

THE MAINTENANCE OF CENTRAL THAI CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH HYBRID MUSIC GENRES

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Abstract

Thailand has experienced rapid industrialisation, modernisation and cultural change since the mid-nineteenth century. Many Western cultural forms have been adopted into Thai life, including Western popular music. An external view of these processes and their results might suggest that Thailand has become quite 'Western'. However, closer analysis reveals that elements of foreign cultures have long been adopted and adapted into Thai culture, and used as social capital to build an image of modernity and cosmopolitan sophistication.

One of the adaptations made has been the fusion of Western genres with Thai ones, to form new hybrid styles of music. One hybrid genre that has developed largely over the past half century is *Dontri Thai Prayuk* ('modernised Thai music'), which fuses aspects of Western pop with elements of Central Thai classical music. As this paper demonstrates, clear patterns emerge in the way Thai musicians have maintained markers of Thai identity and fused them with Western elements that signify modernisation.

Motivations behind this deliberate fusion of Thai and Western elements are explained by the theories of 'musical accommodation' and 'acts of identity' – that musicians will converge with or diverge from other music-cultures in order to gain approval or assert a separate identity, in ways that deliberately change the underlying rules of the source musics to form a new identity. Analysis of *Dontri Thai Prayuk* fusion music shows that it has changed the underlying rules of Thai classical and Western popular music to display a music-cultural identity that is Thai, yet modern.

Key words: Thai Cultural Identity, Modernisation, Western Conceptions of Modernity

Introduction

There's kind of this perception that the Thais have sold out to the West and the Western world, and it's *not* true – it really isn't. (Bruce Gaston, personal communication, June 4, 2003)

Thailand, formerly Siam, was never colonised by a Western political power. Yet by the mid-nineteenth century, all of her neighbours had fallen prey

to Western colonial regimes. The early kings of the Chakri dynasty (1782-1851) had attempted to keep foreign powers at bay by demonstrating the splendour of Siamese cultural, religious and artistic traditions, but by 1850 this tactic was clearly wearing thin. It became apparent to the country's leaders that the Thai people were faced with a choice – to adjust to Western cultures or be forcibly adjusted through their colonising power.

In 1851 a new king came to the throne – King Mongkut (Rama IV). Rather than passively resist these military and economic forces, he found a radical new way of dealing with them:

The first policy that King Mongkut employed in coping with the Western threat was the introduction of Western education within the court, with the purpose of educating in the ways of the West the royal children who would become future leaders. Through this learning they would be able to negotiate with the Western powers on more equal and dignified terms and to maintain Siamese sovereignty. (Rutnin, 1996, p. 70)

Thus, the Thai aristocracy adopted the practice of borrowing Western cultural icons to demonstrate to the West their equal footing with Western powers, both in terms of their prestige and their ability to manage their own modernisation program.

This approach of engaging with foreign powers on their terms undoubtedly saved Siam's political sovereignty. Yet it also set in motion far-reaching changes to Siamese society, changes which at times appear to have almost overwhelmed and even destroyed Thai culture. Today Bangkok has many Western fast food chains and department stores selling Western clothing, furniture and technology. The streets are choked with cars, bikes and trucks – all Western technological innovations. Western popular music booms where the serene sounds of Thai classical instrumental music were once heard.

Central Thai music and other performing arts no doubt suffered losses in the midst of these adaptations to Western culture: much simply died out; some traditional genres, such as Central Thai folk song, now exist only in a few recordings; and the Fine Arts Department preserved such classical performing arts as the *khon* (masked dance-drama) only in museumised form – they are not exactly thriving.

Yet Thai music-culture is far from dead. Thai folk song, for example, may have lost its original context, and its original performance practices are all but gone. However, its melodic and poetic structures live on in the

‘modernised’ forms of *Luk Tung* and to a lesser extent the *Songs for Life*¹ genre. It appears that Thai musicians have utilised King Rama IV’s strategy of borrowing Western icons in order to demonstrate that they could ‘modernise’ Thai music-culture without the assistance of the West. But this does not mean Western musical forms have altogether supplanted Thai ones. Rather, in many fusion genres that developed over the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Thai genres have largely survived by being blended with new foreign forms coming from Western culture.

