a traditional Thai music ensemble with a prolonged history in Thailand and significant cultural importance. It comprises three performers, including a vocalist, a Saw Sam Sai player, and a Bando drummer. The Bando drum, originating from China, Tibet, and India, is a vital part of the Khap Mai ensemble, played by rolling it sideways using a handle to create a rhythmic line. The Khap Mai ensemble's exceptional vocals, strings, and percussion blend is appreciated by audiences worldwide, making it an important cultural tradition in Thailand.

The Mahori, a stringed and percussion ensemble, was initially invented by the Khmers and later refined by the Thais. It originally consisted of four performers but now includes additional instruments. During the Ayutthaya period, women began performing in the Mahori style, resulting in the ensemble growing to six members. Smaller instruments were added to the ensemble for women performers. (Morton & Duriyanga, 1976)

Ngiao songs

Contemporary Thai music is influenced by popular music from other countries. The Thai royal family has also made contributions to music composition. Classical musicians in Thailand are exploring new avenues for development. Col. Choochart Pitakasakorn and Natchar Pancharoen have arranged numerous pieces of Thai music for solo piano. The Piano Solo School of Traditional Thai Music (PSTM) in Bangkok focuses on researching and performing traditional Thai music on the piano. "Fon Ngiao" represents the merging of Thai contemporary music with Western instruments. The development of Thai music promotes and strengthens the national identity. The blending of Western and Thai cultural influences reflects modern Thai music culture.

Ngiao is a type of melody from eastern Lanna, Thailand that features the Saw Ngiao instrument and is often accompanied by the Fon Ngiao dance (Pidokrajt, 2014, p. 219). The dance is traditionally performed by the Ngiao Hill ethnic group and is associated with spiritual figures and objects. The music for this dance was composed in 1938 by Mr. Rod Aksorn Thap. Professor Lamul Yamagupt observed the Ngiao Pon Meueng dance being performed in the late 1800s and brought elements of it to the central Thai dance style, resulting in the development of a new standardized form of beautiful dance in 1895.

Theory of western music composition

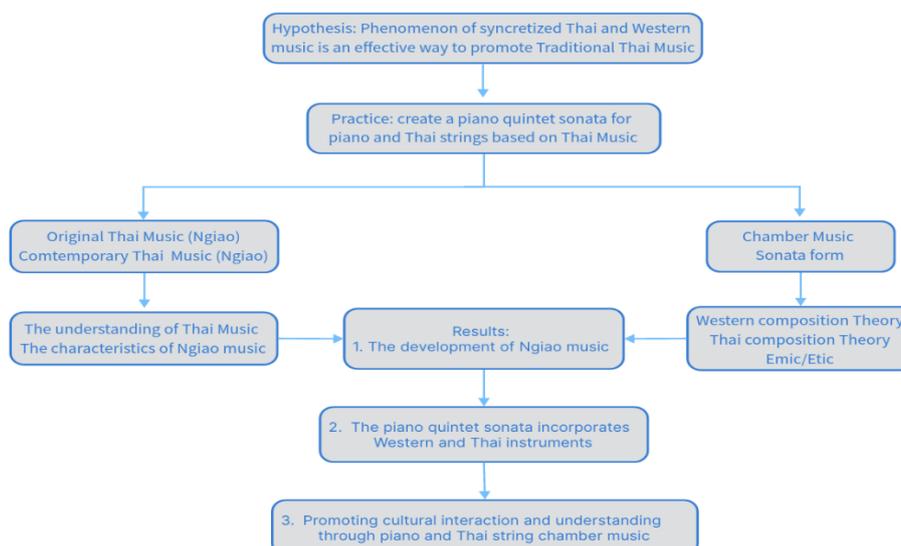
Music is a medium of expression with auditory elements subject to analysis and interpretation. Music theory studies the application of these elements in creating and understanding music, including melody, rhythm, harmony, and more. Melody is a cohesive sequence of musical tones with specific characteristics. It can be described in terms of movement, pitch, spacing, range, continuity, rhythm, and shape. Western music theory divides the octave into a chromatic scale with twelve pitches, and different patterns of selecting notes create additional scales. Heptatonic scales, named using tonic, supertonic, dominant, and other terms, can be used to construct melody and harmony. Rhythm is the organization of sounds and silences in time, creating movement and flow. Meter involves grouping beats into bars with a specified number and value of beats. Rhythm is related to pulse, meter, and beats and involves an interrelationship between accented and unaccented beats. Harmony refers to the use of simultaneous pitches or chords and the principles governing them. It is the "vertical" aspect of music and is closely related to counterpoint and polyphony. Harmony is a fundamental element of Western music and is based on the listener's perception of the relationship between different pitches and chords. Consonant pitch relationships are pleasant while dissonant relationships are harsh. (Palisca & Ian, 2014).

