



THAI CLASSICAL
SINGING

DUSADEE SWANGVIBOONPONG

An **Ashgate** Book

Thai Classical Singing

*To all the gods of music and all the singers through the ages who
have made Thai classical singing the complex and beautiful thing it is*

THAI CLASSICAL SINGING

Its History, Musical Characteristics,
and Transmission

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SOAS Musicology series

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Editorial Note

Romanisation

Deborah Wong, in her recent book, noted that ‘The Thai language does not romanise gracefully’ (2001: xxxi). The fault, I think, lies less with the language than with the scholars of Thai culture, who refuse to agree on a single standard. The real problem is with inconsistency between publications. After all, for Mandarin Chinese the *pinyin* romanisation has largely won the day despite the fact that non-specialists are befuddled by the use of *q* to represent the sound ‘ch’, *c* to represent ‘ts’ and so forth. It is surely fair to assume that nobody will read a book as specialised as the present one without being willing to exert a bit of effort to learn the conventions of orthography.

In choosing a romanisation, I first turned to five major works in English on Thai music (in chronological order: Morton 1976, Roongruang 1990, Myers-Moro 1993, Miller and Chonpairot 1995, Wong 2001). I was hoping that a consensus would emerge among the numerous available systems. But as I already knew, there was no consensus – even worse: *every* author had made further modifications to existing systems. Morton used the Cornell Library system, with some modifications; Roongruang used no system, spelling some terms in up to three different ways; Myers-Moro opted for the Haas system, ‘with several alterations’; Miller and Chonpairot went for the ALA-LC system, ‘with . . . exceptions’; and Wong preferred the Royal Institute system, but ‘with certain modifications’.

Thus we find one form of musical theatre spelled in four different ways in these five works: *lakhōn*, *lakhon*, *lakhaun*, *lakhawn*, *lakhon*. The three-string fiddle suffered an even worse fate: *sō sām sāi*, *so sam sai*, *sau saam saaj*, *saw sam sai*, *sau saam saai* – all five authors differ!

Lacking any agreed standard, I have chosen to follow the Haas system (see Haas 1994), because it shows all possibly relevant details: it distinguishes all consonants, all vowels, all tones and also shows vowel length consistently. Like the Chinese *pinyin* system, some of its features are not immediately intelligible to native English speakers; these are described below.

Written and spoken Thai do not always agree; my romanisation follows everyday Thai pronunciation (and thus is not strictly speaking a

‘transliteration’ of written Thai). Thus in a word such as น้ำตา, where a long vowel is not written but is pronounced, I will romanise it as *námtaa*, and not *námtaaa*.

When romanised Thai words begin with a vowel marked with a speech-tone, and that word is capitalised, the speech-tone mark will be moved to the second letter of the word; e.g. *yán* will become *Yán*. Also, when a word beginning with η is capitalised, Ng will be used, e.g. Ngó Pàa. An equivalence table at the end of this section shows some common Thai terms as romanised in the five works mentioned above plus the present work.

Consonants

Here is a list of Roman consonants used to represent Thai letters in this book, following the Haas system. They have the usual English pronunciations with any exceptions shown in brackets. Please note that consonants at the ends of words should not be emphasised via aspiration or a clear release.

	beginning of a word	end of a word
b =	บ	บ พ ภ
c =	จ	-
(c is pronounced as English j)		
ch =	ฉ ช ฌ	-
d =	ด ฎ	จ ช ด ต ฎ ฏ ฌ ฐ ฌ
f =	ฟ	-
g =	-	ก ข ก ฌ
h =	ห	-
j =	ย	ย
(j is pronounced as y)		
k =	ก	-
(k is pronounced as the g in the word ‘go’)		
kh =	ข ค ฌ	-
(kh is pronounced as k)		
l =	ล	-
m =	ม	ม
n =	น	น ล วรร
p =	ป	-
(p is pronounced somewhere between b and p; there is no English equivalent)		
ph =	ผ พ ภ	-
(ph is pronounced as p)		
r =	ร	-
(r is flapped or rarely trilled, with tongue tip pointing slightly back)		
ry =	ฤ	-
ryy =	ฤร	-

s	=	ซ ฌ ษ ส	-
t	=	ต ฏ	-
(t is pronounced somewhere between d and t; there is no English equivalent)			
th	=	ฐ ฑ ฒ ถ ฑ ฒ	-
(th is pronounced as t)			
w	=	ว	-