This paper explores the processes by which Thai musicians have adapted to quasi-colonial forces by blending local and foreign forms. I utilise an adaptation of the social-psychological *Communication Accommodation Theory* as well as *Acts of Identity Theory* as a means of explaining the motivations that have driven contemporary Thai musicians’ experiments in combining two very different musical sources.

Given the vibrancy and wide variety of musical activity across Thailand, I have chosen to limit this study to the urban middle class of Bangkok. I argue that processes by which they borrow from both Western popular music and Central Thai classical music to develop the fusion genre of *Dontri Thai Prayuk* mirror the aristocracy’s attempts to borrow from Western cultural icons of prestige to demonstrate their modernity and their ability to participate in the global order on equal terms, whilst borrowing from traditional Thai icons of status to both demonstrate their maintenance of Thai identity and build their social prestige more locally.

The data for this study comes from interviews I conducted in the early 2000s with approximately a dozen Thai fusion musicians, as well as relevant observations from literature on Thai culture and music. This study is significant as there have been no other systematic, scholarly attempts to examine how Thais have engaged musically with modernity, whilst maintaining their own cultural identity.

The paper is structured as follows: in the next section, I introduce *Communication Accommodation Theory* and *Acts of Identity Theory* in order to provide a theoretical basis for exploring the ways in which *Dontri Thai Prayuk* mirrors broader societal responses to pressures for cultural change and maintenance. Following this, I present relevant facets of middle class Thai culture, to show how these theories explain everyday cultural adaptation behaviours in Thai society. Section 4 presents *Dontri Thai Prayuk* – hereafter

¹ *Luk Tung* is Thai country music, which combines Central and Northeastern Thai folk melodies with elements of international pop music. “Songs for Life” (a literal translation of the Thai *Phleng Phuea Chiwit*) is a genre that developed in the 1970s-early-80s, combining Central Thai folk melodies and singing technique with the folk-rock coming from the United States. These songs often had socio-political messages). I will describe these songs in more detail in chapter 6.

referred to as *Prayuk* – and then section 5 shows how *Prayuk* musicians have prioritised particular facets of musical change and maintenance in order to present a modern-but-Thai identity. Section 6 concludes by drawing together evidence from this brief study of *Prayuk* musicians to show how these two social theories effectively account for the motivations and attitudes underlying the changes in the way Thais present their culture musically.

To Conform or not to Conform: Two Social Theories

In this section, I present two theories which may illuminate underlying processes and motivations for change (or lack thereof) within contexts of rapid culture change. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is useful in explaining why *Prayuk* musicians may choose to adopt some elements of Western music and maintain other elements of Thai classical music, while *Acts of Identity Theory* (AIT) helps to account for how they have gone about the process of fusing disparate music-cultures.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Howard Giles first articulated his *Speech Accommodation Theory* in 1973 (Giles, 1973). He developed this theory in an attempt to explain why speakers from one region of the UK with a particular accent may attempt to adapt to the accent of a listener from another region. Since the early 1970s, this social psychology theory has been tested in a range of different contexts and has been expanded to examine broader communicative behaviours, such as intergenerational communication and the interactions between police and their local community (Giles et al., 2007). Therefore, it has been renamed *Communication Accommodation Theory* (Griffin, 2009, p. 388).

Communication Accommodation Theory posits that a speaker will ‘...increasingly accommodate [or imitate] the communicative patterns believed characteristic of their interactants, the more they wish to ... elicit the other’s approval, respect, understanding, trust, compliance, and cooperation; ...or signal common social identities’ (Giles et al., 2007, p. 147). That is, they will adjust their speech to become “more like the listener or less like the listener” (Downes, 1984, p. 228) in order to gain the approval of or maintain their distinctiveness from their listeners. Becoming more like the speaker in order to gain approval or signal similar social standing is referred to as *convergence*, while maintaining or increasing distinctiveness is known as *divergence*.

In musical terms therefore, CAT posits that musicians will consciously adapt their musical practices to those of another culture or subculture with

which they wish to signal common cultural identity (e.g. those of higher status), or from whom they wish to elicit approval or respect.