Chamber music is a genre of intimate music performed by small instrumental ensembles. It was coined by Richard Henry Walthew in a lecture published in 1909 (Walthew, 1909). It is composed of small groups and played without a conductor. The genre originated in the 16th century and was associated with aristocratic households. The string quartet emerged in the 1750s. Classical chamber music forms such as the serenade, nocturne, and divertimento were intended for various instrumental forces and often played at social gatherings. Standard chamber music ensembles include the string trio, string quintet, and piano trio.

Sonata form is a musical structure widely used in the first movements of various genres. It has three main parts: exposition, development, and recapitulation, which present, explore, and repeat musical themes. The exposition is divided into four sections, while the development section mainly extends and develops the exposition material. The recapitulation reproduces the exposition material, but each part stays in the tonic key. Although sonata form is a powerful tool for organizing music, it's not always strictly followed by composers. An introduction and an epilogue can be included in sonata form, with the introduction often echoing or contrasting with the exposition. The epilogue can have the character of a second development section (Rosen, 1988).

The researcher examined academic texts and theses on chamber music in West, Central, and Northern Thailand, and the composition of Thai contemporary chamber music. This provided a comprehensive understanding of other authors' views, which will guide the creation of new music that combines Thai and Western music theories. The researcher will use these ideas to produce a novel and innovative composition.

Conceptual Framework



The inspiration for this study stems from observing the fascinating phenomenon of syncretism between Thai and Western music, sparking a hypothesis that whether it is an effective way to promote Traditional Thai Music. This study will verify it by creating a piano quintet sonata for piano and Thai strings based on Thai Music. The creating process comprise two distinct yet interconnected sections: comprehension and creation. The comprehension portion will examine Thai music, further divided into two subgroups: traditional Thai music (Ngiao) and contemporary Thai music (Ngiao). The second part of this study, creation, will build upon the knowledge and perspectives gained from analyzing both traditional and contemporary Ngiao music. Applying Western compositional techniques, a new chamber piece in sonata form will be composed, blending piano and Thai string instruments harmoniously.

Methodology

The research design of this study involves two main parts with the aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Thai Ngiao music from traditional to contemporary interpretations.

Part 1 focuses on analyzing original traditional Thai Ngiao music using the following research methods:

- Literature review of academic books and articles on Thai music analysis (e.g. Manop Wisuttipat's book) to gain foundational knowledge.

- Purposive sampling and musical analysis of 4 representative traditional Ngiao songs (Ngiao, Saw Ngiao, Fon Ngiao, Ngiao Ram Luk Thao) using musicological methods to examine elements like melody, rhythm, structure and instrumentation.

- Expert interviews with traditional Thai musicians identified through criteria-based selection to gain insider perspectives.

Part 2 centers on examining contemporary Thai Fon Ngiao music using these methods:

- Literature review of academic sources on contemporary Thai music.

- Purposive sampling and musical analysis of 2 contemporary Fon Ngiao compositions by Thai ethnic and Western musicians using Western musicological methods.

- Expert interviews with contemporary musicians from Thai and Western backgrounds selected based on criteria.

- Comparative analysis of traditional and contemporary Thai music characteristics.

In terms of data collection and analysis, academic literature, expert interviews, musical analysis and comparative analysis will be utilized. Quantitative and qualitative methods will analyze the evolution of Thai Ngiao music across time periods and cultures. This will inform the researcher's own composition of an original contemporary Thai chamber music piece.

Research Results

1. The development of Ngiao music from its original compositions to contemporary variations

Ngiao music, originating from the northern region of Thailand, has a diverse and evolving history. It encompasses a variety of styles and compositions that have shaped its unique identity. The journey of Ngiao music began with the contributions of early musicians like Saw Ngiao and Selemao. However, it was the collaborative work of Miss Lamul Yamagupt and Mr. Rod Aksorn Thap in 1938 that marked a significant turning point, giving birth to the distinctive style known as Fon Ngiao music. (Phiphatphong Masiri, 2022).

Over time, Fon Ngiao music became a source of inspiration for subsequent generations of musicians. Notable contemporary artists such as Natchar Pancharoen and Bruce Gaston were influenced by Fon Ngiao and ventured into creating their own interpretations of this musical genre. One remarkable composition that emerged from this lineage is Boonyong Ketkong's Ngiao Ram Luk Thao, released in 1958, which further developed the melodic aspects of Fon Ngiao.

