

Cultural Literacy and Digital Success: Traditional Knowledge Transform in Isan Folk Music

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the development and adaptation of Isan folk music in contemporary Thai society, focusing on its cultural literacy, preservation of traditional identity, and role in social development. Using qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews with five key informants and document analysis, the study investigates three main aspects: the preservation of aesthetic identity, adaptation to contemporary culture, and contributions to social and educational development. The findings reveal that Isan folk music has successfully integrated traditional literacy elements with modern forms while maintaining its cultural essence. The integration of digital platforms has significantly expanded its reach, with notable examples such as achieving 802 million YouTube views and generating 6 billion baht in economic value through live performances. The research also highlights the evolution of knowledge transmission from traditional oral literacy methods to formal education systems and digital literacy platforms. Moreover, the study demonstrates how Isan folk music serves as a vital tool for cultural literacy formation, economic development, and cross-cultural communication. These findings suggest that the successful adaptation of Isan folk music provides a valuable model for preserving and developing cultural literacy heritage in the context of rapid social change, while maintaining a balance between commercial development and cultural literacy conservation.

Key words: Isan Folk Music, Cultural Literacy, Digital Literacy Transformation, Cultural Heritage, Contemporary Thai Society

INTRODUCTION

Music is a cultural literacy phenomenon that is deeply connected to social contexts, particularly in dimensions of creation, consumption, and knowledge transmission between groups. Tylor (1871) presented the concept of culture as a “complex whole” comprising various elements that humans acquire as members of society, including knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, and customs. Isan folk music is a prominent example of cultural literacy objects that reflect and create social boundaries (Griswold, 1987; DiMaggio, 1987), especially in the context of ethnic diversity in Thailand. As Junsri and Burusphat (2018) point out, Isan folk music not only serves an entertainment function but also acts as a cultural literacy symbol that clearly represents Isan identity. This aligns with Bourdieu’s (1984) concept that cultural literacy consumption functions as a marker of social status. In this case, the ability to access and understand, and develop literacy in Isan folk music becomes a form of cultural capital that Isan people use to express their identity.

In the contemporary context, Nakrob (2014) points out that Isan folk music has demonstrated interesting cultural dynamics through the integration of traditional and modern forms, creating new musical cultural forms while maintaining the essence of Isan identity. Boonrod’s (2019) said that

these changes affect not only musical forms but also broader social and cultural transformations. Additionally, Chandapan (2011) discovered that Isan folk music could serve as an effective tool for communicating and transmitting knowledge in environmental education, reflecting the diverse roles of folk music in social development.

Objectives

This study aimed:

1. To analyze the creation and maintenance of cultural identity.
2. To analyze the adaptation and integration with contemporary culture.
3. To analyze the roles in social development and education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Theory

Theoretical focus on studying the development and adaptation of Isan folk music in contemporary Thai society, cultural dynamics, and preservation of traditional identity.

1. Theory of Ethnomusicology: Timothy Rice (2014) presented a conceptual framework for the study of ethnographic music. He proposed that the study of music in

cultural contexts should consider three main dimensions: Music Making, Music Maintenance and Transmission, Musical Change. Music exists as a dynamic social activity. Therefore, the study must consider the creative process, transmission, and changes that occur in historical and social contexts. Especially in the era of globalization where local music faces rapid changes, the study should emphasize the adaptation process and the persistence of music in contemporary contexts.

2. The concept of Cultural Objects by Griswold (1987) and DiMaggio (1987) presents important perspectives in the analysis of cultural phenomena. Griswold proposes a methodological framework to study culture that examines four key components: Cultural creators, Cultural receivers, Social world and Cultural objects. This framework emphasizes the analysis of relationships between cultural objects and their social and historical contexts. Meanwhile, DiMaggio presents the Theory of Classification in Art that analyzes the art classification system through four dimensions: Classification, Hierarchy, Universality and Boundaries. The art classification system relates to social structures and changes according to social transformations.
3. Theory of Transmission: Huib Schippers (2010) presents a conceptual framework about music transmission in the globalization era that requires adaptation in all components to maintain balance between traditional value preservation and response to changing contexts. This concept holds significance for the development of music education systems that embrace a global perspective and recognize cultural diversity.