Vowels

The symbols for vowels (again following Haas 1994) include three special symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet. A double vowel simply represents greater length (duration) rather than a change in quality in most cases. Examples are from British English unless otherwise noted.

a	=	อะ	like	u in <u>cut</u>
aa	=	อา	like	a in <u>car</u>
i	=	อิ	like	i in <u>hint</u>
ii	=	อี	like	ee in <u>meet</u>
y	=	อึ	like	English <u>could</u> but with a slight smile (short)
yy	=	อือ	same as above	(long)
u	=	อุ	like	u in <u>put</u>
uu	=	อู	like	oo in <u>boot</u>
e	=	เอะ	like	e in <u>net</u>
ee	=	เอ	like	a in <u>late</u>
ε	=	แอะ	like	a in <u>mare</u> (short)
εε	=	แเอ	same as above	(long)
o	=	โอะ	like	o in <u>host</u> (short)
oo	=	โอ	same as above	(long)
ɔ	=	เอาะ	like	o in British <u>hot</u> or American <u>ought</u> (short)
ɔɔ	=	ออ	same as above	(long)
ə	=	เออะ	like	e in <u>her</u> (short)
əə	=	เออ	same as above	(long)

Please note that the above vowels can be combined in Thai, for example, iia (เอีย).

Thai names that have already been romanised will be given their commonly used spellings, e.g. Ketukaenchan (Keetukəncan) and Phibun (Phíbuun). Common place and period names such as Bangkok and Ayutthaya are also left in their familiar forms as used by the Royal Academy of Thailand (Rāadchabanditajásathāan). Names of royals follow Finestone's spellings in his 1989 book *The Royal Family of Thailand*.

The Thai language is tonal. The system used to represent these speech-tones is again based on that of Haas (1994). It is as follows:

no tone mark	=	mid-tone
`	=	low-tone
ˆ	=	falling-tone
ˊ	=	high-tone
ˋ	=	rising-tone

See Chapter 3 under *Speech-tones and their melodic formulae in songs* for further details.

This book 2003/2004	Miller 1994	Wong 2001	Myers-Moro 1993	Morton 1976	Roongruang 1990
cakhêe	ja-khe	<i>cakhee</i>	cakhee	jakhê	jakay, chakhae, jakhae
châəd	<i>choet</i>	choet	cheut	choet	choed chöed chud chyd
diiaw	dio	<i>diaw</i>	diaw	dio	dio
jāj	yai	yai	jaj	yai	yai
khêeg	khaek	khaek	khaek	khâek	khaek khaeg
khlùj	khlui	khlui	khluj	khlui	khlui, klui
khõon	khon	khoon	khoon	khõn	khone
khóŋ	khawng	khaung	khaung	khõng	gong
khryaŋ	khrüang	khrüang	khryang	khřüang	kruang
klóŋ	klawng	klaung	klaung	klõng	glong
kraaw	<i>krao</i>	kraao	kraaw	krāo	gao
kràb	krap	krap	krap	krap	grab, krab, crab
lakhõn	lakhawn	lakhon	lakhaun	lakhõn	lakhon
lûug	luk	luuk	luuk	lūk	look
nõg	nawk	nauk	nauk	nõk	nog
ranâad	ranat	ranaat	ranaat	ranāt	ranad
rýyaŋ	<i>rüang</i>	rüang	ryang	rřuang	ruang
sêephaa	sepha	seephaa	seephaa	sêphā	sepa
sõ sãam	saw sam	sau saam	sau saam	sõ sãm	so-sam-sai
sãaj	sai	saai	saaj	sāi	
thajõj	thayoi	thayoi	<i>thajauj</i>	thayõi	thayoy
thăw	thao	thao	thaw	thao	thao

Note: The words in italics represent how they would be written according to the various systems, if they were to appear in the texts.