The influence of Fon Ngiao extended beyond its original boundaries, reaching different regions of Thailand. In 1957, two compositions deeply influenced by Fon Ngiao were released: "Toey Khong," a captivating Thai folk song from the Northeastern region, and "Kulab Wiang Phing," a popular song from northern Thailand that symbolizes the Rose of Chiang Mai City. These compositions serve as testaments to the widespread impact and enduring legacy of Ngiao music.

By exploring the rich history, evolution, and influence of Ngiao music through the works of various musicians and composers, this research sheds light on the cultural significance and artistic development of this unique musical genre.

2. Create The piano quintet sonata incorporates Western and Thai instruments.

The creative endeavor of blending Western and Thai musical elements resulted in the creation of a captivating piano quintet sonata. Masterfully revised by Bruce Gaston, this composition represents a harmonious fusion of diverse musical traditions. The sonata unfolds in three distinct parts: a captivating prelude, a dynamic main body, and a satisfying postlude.

Rooted in the key of C minor, the sonata incorporates the evocative tones of two pentatonic scales, seamlessly bridging the gap between Western and Thai musical aesthetics. Within the main body, listeners are treated to two sections, A and B, with an interlude gracefully interwoven between them. Throughout the composition, traditional Thai motifs and instruments like the "Sueng" and "Mong Sae spelling" are skillfully integrated, lending an unmistakable Thai flavor to the overall musical tapestry.

The structure and melodies of the sonata pay homage to the foundations of traditional Thai music while allowing for variations and development, showcasing the creative genius of the composer. As the sonata reaches its conclusion, the coda masterfully brings a sense of closure through a thoughtfully crafted chord progression, ultimately resolving to the poignant tonality of C minor.

In addition to Bruce Gaston's revised version, another noteworthy interpretation of the piano quintet sonata emerges from the expertise of Professor Natchar Pancharoen. This rendition follows a binary form and embraces the enchanting sounds of the pentatonic scale. Divided into an introduction, a captivating main body, and a concluding coda, the sonata's sections A and B feature verses and refrains, while the coda echoes the essence of Section The melodic motifs in this composition draw inspiration from the original "Fon Ngiao" and Ngiao Ram Luk, allowing for a sense of continuity while offering delightful variations on the main theme.

These captivating arrangements, adapted by the researcher, exemplify the researcher's aim to blend traditional Thai music with Western instruments while preserving the essence of the Ngiao genre. The incorporation of the Thai rhythm instrument "Ching" and the exploration of Thai string instruments as substitutes for their Western counterparts have yielded valuable experiences and insights. These arrangements contribute to the repertoire of chamber music that seamlessly merges traditional and Western elements, creating a truly unique and captivating sound.

Fon Ngiao Sonata

Ming YAN

Andante

Ching

Sueng

Saw Duang

Saw Sam Sai

Piano

Andante

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Piano Sonata first page



photo of ensemble in perform

3. The significance of transnationalization in promoting cultural interaction and understanding through piano and Thai string chamber music.

The chamber music collaboration between piano and Thai strings serves as a testament to the transformative power of cultural exchange and collaboration among musicians from diverse backgrounds. By combining traditional Thai instruments with Western counterparts, this innovative ensemble creates a platform for cultural dialogue and mutual appreciation.

The integration of Thai and Western musical instruments within the chamber music setting is a distinctive feature that contributes to the richness and uniqueness of the compositions. The enchanting sounds of traditional Thai instruments like the Sueng and the Saw Duang blend harmoniously with the expressive capabilities of the piano, resulting in a musical experience that transcends cultural boundaries and opens up new possibilities for artistic expression.

Furthermore, the emphasis on cultural exchange and collaboration fosters a sense of unity and cooperation among the musicians. Through their shared understanding and appreciation of different musical traditions, they create a harmonious musical landscape that promotes cross-cultural understanding and respect.