The researcher applied both concepts to study Isan folk music. From Griswold's perspective, this enables the analysis of Isan folk music as a cultural object that reflects relationships between creative artists, music listeners or consumers, Isan social and cultural contexts, including song texts and performances. From DiMaggio's viewpoint, it aids in the study of Isan folk music classification, both in terms of Mor Lam categorization, artist status hierarchy, fusion with contemporary music, and cultural boundary definition.

Population and Sample Group

In this research, in-depth interviews were conducted with four experts in Isan folk music who have had teaching and research experience in higher education for more than 10 years in northeastern Thailand: These experts include two assistant professors and lecturers from Khon Kaen University, one assistant professor from Mahasarakham University, and one lecturer from Roi Et Rajabhat University, along with experts who have had more than 50 years of experience in folk singing or Mor Lam.

Data Collection

The research, conducted over six months from October 2023 to March 2024, involved several key activities:

1. In-depth interviews using semi-structured interview forms focus on identity and inheritance of Isan folk

music, cultural adaptation and integration, social and educational roles.

2. Document analysis from academic articles and research from Thai journals online and Thai-journal citation index center databases, statistical reports from relevant agencies and media presenting information about Isan folk music.
3. Finally, analyze the data and write a report.

Data Analysis

In this research, content analysis follows these steps:

Step 1: Data organization through word-by-word transcription and thematic categorization.

Step 2: Data reduction by selection of information that aligns with research objectives.

Step 3: Interpretation and conclusion through theoretical analysis.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The research has been reviewed by the Khon Kaen University Ethics Committee for Human Research (HE663249) based on the Belmont Report and GCP in Social and Behavioral Research. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study and adheres to research ethics principles on consent, confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw.

RESULTS

The results were presented according to Research objective as follows:

Creation and Preservation of Aesthetic Identity in Isan Folk Music

Isan folk music represents a valuable cultural heritage that reflects local ways of life, beliefs, and values, with distinctive aesthetic identities through language, melody, and musical instruments. It can be classified into three main cultural groups: Mor Lam, Korat Songs, and Chaeriang Kantruem (Pongsapich, 2000). Each group possesses unique characteristics that reflect the cultural identity of their respective areas. The Mor Lam cultural group is the most popular performance style, with roots in religious rituals and beliefs, particularly in Phi Fa practices such as Mor Yao, Mor Lam Phi Fa, and Mor Lam Song (Junsri & Burusphat, 2018). It later evolved into various entertainment forms including Lam Rueng, Lam Klon, Lam Mu, Lam Ploen, and Lam Phi Fa, as well as Lam performances in various occasions such as Bun Bang Fai festivals, Muan Noi processions, and Nang Dong processions. The Korat Songs group represents folk songs unique to Nakhon Ratchasima province, distinguished by their use of vowel and consonant rhymes that create melodious songs, with the characteristic "Chai Cha Cha Chi Chai" vocals and accompanying movements that reflect Korat cultural identity (Nakrob, 2014). The Chaeriang Kantruem group consists of folk songs popular in Cambodian border provinces, including Buriram, Surin, and Si Sa Ket.

The identity of Isan folk music consists of local dialect usage in vocals, such as Isan, Korat, or Khmer-influenced languages, improvisation that demonstrates artists' creativity and skills, and third, specific musical instruments such as Khaen, Pin, Wot, and Pong Lang. Regarding social and cultural roles, Pinkeaw (2017) said that Isan folk music plays a significant role in communication and knowledge transmission, especially in eras of underdeveloped communication. Mor Lam performers serve as mediators for education, news, and religious teachings. Additionally, they play roles in entertainment and form essential parts of traditions according to Hit Sip Song Khong Sip Si (The Twelve Traditions and Fourteen Rules). These arts pass through oral tradition from generation to generation, harmoniously blends way of life with art. Isan folk music reflects local identity and wisdom through the integration of beliefs, rituals, and entertainment. The preservation of aesthetic identity in Isan folk music currently faces challenges from social and cultural changes (Junsri & Burusphat, 2018), while also demonstrates dynamics in adaptation for survival in contemporary contexts.