Acts of Identity theory (AIT)

The very act of adapting one's speech norms in order to define oneself as similar to or different from another person involves the speaker's perception or construct of the listener's identity. This is where reference to *Acts of Identity Theory* (AIT) helps to explain what I have observed in Thai fusion music. This theory holds that 'speakers create linguistic rules to resemble those with which they wish to identify' (Downes, 1984, p. 229). Not only do speakers adapt in the short term to accommodate the norms of listeners, but they change their *underlying rules*, leading to longer term change. Thus AIT posits that musicians create musical rules (or genres) 'which resemble those with which they wish to identify'. As I will demonstrate shortly, in combining facets of both Classical Thai and Western popular music in *Prayuk*, Thai musicians have changed the underlying rules of both music-cultures to project the desired identity.

The Middle Class in Bangkok

In order to understand the significance of *Prayuk* as a case study of how Thais have managed their own modernisation program, it is necessary to understand where the middle class came from and how they utilise icons of social and cultural capital (e.g. music) to create social status. This section describes the origins and several aspects of Thai culture which are relevant to the current study.

Whilst Wyatt suggests that the urban middle class emerged around the early 1960s (Wyatt, 1984, p. 294), their roots go back to about the turn of the twentieth century. The Siam of the early nineteenth century was a feudal society consisting largely of two social classes – the aristocracy and the rural peasants. Reforms to trade monopolies during the reign of King Rama IV and governance reforms during King Rama V's reign led to the empowerment and education of a new intermediary group – the foundations of the modern, urban middle class (Mulder, 1996, pp. 133-134; Mulder, 1997, p. 13). This group were conscious of their different status compared to that of the rural poor, but grew too rapidly to be thoroughly absorbed into the old power structures (Mulder, 1997, p. 7). Their prominence in Thai society continued to increase throughout the twentieth century, and by the 1960s they had become a strong political force.

The characteristics of what is called the middle class in Bangkok are difficult to define. Wyatt attempts to define it as follows:

It is predominantly urban and non-agricultural..... For this group, modern education at the secondary level and above is the sine qua non for status and the middle-class lifestyle – which includes access to the mass media, especially television, sufficient income to assure quality education for one’s children and the achievement of some sense of upward social and economic mobility. (Wyatt, 1984, p. 294).

In his book on the public world of the middle class Thai, Mulder writes about how its members desire to increase their power base in order to take greater control of their members’ lives (Mulder, 1997, p. 7). One way of achieving this is to increase the status of the individual. The Thai middle class possesses much less economic and political power compared to the Thai upper class, or the middle classes in Western societies, but it is increasingly making its presence known in business and political arenas. Culturally, the middle class is in the process of negotiating a new balance between modernity and tradition. *Prayuk* music is in a similar position. As we will see shortly, musicians are negotiating between elements of classical Thai and Western popular music in this fusion genre, in order to negotiate a middle path between tradition and modernity.

In Thai society, status determines everything, and no two people have exactly the same status (Nathalang, 2000, pp. 39-40). Status shapes the way in which people communicate with each other and the level of respect accorded a person, which in turn decides the degree to which that person has a voice in the community or the types of opportunities that open up in the workplace. Thais are said to be *status-oriented*, i.e. they put a high priority on increasing their status as a means of gaining respect and power in their community. Age is one of the means of gaining higher status: the older a person is, the higher his or her status. However, Nathalang observes other means of building status: ‘Status is determined by birth, age and level of education’ (Nathalang, 2000, pp. 39-40). In the eight and a half years that I lived in Thailand, I also observed that wealth is a primary means of attaining high status.

In order for one’s implicit status to have any effect on one’s social standing, there needs to be cues for others to observe it - i.e. status needs to be displayed. Thais tend to achieve this by being ‘presentational’, by presenting oneself outwardly in the way one wishes to be perceived. As Mulder explains, there is an ‘implicit expectation that the surface also is the essence of social reality’ (Mulder, 2000, p. 47). For example:

...people are expected to dress according to their station in life....., because presentation expresses the social persona and claim to status. (Mulder, 2000, p. 47).

Thus, investing in status symbols is very important to middle- and upper-class Thais. Again, as Mulder discusses:

In presentation, the expectations of society and the individual meet. Consequently, it calls for heavy investment in smooth interaction and in the projection of prestige and dignity. This investment is not simply an investment in cosmetics.... The value of presentation is also extremely psychological, serving the feelings of identity and acceptance.[T]he primary Thai values are wealth, power, seniority, rank, and being the boss..... Peoples build up stature by increasing their resources – and by the demonstration of them. (Mulder, 2000, p. 48)

Hence if one wishes to be seen as ‘modern’ or ‘developed’, one needs to conduct oneself in a ‘modern and developed’ manner.