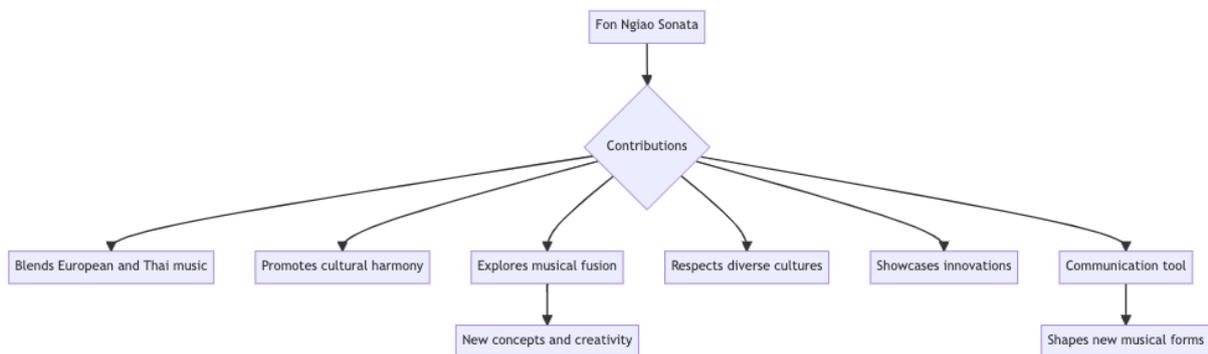
The cognitive and psychological effects of this chamber music extend beyond the performers themselves. The performance of this music creates an immersive experience for the audience, evoking emotional responses and providing a deeper understanding and appreciation of Thai culture. Through the exploration of traditional musical practices within a contemporary context, the audience gains valuable insights into the cultural traditions, history, and values of Thailand.

The development of piano and Thai strings chamber music reflects the increasing globalization and modernization of Thailand, as well as its commitment to cultural exchange and understanding. By embracing both Thai and Western cultural influences and adapting traditional music to new contexts, this form of ensemble music represents a dynamic bridge between diverse musical traditions.

In conclusion, the chamber music of piano and Thai strings exemplifies a unique and innovative fusion of traditional Thai and Western musical elements. Through its artistic creations, it promotes cultural diversity, preserves traditional musical practices, and fosters cross-cultural understanding. This musical collaboration not only enriches the lives of musicians but also offers audiences an immersive experience that deepens their understanding and appreciation of Thai culture.

New knowledge and contributions

The Fon Ngiao Sonata blends European classical music with Thai melodies, reflecting cultural syncretism in Bangkok. It aims to promote understanding and harmony across cultural and religious boundaries. The study explores the fusion of Thai and Western music, leading to new musical concepts and creative spaces. The composer emphasizes the importance of respecting different tuning systems and cultural beliefs to make music understandable for diverse cultures. New music concepts prioritize exploration, innovation, and cross-cultural fusion, showcased through performance. Music creation can serve as a communication tool, shaping new musical forms through cross-cultural exchange.



Recommendations

1. Specific Recommendation

This study recommends first presenting the development of Ngiao music from its origins to contemporary variations in order to provide context. It then advises composing an original piano quintet sonata blending Thai and Western instruments to achieve musical fusion. Finally, it recommends performing the work publicly and gauging audience response to evaluate its capacity to promote cultural understanding. In summary, the recommendations are to 1) outline the history of Ngiao, 2) compose a Thai–Western chamber music fusion piece, and 3) assess the composition's effectiveness via public performance. Through this multi-faceted approach of analysis, creation, and evaluation, the study aims to explore the integration of Thai and Western musical cultures.

2. General Recommendation

Strategies for promoting traditional Thai music through chamber music with piano and Thai strings include: Collaboration with cultural institutions: Partner with museums and music schools to

offer performances, workshops, and educational programs that emphasize the cultural significance of Thai piano chamber music, raising awareness and appreciation.

In future research, educational programs should develop programs that teach traditional Thai music techniques and styles to both Thai and non-Thai musicians. Offer workshops or classes taught by traditional Thai musicians, or incorporate Thai music into existing music education programs.

Cultural exchange programs: Facilitate exchanges between Thai and non-Thai musicians to encourage mutual understanding and appreciation. Organize collaborative performances or events featuring traditional Thai music alongside other genres.

Conclusion

This study has traced the evolution of Ngiao music from its origins in northern Thailand, which were influenced by seminal musicians that established distinct melodic and compositional styles. The collaborative efforts of Lamul Yamagupt and Rod Aksorn Thap marked a crucial turning point, leading to the influential Fon Ngiao style, which was later expanded by artists such as Natchar Pancharoen. As demonstrated, compositions like "Ngiao Ram Luk Thao" and "Toey Khong" further developed Ngiao's unique musical identity. By harmoniously blending Thai melodic motifs and pentatonic scales with Western instruments, the piano quintet sonata created exemplifies the possibilities for cultural exchange. The quintet fuses Thai and Western musical elements in a harmonious manner, adapting between instrumental interludes and verse/refrain sections while unfolding through traditional structures. This innovative synthesis highlights the potential for appreciating diverse artistic traditions through intercultural creativity and conversation. Musicians facilitate greater understanding between Thailand and the West by analyzing foundational compositions, composing new cross-cultural fusions, and assessing their reception. While requiring further evaluation, this research initiates an ongoing process of musical dialogue spanning cultures. Through such collaborative efforts, Thai and Western artists can gain mutual respect for each other's artistic practices and perspectives.

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