The research results reveal that the preservation of Isan folk music identity today requires cooperation from multiple sectors. Nakrob (2014) said that the integration between traditional and modern forms, such as the development of Mor Lam Sing, represents an adaptation that helps maintain the core of folk music culture. Meanwhile, Pinkeaw (2017) emphasizes the importance of knowledge transfer and education, particularly the role of Mor Lam as educational and religious mediators. The approaches to conservation and development of Isan folk music should proceed in three main areas: (i) promotion of intergenerational knowledge transfer through formal and non-formal education systems, (ii) support for creative works that combine traditional and contemporary music, and (iii) development of folk artists' potential to exist in current society (Chandapan, 2011).

Furthermore, the promotion of cultural tourism and creation of economic value added are important approaches to maintain the sustainability of Isan folk music.

Development of isan folk music

Isan folk music shows interesting cultural dynamics through continuous development and changes over many decades. This reflects the adaptability and flexibility of folk arts. The development can be considered in multiple dimensions, including integration with modern music, cultural diffusion, education and transmission, and evolution of musical instruments. A significant turning point in Thai music occurred around 1957, during the Vietnam War era, when Western music entered Thailand through American musicians performing at military bases. They introduced various music genres such as pop, jazz, heavy metal, and rock and roll. These influences spread rapidly throughout Thai society. Between 1958 and 1967, the expansion of capitalist economy in post-war Thai society led to changes in rural life and increased rural-urban connections. The Thai music industry received clear influence from Western music, which resulted in Thai pop music and string combo bands. In 1964, Professor Chamong Rangsikul coined the term "Luk

Thung" to define a music style that combines traditional Thai singing and dance with Western music.

The golden age of Luk Thung occurred between 1968 and 1987 when it gained widespread popularity, especially in rural areas. Luk Thung and folk music competitions were held on various stages, and Luk Thung radio stations became influential media. This increased popularity led to the introduction of capitalism into the Luk Thung music industry, resulting in more systematic management and integration with the music industry. During 1992-2007, Luk Thung underwent a significant adaptation by blending with modern international music genres like pop and rock, creating "contemporary Luk Thung" that gained widespread popularity. The expansion of industrial economy led to labor migration from Isan to the capital, which resulted in the spread of Isan music culture and growth of Isan Luk Thung. In terms of integration with modern music, Isan folk music incorporated contemporary music styles, creating new performance formats such as Mor Lam Sing and Modern Mor Lam, which maintained the essence of folk music while adding contemporary elements to reach new audiences. The connection between Isan folk music and Luk Thung appears clear in many aspects: musical integration, content and essence inheritance, social reflection, cultural preservation and dissemination, and presentation development. Luk Thung combined melodies and vocal characteristics of folk music with Western music, particularly Lam and Serng from Isan region, such as Lam Toei, Lam Ploen, Lam Sarawan, and Serng Bung Fai.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic severely affected Mor Lam and Isan Luk Thung troupes, causing live performances to halt. However, this crisis demonstrated the adaptability of artists and entrepreneurs in the industry, which led to the development of online performance formats such as Facebook live streams and YouTube video production. Isan Luk Thung, in particular, maintained continuous popularity, as seen during 2021-2022, which reflected the cultural and economic influence of this music type in Thai society through both traditional consumption and clearly growing digital dimensions. Regarding artist popularity and hit songs, Monkan Kankoon was the most popular artist during this period (Figure 1), holding the position of most-viewed artist on YouTube in Thailand for three consecutive years, with over 802 million views in 2022 (Table 1), which reflected the strength of the Isan Luk Thung market (Thai Public Broadcasting Service, 2023).