During the nineteenth century, when European colonial powers constantly threatened Thailand’s sovereignty, many of the changes that took place were intended to demonstrate that Thailand could modernise itself while keeping the West’s ‘colonial encroachment at a distance’ (Mulder, 1997, p. 287; see also Wyatt, 1984, p. 238). Likewise, many of Prime Minister Phibun’s changes in the late 1940s were designed to demonstrate Thais’ ability to modernise on their own. Myers-Moro comments that ‘Phibun’s programs were intended to make the Siamese appear “civilized” to the outside world...’ (Myers-Moro, 1993, p. 245). She continues on to say that ‘...Phibun’s policy towards culture consistently favoured Western forms, Westernisation and civilisation being equated’ (Myers-Moro, 1993, p. 246).

Western culture generally has high status in the eyes of Thais, with Westerners in Thailand during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries being seen as ‘expert consultants’ who came in to assist Thais with their program of modernisation (Roongruang, 2003, p. 126). As a visible marker of Western culture, Western popular music is seen as being modern, and therefore a desirable symbol of status.

In direct contrast, the commonly held Thai perception is that Thai traditional music is backward and old-fashioned, hence not really ‘relevant’ in everyday life: I have often heard Bangkok Thais say that classical music is *mai kiow khong chiwit prajam wan*, meaning it has nothing to do with everyday life. By this they mean that classical music does not play an important role in their everyday lives. They do not listen to it on a regular basis, play it, attend performances or purchase recordings. Its chief function is as a form of remembrance of their traditional cultural heritage on special occasions.

Nonetheless, Central Thai classical music has typically been connected with the prestige of royalty. Myers-Moro noted that ‘...contemporary attitudes toward Thai music [in part] derive from the music’s association with the courts of royalty and noblemen’, and that ‘...Thai music connotes identity, prestige, and values central to being Thai’ (Myers-Moro, 1993, p. 20, 226). *Prayuk* is one significant form combining the ‘modernity’ of the West with Thai royal symbols, thereby creating a form of music that is aligned with both Thai and Western symbols of status. Unlike more traditional versions of classical music, *Prayuk* is relatively popular amongst middle class Thais.

Dontri Thai Prayuk

Dontri Thai Prayuk (literally *adapted/modernised Thai music*) is a genre that developed in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, largely as a result of government policies restricting the use of Central classical Thai music in the public arena. It mostly adapts classical Thai melodies, which are frequently (but not always) played on solo traditional Thai instruments, using elements of Western popular music, including rhythms and syncopations, homophonic texture, diatonic harmony on chords I, IV and V, vocal techniques and instruments. The *Prayuk* musicians that I interviewed suggest that the genre expresses the dominant Thai cultural heritage in a ‘modern’ way: it is ‘Thai yet modern’. Whilst *Prayuk* is not as highly visible as pop music in everyday life, it nonetheless performs a significant role in Bangkok’s music-culture.

Prayuk is heard today in a wide range of contexts where middle-class urban Thais gather. These include some sophisticated nightclubs, such as the Tawandaeng German Brewery in the Yannawa district of Bangkok, as well as in commercial festivals that sell traditional Thai cultural artefacts in large shopping malls, at international exhibitions, and even in some religious settings. The most famous ensembles today are Boy Thai, Fong Nam, and Adjarn Tanit Sriglindee’s ensemble.

The Musicians’ Approach to *Dontri Thai Prayuk*

In this section, I will now briefly discuss the results of my interviews to demonstrate how *Prayuk* musicians have adapted elements of both Thai and Western music to present their music-cultural identity. My interviews with *Prayuk* musicians show that there is a high degree of consistency in preferences about which Thai musical elements they use to represent Thai-ness and which Western elements represent modernity. However, some other musical elements are less clearly situated: some musicians think they should be maintained while others think they are dispensable (either partially or completely). Thus, I have

identified some loose hierarchies of both Thai and Western musical elements for presenting modern Thai-ness.