Concurrently, songs like "Bai Samon Mot Ayu" by Artist Ramphai Saengthong and "Kham Sanya Thi Chanuman" by Artist Aim Chonthicha have also received warm reception from listeners, with high listening and sharing numbers online (Changthai Entertainment, 2022). The transformation in the Isan music ecosystem has seen digital platforms play a crucial role in expanding the reach of Isan country music, with 71% of music fans engaging with content through online channels such as YouTube and live streams. Additionally, artists and music labels utilize these platforms to release new works and build new audience bases (Isan Insight, 2024). For example, the molam song "Khit Hot Jang Phu Lanka" by Artist Viang Naruemon (Figure 2) has gained popularity

Table 1. Most streamed artists of 2022 (<https://chartmasters.org/youtube-most-streamed-artists-of-2022/>)

Most Streamed Artists in 2021 on YouTube Thailand				Most Streamed Artists in 2022 on YouTube Thailand			
LY	Rank	Artist	Streams	LY	Rank	Artist	Streams
1	1	Monkaen Kaenkoon	808 000 000	1	1	Monkaen Kaenkoon	802 000 000
2	2	Blackpink	743 000 000	3	2	Illslick	686 000 000
5	3	Illslick	673 000 000	4	3	Saran	655 000 000
-	4	Saran	545 000 000	2	4	Blackpink	502 000 000
7	5	BTS	508 000 000	6	5	Pongsit Kamphoe	403 000 000
4	6	Pongsit Kamphoe	430 000 000	-	6	Tilly Birds	381 000 000
3	7	Youngohm	429 000 000	-	7	Singto Numchoke	345 000 000
-	8	Sprite	416 000 000	-	8	Joey Phuwasit	337 000 000
-	9	F.Hero	397 000 000	-	9	Tai Orathai	315 000 000
-	10	Labanoon	386 000 000	-	10	Musketeers	306 000 000



Figure 1. Billboard artist popularity and hit songs, Monkan Kankoon (https://www.billboardth.com/thai_country?week=2022-W47)

in both online viewership and live performances, connecting with the local identity and culture of Isan (Changthai Entertainment, 2022). In terms of economic and cultural significance, Isan country music not only provides entertainment but also plays a role in the community economy, with revenue from live performances and related activities reaching 6,000 million baht in 2022, attracting over 20 million viewers. These performances serve as a platform to connect Isan identity with audiences nationwide, as well as attract tourists and commercial sponsors (Isan Insight, 2024).

Adaptation and Integration with Contemporary Culture

The development of Isan folk music (Figure 3) has faced significant changes in the contemporary era, resulting from infrastructure development and technological advancements in the Isan region. Access to the internet and various media has opened new worldviews for the younger generation in



Figure 2. Billboard the molam song “Khit Hot Jang Phu Lanka” by Artist Viang Naruemon (<https://www.sanook.com/music/2444445/>)

this region, allowing them to access diverse information, knowledge, and cultures from around the world. By blending traditional culture with modernity, new-generation Isan

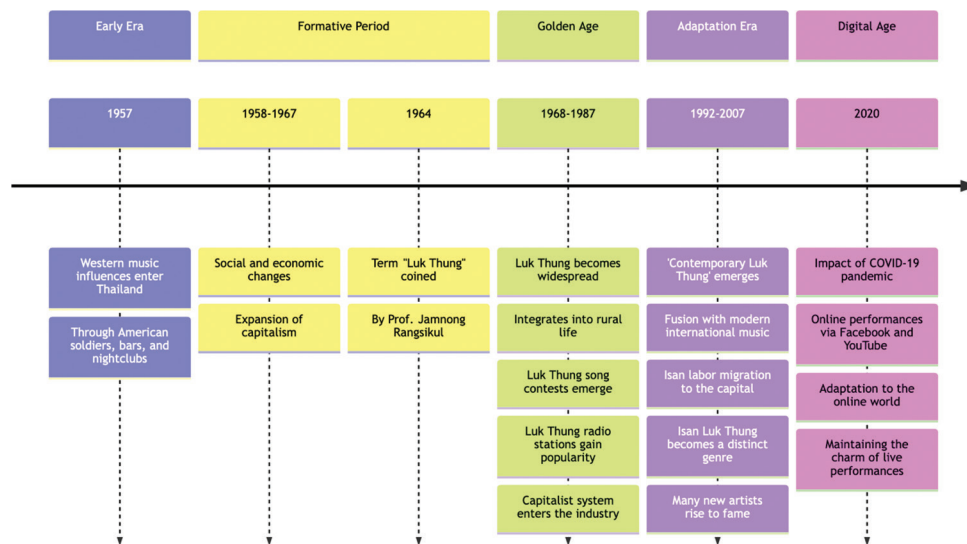


Figure 3. The timeline of Isan folk music development (Source: Sutee Julakarn, 2024)

artists have created a unique musical style called “Applied Isan Music.” This style not only preserves the essence of Isan folk music but also incorporates new elements, resulting in linguistic diversity and innovative presentation methods within the same song. This change is not limited to the music industry but also reflects broader social and cultural transformations in the Isan region. The image of a “modern Isan” portrayed in these songs demonstrates that Isan people are no longer confined to traditional lifestyles. Various factors have contributed to this transformation, including economic, social, political, demographic development, education, age groups, and access to information. All of these elements have played a role in shaping the new identity of Isan music.

Although Applied Isan Music differs from traditional Mor Lam, it maintains the core of Isan identity by presenting characteristics of Isan people, such as resilience, perseverance, and cheerfulness, through modern methods that reach a wider audience. This evolution of Isan folk music reflects a broader cultural shift in the region, where traditional elements are being reinterpreted and presented in contemporary contexts. The emergence of “Applied Isan Music” represents not just a musical innovation, but a reimagining of Isan identity in the modern world. It demonstrates how local cultures can adapt to global influences while maintaining their distinctive characteristics.

The transformation of Isan music also highlights the dynamic nature of cultural identity in the face of rapid social and technological change. It shows how younger generations are negotiating their cultural heritage with their contemporary experiences, creating new forms of expression that bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. This phenomenon aligns with theories of cultural hybridization and glocalization, where local and global elements interact to produce new cultural forms. As scholars like Arjun Appadurai have noted, such processes are characteristic of cultural dynamics in the era of globalization, where local identities are constantly being reshaped by global flows of information, technology, and ideas.

The case of Isan music thus provides a valuable lens through which to examine broader processes of cultural change and adaptation in the context of globalization and modernization. It exemplifies how traditional cultural forms can evolve and remain relevant in changing social contexts, while still maintaining a connection to their roots.

The adaptation and integration of traditional Isan music with contemporary culture is a clear phenomenon in the present day, especially in terms of adapting to the changing social context and technology. As Hiran Chakkrasen said, “The characteristic of being able to constantly adapt without being fixed allows Isan music to be sustainable and survive because it can adapt itself to the changing context of the area, society, or era.” The combination of traditional and modern musical instruments is one of the clear forms of adaptation. For example, “They also have adaptations, such as adding some Western musical instruments. like in the Pong Lang ensemble, the bass comes directly from the West” (Chakkrasen, interview, 2024). However, the adaptation and integration with contemporary culture must also consider preserving the core of folk music. As Atit Khamhongsa said, “Each melody will have its own unique identity, but within that uniqueness, it is still possible to create the identity of the person who will convey it” (Khamhongsa, interview, 2024).

The adaptation of Isan folk music is also reflected through the development of the entertainment business. As Atit Khamhongsa explained about the emergence of the Khon Kaen melody, “It emerged in the era when the entertainment business was in full operation in order to sell products successfully” (Khamhongsa, interview, 2024). This business development led to the creation of a memorable musical identity and a more professional performance system.

In contemporary creative works, New-generation artists tend to blend modern concepts with folk music. “Most of the children, more than half, do not want to learn in the traditional way. They want to bring modern ideas to blend in order to truly understand the foundation and then apply it to create something fun.” The use of modern technology in creative works is another form of adaptation. Hiran Chakkrasen

said about using AI to create music, saying, “Using AI to generate the style of music, the melody, is a melody that did not originate in this era” (Chakkrasen, interview, 2024).

The adaptation of Isan music, stating that it can be blended with various other music genres. “I like any Isan melody that gives an Isan feeling, but it must include elements like Symphony, characteristics of Epic Orchestra” (Thamaphan, interview, 2024).