During my fieldwork in Thailand, I interviewed 15 musicians, producers and promotions managers of fusion music. My informants were a diverse group who came from a full spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, ranging in age from about 25 to 55 years. Twelve of them originated in Central Thailand, one came from the Northeast, one was born in Thailand but raised in the US, and one Western musician (Bruce Gaston) was a US citizen who came to Thailand as a conscientious objector during the Viet Nam War. Some grew up in big cities, others came from rural villages. These informants participate in several aspects of music-production – composition/arrangement, performance and management of performers – and have been involved in fusion music from about 1970 to the present day.

Markers of Thai-ness

Melody

It is clear from these interviews with *Prayuk* musicians that melody is their chief means of maintaining Thai-ness, even when all else derives from global popular music. Narongrit Tosanga's comments represent the intentions of most *Prayuk* composers:

Everything is important, but if we have to single out one thing and say it is the most important, then it would have to be the melody. If it is a good melody, you can add any rhythm and it will have a Thai flavour. (N. Tosanga, personal communication, May 8, 2003)

Some clear patterns as to how Thai identity is represented in a melody have emerged. Thai-ness tends to be maintained by the use of a pentatonic scale. Whilst diatonic tuning (i.e. a Western musical trait) predominates in fusion genres such as *Prayuk* today, the occasional use of a flat 7 also helps to preserve Thai-ness, by hinting at the Thai tuning system (an equidistant system with 7 distinct notes in an octave). Thai-ness is also maintained in the use of continuous and conjunct movement in melodies, which is a typical Thai melodic attribute. Thus, the rules of traditional Thai melody and tuning system have been altered by combining diatonic tuning with other typical Thai melodic traits.

Alignment of Linguistic Tones and Melodic Contours in Vocal Music

In vocal works, the close alignment between the pitch contours of linguistic tones and melodic lines is arguably of equal importance to the use of Thai melodic structures. This is a strong indicator to Thais of whether a vocal song sounds Thai or not. In my interviews, fusion musicians talked about the fundamental importance of this feature *at least* as strongly as they did about the need for Thai melodies. Bruce Gaston asserted that it is ‘absolutely essential’ to attain this close agreement. Tanit Sriglindee stated that ‘it is really important. ... Because with Thai language, you have a set pattern of tones – it’s like music already’. Finally, Panya Roongruang commented that

You have to make them match each other. Because the Thai language is a tonal language, when they sing high pitches, it must fit the text. (P. Roongruang, personal communication, August 2, 2003)

Thus, this rule appears to be unchangeable, where Thais wish to *diverge* from Western music and present their Thai-ness.

Incidentally, this is not the case in Thai pop music, where there is little agreement. Many older Thai musicians complain about the lack of correspondence between tone and melody in Thai pop. This divergence from traditional Thai melodic structures and convergence with Western practices perhaps signals a desire amongst the young to identify more closely with a global culture than to maintain what they perceive as ‘outdated’ traditional Thai practices.

The Use of Thai Instruments

The next most important element for marking Thai-ness in fusion music is the use of melodic Thai instruments. Most musicians I interviewed concurred that a fusion song could sound Thai without the use of Thai instruments. Tanit Sriglindee asserted that ‘you can play a really Thai melody with only Western instruments’. Panya Roongruang also refutes the idea that the use of Thai instruments is necessary to mark Thai identity in fusion:

You know, some people say that Thai music must be performed on Thai instruments. But I don't believe that. Thai music is not just to be presented on Thai instruments. (P. Roongruang, personal communication, August 2, 2003)

Thus, this rule of classical Thai music is negotiable, depending on the degree to which a given musician wishes to converge with or diverge from ‘modernity’.

Classical Vocal Technique

Following that, the hierarchy becomes a little looser. Classical Thai vocal technique is a very strong marker of Thai-ness. This includes the use of nasalizations of notes, abrupt changes of register, and *euan* – the traditional style of ornamenting vocal melodies. However, since the traditional Thai singing style is highly unpopular with middle-class audiences, *Prayuk* musicians rarely use it. Bruce Gaston explained the widely-held feeling of *Prayuk* musicians by commenting that audiences leave when they hear *euan*. He also observed:

The Thais aren't into [euan] at all. The beauty and the profundity of the Thai vocal tradition is gone. Gone. Not 'is dying'. Is 'gone'. (B. Gaston, personal communication, June 6, 2003)

Nonetheless, a small number of *Prayuk* musicians continue to make occasional use of traditional vocal technique, particularly *euan*, to mark Thai-ness. Tanit Sriglindee felt that

[One] should use a bit, but not much... I don't really use much *euan*—just a tiny little bit. You have to look at the melody and the underlying chords. Sometimes if you *euan* it just doesn't fit. (T. Sriglindee, personal communication, May 23, 2003)

Thai vocal techniques, therefore, are seen as something which detracts from a modern identity, so *Prayuk* musicians tend to *converge* with Western practices to enhance their modernity.