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the adaptation and integration of Isan folk music with contemporary culture is an ongoing process that takes many forms, including performance, production, technology use, and business development, while still maintaining the core and identity of Isan music. This reflects the flexibility and adaptability of folk performing arts in responding to changes in society and technology.

The movement of isan folk music and culture

The movement of Isan folk music and culture in contemporary Thai society reflects complex social and cultural dynamics, influenced by various factors including population migration, communication technology development, and adaptation by new-generation Isan artists. The migration of Isan people to major cities, particularly Bangkok, has led to the spread of Isan culture in urban areas, including food, language, and music (Surathorachaikul 2007). This presence of Isan culture in urban spaces has created familiarity among city dwellers and opened opportunities for cultural fusion.

Concurrently, the advancement of communication technologies, especially the internet and social media, has enabled Isan music to reach a wider audience. These new media have reduced temporal and spatial limitations in accessing music, allowing Isan songs to spread to more diverse listener groups.

New-generation Isan artists have adapted and developed their musical style from traditional “Isan country music” and “Mor Lam” to “Applied Isan Music,” which blends contemporary elements with local identity. This transformation reflects the different life experiences of the younger generation, influencing the content and presentation of songs. The content of Applied Isan Music has shifted from depicting the hardships of life in the capital city to narrating diverse love stories and life experiences. The use of Isan language that is “unfamiliar” yet “catchy” is a key strategy in creating identity and attracting listeners (Panitlorchaloen 2018). Additionally, novel comparisons and humor add interest to the songs. Musically, there is a fusion of traditional Isan instruments like the phin and khaen with contemporary instruments and rhythms, making the songs more diverse and accessible to a wider audience. This blend not only creates novelty in Isan music but also helps it reach more diverse listener groups.

The movement of Isan folk music into the mainstream reflects the adaptation of local culture in the context of globalization, maintaining traditional identity while embracing change and modernity (Phuangphusakul 2009). This process not only changes the characteristics of Isan music but also affects the perception and acceptance of Isan culture in Thai society as a whole. Ultimately, the movement of Isan folk

music and culture in contemporary Thai society is not merely a cultural phenomenon but also reflects broader social and economic changes in Thailand. The cultural fusion and creation of new social spaces for Isan identity in the context of contemporary Thai society is an ongoing process that is likely to impact Thailand’s cultural landscape in the future.

The findings indicate that Isan folk music has had an interesting development in contemporary society, especially in adapting to the changing social context. As Atit Krachangsi said, “Isan music has a high degree of freedom and can be used in various ways. It does not necessarily have to adhere to traditional forms” (Krachangsi, 2024).

The movement of Isan folk music is reflected through several important phenomena. One of them is the blending of traditional and modern musical instruments. As Hiran Chakkrasen said, “The development of folk music itself already has its own contemporariness” (Chakkrasen, 2024), reflecting that change is part of the ongoing cultural dynamics.

Moreover, changes in dissemination and accessibility have also been found, particularly the role of modern media and more diverse performance spaces. Ajan Thammachit Thamaphan pointed out, “Nowadays, it is already a free world. It can be performed anywhere, and the new generation themselves are not afraid to accept that they are Isan people” (Thamaphan, 2024), reflecting cultural openness and pride in local identity.

However, this movement still maintains the essential core of Isan folk music in terms of melody, rhythm, and emotional communication. The blending of old and new is therefore an extension rather than a destruction or erasure of traditional culture.

The Roles in Social Development and Education

Isan folk music has played an important role in various aspects of social and educational development. In the past, Isan folk music, especially Mor Lam, served as a medium for transmitting knowledge and Buddhist teachings to villagers in an easily understandable way. “The Mor Lam took the Pali language and explained it in Lam verse so that everyone could listen, such as what the Buddha’s life story is, what goodness is, and what evil is” (Khamhongsa, interview, 2024).

Isan folk music today still plays a significant role in promoting the creative economy and cultural tourism, especially in Khon Kaen province, which has made Mor Lam a part of its Soft Power policy. As Ajan Atit Krachangsi said, “Isan folk music is now a Soft Power. They have taken Mor Lam and made it a Soft Power of the province.” In terms of performance development, Isan folk music has adapted to the times and expanded its audience base to the international level, as evidenced by Mor Lam troupes performing on international stages. In addition, there has been a fusion with contemporary music. The inheritance and development of Isan folk music today also opens up opportunities for new creations and interpretations without being too attached to traditional forms. “I don’t want to be stuck with the term Isan folk music because the context has changed Isan music already has a high degree of freedom. It can be used for various works.” The development of Isan folk music also promotes

acceptance and cross-cultural understanding. Although there are language limitations, music can communicate across cultures through melody and rhythm. “If we look at the language aspect, it definitely has limitations. But if we remove the language, there is melody, there is rhythm which can communicate directly.” (Krachangsi, interview, 2024).

In addition to this, Isan folk music played a role in communicating news and current events during times when communication systems were not yet developed. “Molam was very important in terms of communication with audiences and conveying other news. People had to listen to know what happened in current affairs” (Khamhongsa, Interview, 2024). Isan folk music also has an important role in building pride in local identity, especially in the present era with greater cultural acceptance and openness. As Professor Arthit Krajangsi reflected, “At this moment, Isan culture and music that rises strongly because it springs up everyone now has pride that I am an Isan person” (Krajangsi, Interview, 2024).

In terms of education, the transmission of Isan folk music has now developed into a more formal education system. As Arthit Khamhongsa said, “Isan folk music has its roots in Molam culture, which relates to the language and way of life of Isan people. The transmission of folk music in the past often came from self-learning through observation and memorization from villagers and community elders, without a formal education system. The pattern of folk music transmission changed when music was introduced into the educational system in schools and higher education institutions. However, direct learning from folk teachers still continues, though less than in the past, due to faith in the wit, performance, content, melody, and performance art of folk artists.” Additionally, technology and social media serve as channels for knowledge dissemination and preservation. “Master teachers nowadays transform themselves into instructors who teach through social media.” (Krajangsi, Interview, 2024).

The inheritance of Isan folk music today still preserves traditional learning roots alongside new developmental forms. As Sanguan Saengsrirueang (Molam Pan Pi is a title given to highly skilled and experienced Molam performers who have mastered the art of singing and performing Molam for a long time) said (Figure 4), “There are still people who want to learn, want to sing, so they travel to study with folk teachers because of their faith in performance wit, content, melody, or what we call improvise.”



Figure 4. Interview with Sanguan Saengsrirueang (Molam Pan Pi) (Source: Sutee Julakarn, 2024)

DISCUSSION

The study of Isan folk music development in contemporary context reflects several interesting cultural dynamics, especially the ability to adapt and blend local elements with contemporary ones. This aligns with Nakrob’s (2014) concept that points out how Isan folk music demonstrates cultural dynamics through the combination of traditional and modern forms, which creates new musical cultural forms while still maintains the essence of Isan identity. This adaptation occurs in multiple dimensions, including performance styles, musical instruments, content, and distribution channels. Technology and digital media play a crucial role in the dissemination and preservation of Isan folk music, particularly through the use of online platforms to reach new audiences. This phenomenon aligns with Boonrod’s (2019) research, which found that these changes affect not only musical forms but also lead to broader social and cultural transformations.

In economic dimensions, Isan folk music has evolved to become part of the creative economy and cultural tourism. This aligns with Bourdieu’s (1984) concept that views cultural consumption as a marker of social status. This development reflects the potential of local culture to create economic value, especially in the context of tourism and entertainment industries. The transmission of Isan folk music knowledge has evolved from oral tradition to more formal educational systems. This aligns with Chandapan’s (2011) work, which found that Isan folk music can serve as an effective tool for communication and knowledge transfer. The combination of traditional learning and modern education plays a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of folk performances. Furthermore, Isan folk music has a significant role in creating and preserving cultural identity. This corresponds with research by Junsri and Burusphat (2018), which indicates that Isan folk music not only serves an entertainment function but also acts as a cultural symbol that clearly represents Isan identity. The challenge of adapting to contemporary contexts without losing cultural essence remains important for the future development of Isan folk music.