Thai Drums and Rhythmic Patterns

Thai drums and rhythmic patterns are occasionally used to mark Thai-ness. Some musicians referred to the use of Central Thai classical rhythmic patterns and drums as a useful marker of Thai-ness. However, it seemed to be a very low priority: often almost an after-thought. Wanchai Pinthong observed that

[Thai-ness] is in the melody. This is the first thing—a Thai melody. And then also elements of the rhythm must be similar to classical Thai rhythms—like they use on the *klong yao* [a traditional Thai drum], Then you have to adjust it to Western music. But the rhythm is not that important. (W. Pinthong, personal communication, April 4, 2003)

Thai Imagery in the Lyrics

Finally, the use of Thai imagery in song texts can be an important means of marking Thai-ness. This is not distinctive to *Prayuk* and was not something of which many *Prayuk* musicians were conscious, but many musicians nonetheless indicated it is an important element for displaying Thai identity. In the *Songs for Life* genre for example, bands such as Carabao utilised many elements of folk music in order to communicate an extra-musical political message. Kirati Phromsaka (an original member of Carabao and now a music producer and manager) commented that *Songs for Life* lyrics use imagery from everyday rural life in Thailand. He particularly commented that ‘They should have at least something in them that people can take and use, which is relevant. ... You have to communicate’.

He is the only musician I interviewed who raised this issue. It is therefore lower down the hierarchy of musical elements used to communicate Thai-ness. Nonetheless, I have observed that it is significant in vocal songs. Part of my work as a community artist in Thailand involved running indigenous song-writing seminars, in which musicians regularly indicated to me that the use of Thai imagery in the lyrics made the song sound ‘more Thai’.

Markers of Modernity

Middle-class Thai musicians also made conscious choices in adopting elements of global popular music to represent modernity. A clear order of preference was evident in the interviews: diatonic tuning, global pop vocal technique, harmony and homophonic texture, as well as the use of a rhythm section as the basis of the ensemble are the most significant markers of modernity. Verse-chorus form is also used as a marker of modernity to a lesser extent in *Prayuk* music.

Diatonic (Western) Tuning

The general attitude of musicians is that ‘you can’t play [fusion] without changing the tuning’ of Thai instruments to match Western ones (Tanit Sriglindee). In interviews, musicians clearly indicated an almost universal preference for using a common tuning system, thereby avoiding constant clashes. Thus, there is a changing of the ‘rules’ of Thai tuning where Thai instruments are used in *Prayuk* to converge with Western practices. However, it was more than just a desire to avoid clashes. The use of Western tuning also conveys a sense that this music is ‘modern’ or ‘international’.

I change everything to be in Western tuning. ... It's like this—it's like the end of the old ways (luk boran). If you are using Western music, your tuning continues to be used – and you can add

whatever you like. (N. Tosanga, personal communication, May 8, 2003)

Western Popular Vocal Technique

The majority of *Prayuk* vocal music today employs the singing techniques of Western popular music. This is the style of singing most familiar to middle-class urban Central Thais today. The common perception amongst musicians is that audiences regard traditional singing as archaic and boring. Even some *Prayuk* musicians feel this way. Wanchai Pinthong stated,

I don't think [fusion] should have traditional ornamentation because this is one thing that causes classical songs to make us feel that they are so ancient, so long and boring. If we want to make people these days listen to Thai songs, we shouldn't make our songs sound like this. (W. Pinthong, personal communication, April 4, 2003)

Many *Prayuk* musicians still secretly cherish the old singing techniques of Central Thai classical and folk music, particularly those who have had a greater degree of classical training. However, they will not generally utilise it in fusion because they are unpopular with audiences.