These findings indicate that the development of Isan folk music in contemporary contexts is a complex process that involves multiple factors - social, cultural, economic, and technological. The successful adaptation of Isan folk music can serve as a model for the development and preservation of other cultural heritage in the context of rapid social change.

Another interesting aspect is the transformation of the music ecosystem, particularly the role of digital platforms that affect the distribution and consumption of Isan folk music. Data from Isan Insight (2024) shows that the Isan folk music industry can generate economic value up to 6,000 million baht and attract over 20 million viewers, which reflects its potential to develop as a major creative industry. The success of artist Monkan Kankoon, who topped YouTube with over 802 million views in 2022 (Thai Public Broadcasting Service, 2023), demonstrates that Isan folk music can reach wide audiences through digital channels. This aligns with Pinkeaw’s (2017) concept that emphasizes the importance of communication and knowledge transfer through contemporary media. Furthermore, the fusion

between folk music and contemporary genres, such as the development of Molam Sing and Modern Molam, reflects the flexibility of folk arts in response to modern consumer tastes. This corresponds with DiMaggio's (1987) work, which suggests that artistic classification relates to social and cultural changes. This framework aligns with Schippers' (2010) concept through five components of cultural transmission. The transmitters adjust their roles from folk artists to work in the contemporary entertainment industry. The content combines traditional essence with contemporary elements. The transmission methods develop from oral tradition to integration with modern education and digital media. The receivers expand from local communities to broader audiences. The transmission context adapts to become part of the creative industry. However, a key challenge in Isan folk music development is to maintain balance between traditional value preservation and commercial development. This issue aligns with Griswold's (1987) observations about culture's role in creating and reflecting social boundaries. Future studies should focus on the analysis of commercial development impacts on Isan folk music culture sustainability, as well as approaches to maintain equilibrium between development and preservation.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that Isan folk music faces significant changes in the digital era. The adaptation and fusion with contemporary culture is a complex process that requires understanding of various dimensions - social, cultural, economic, and technological. The success in Isan folk music development can serve as a model for the preservation and development of other cultural heritage in the context of current rapid social change.

CONCLUSION

The study of Isan folk music development in contemporary contexts demonstrates interesting adaptations of local culture amid social changes. Research results indicate that Isan folk music has evolved from traditional forms to become part of the contemporary creative industry while maintaining a strong local identity core. This aligns with research by Junsri and Burusphat (2018) that emphasizes the importance of folk music as a cultural medium. The success in blending local and contemporary elements reflects through several social phenomena, particularly the growth of the Isan folk music industry, which can generate economic value up to 6,000 million baht (Isan Insight, 2024), and popularity on digital platforms that shows audience expansion to new generations. These developments correspond with Nakrob's (2014) concept that points out the dynamics of folk music culture in response to social changes. The case of Isan folk music thus serves as an excellent example of cultural adaptation in the globalization era, as proposed by Rice (2014). It demonstrates creation, transmission, and changes that occur in historical and social contexts. The success in maintaining balance between traditional value preservation and commercial development reflects the dynamics of music as a living social activity. This music can adapt and develop in accordance with social changes without the loss of important cultural values and meanings.

Furthermore, the study found that the knowledge transmission system of folk music has evolved from traditional oral forms to integration with modern education, both in formal education systems and digital media learning. This aligns with Chandapan's (2011) work that emphasizes the effectiveness of folk music in knowledge and cultural transmission.

Another significant finding is the role of Isan folk music in creative economy development and cultural tourism, which demonstrates that local culture can develop into valuable economic resources without losing cultural meaning. This corresponds with Bourdieu's (1984) concept about the role of cultural consumption in creating social meaning. The development experience of Isan folk music can serve as a model for the preservation and development of other cultural heritage, particularly in balancing traditional value conservation with commercial development. Future studies should focus on the analysis of long-term impacts of commercial development on folk music culture sustainability, as well as approaches to maintain and promote traditional knowledge transmission amid social and technological changes.

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