Chordal Harmony

The inclusion in *Prayuk* of chordal harmony is a conscious choice to associate with 'modern' Western forms, as it is not a part of the classical Thai tradition. Apart from Bruce Gaston, all of the *Prayuk* musicians I interviewed employ such chordal accompaniment to a given melody. However, they tend restrict their choice of chords to I-IV-V.

Inclusion of a Rhythm Section

Most *Prayuk* bands are based around a Western rhythm section (i.e. guitars, bass and drums). To some degree, the association of the rhythm section with Western pop bands signifies *Prayuk* music as a contemporary phenomena that has kept pace with changing musical tastes. Tewan Sapsanyakorn talks about how old Thai melodies can be made to sound new by simply arranging them for Western instruments:

We used old Thai songs and played them in a new way – with Western instruments. When you listened to them, you knew they were Thai songs. [But] they are different. (T. Sapsanyakorn, personal communication, July 30, 2003)

Verse-Chorus Form

The typical verse-chorus form of global pop music is the most preferred compositional structure in *Prayuk* music. Thai musicians have consciously discarded Thai forms because these ‘feel too long’ for audiences (Wanchai Pinthong). Bruce Gaston reported that he had tried to use Thai forms, but they ‘haven’t worked too well – they take too much time’.

Summary

As this section has demonstrated, *Prayuk* musicians have an extremely reflexive and self-conscious approach to the creation of fusion music that reflects the dualistic modern-yet-Thai aspects of their music-cultural identity. They can clearly articulate their priorities as to which elements of traditional music they maintain as markers of Thai-ness (thereby *diverging* from Western music) and which Western elements they adopt to represent modernity (i.e. signalling *convergence*). Further, they make deliberate choices about how to blend Thai and Western elements to present a Thai-but-modern music-cultural identity.

Conclusions: Modernisation Processes in Thailand

The literature demonstrates a range of ways in which Thais construct and present their social status through the use of icons of prestige. A range of studies also demonstrated the way in which the Thai aristocracy of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries responded to colonising threats by borrowing Western symbols of prestige and adapting them to demonstrate to the West their equal social standing, and their ability to manage their own modernisation program. However, in adopting icons of Western prestige, they did not completely replace their own. Rather, they selectively borrowed that which they perceived would enhance and fit with their own symbols of status, taking only that which they perceived as being advantageous to them, and blended it with their existing sources of prestige. This was done in order to enhance their social standing and negotiate with colonising powers, without ceding their own strong sense of cultural identity.

My application of *Communication Accommodation Theory* and *Acts of Identity Theory* to music accounts for both how and why urban middle class Thais have experimented widely with fusions of traditional Thai and Western musics. As the interview results demonstrate, *Prayuk* musicians employed two deliberate and parallel processes of *accommodation* utilising *acts of identity* in order to negotiate rapid modernisation, maintain a clearly Thai music-cultural identity and build their middle-class social status. That is, they purposively and consciously identified aspects of Western music which they perceive as

embodying modernity, and combined these with elements of Thai classical music which symbolise Thai-ness.

The *acts of identity* performed in choosing to *converge* with some Western musical practices, whilst *diverging* in other areas (thereby converging with traditional Thai practices) shows the extent to which they are prepared *accommodate* both Western and aristocratic Thai sources of prestige in order to build a modern, but fully Thai, music-cultural identity which symbolises and thereby presents the rising status of the middle class.

This effectively mirrors broader social processes they have observed in the aristocracy: since the mid-nineteenth century, the aristocracy have used the strategy of adopting – or *accommodating* – Western education, clothing and other cultural behaviour in order to demonstrate that they had equal status with the West, and could manage their own modernisation. Furthermore, this process is not new in Thailand, building on the traditional practice of patron-client relationships where a person of lower status (the client) can borrow from the social prestige of the patron to increase their own social standing (see Wyatt, 1984, p. 9, 71; and Mulder 1997, p. 159ff).

This study has briefly demonstrated the applicability of CAT and AIT to accounting for the construction of an adapted cultural identity in the context of rapid culture change and the threat of colonialisation. Whilst I do not claim generalisability of these theories at this stage, it would be interesting to attempt to repeat this study in other cultures, including those who were actually colonized, to assess its broader applicability.

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