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- Miller, Terry E. and Jarernchai Chonpairot (1995), *A history of Siamese music reconstructed from Western documents, 1505–1932*. *Crossroads* 8.2 (special issue): 1–192.
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- Roongruang, Panya (1990), *Thai music in sound* (2nd ed.). With 3 cassette tapes. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn Univ.
- Wong, Deborah (2001), *Sounding the center: history and aesthetics in Thai Buddhist performance*. Univ. of Chicago Press.

Additional systems of reference used

Bibliography

Memorial publications, which appear on birthdays and anniversaries, and on funeral days, are collections of writings which sometimes include pieces by the person honoured, and sometimes don't. They honour prominent people, such as Sūntharawaathin, Kidtiwan and Prasidthikun, and they will be attributed in this book to the person honoured, who will be put into square brackets, for example, [Kidtiwan].

Some books have no known editor, e.g. Amatayakul 1990, and these will be attributed as '(no ed.)', while those with no known publisher will be shown as 'NP'.

Audiography

Song examples in the text will be given a reference number; 'R' for 'recording', followed by a number in square brackets, e.g. [R1]; these can then be easily found in the Audiography. If the examples are theoretical or come from general knowledge, they will be marked [AM], standing for 'author's memory'.

Recordings made in the field will be designated (F); these include songs recorded during private interviews, as well as those recorded from TV and radio programmes by myself. Commercial tapes and CDs will be designated (C); these include tapes distributed during funeral services, and 'standard songs' recorded by the Ministry of Higher Education (see Chapter 6 under 'Recent movements in teaching theory'), even though these tapes are not really commercial in the understood sense. Unreleased recordings from the sound archive of Chulalongkorn University will be marked (CUSA).

Table of Royal Reigns and Periods

Information taken from *Thailand: A Short History* from Wyatt 1984. I follow Wyatt's spelling, which corresponds to normal English practice, rather than romanising.

Kings of Sukhothai

(1240–1438)

[The Sukhothai period]

1	Si Intharathid	?1240s–?1270s
2	Ban Meuang	?1270s–?1279
3	Ramkhamheng	1283–c.1317
4	Lö Tai	?1317–?1347
5	Ngua Nam Thom	1346–1347
6	Mahathammaracha I (Lü Tai)	1347–1374?
7	Mahathammaracha II	1368–74?–1398?
8	Mahathammaracha III (Sai Lüthai)	1398–1419
9	Mahathammaracha IV	1419–1438

Kings of Ayudhya

(1351–1767)

[The Ayutthaya period]

1	Ramathibodi	1351–1369
2	Ramesuan	1369–1370
3	Borommaracha	1370–1388
4	Thong Chan	1388
5	Ramesuan (second reign)	1388–1395
6	Ramracha	1395–1409
7	Intharacha	1409–1424
8	Borommaracha II	1424–1448
9	Borommatrailokanat (ruling in Ayudhya)	1448–1463
	(ruling in Phitsanulok)	1463–1488
10	Borommaracha III (in Ayudhya)	1463–1488
11	Intharacha II	1488–1491

12	Ramathibodi II	1491–1529
13	Borommaracha IV	1529–1533
14	Ratsada	1533–1534 (5 months)
15	Chairacha	1534–1547
16	Yot Fa	1547–Jun 1548
17	Khun Worawongsa (usurper)	Jun–Jul 1548
18	Chakkraphat	Jul 1548–Jan 1569
19	Mahin	Jan–Aug 1569
20	Maha Thammaracha	Aug 1569–Jun 1590
21	Naresuan	Jun 1590–Apr 1605
22	Ekathotsarot	Apr 1605–Oct 1610
23	Si Saowaphak	1610–1611?
24	Song Tham (Intharacha)	1610–11–Dec 1628
25	Chettha	Dec 1628–Aug 1629
26	Athittayawong	Aug–Sept 1629
27	Prasat Thong	Sept 1629–Aug 1656
30	Narai	Oct 1656–Jul 1688
31	Phra Phetracha	Jul 1688–1703
32	Süa	1703–1709
33	Phumintharacha (Thai Sa)	1709–Jan 1733
34	Borommakot	Jan 1733–Apr 1758
36	Suriyamarin	May 1758–Apr 1767

King of Thonburi

[The Thonburi period]

Taksin late 1767–Apr 1782

Kings of Bangkok

Chakri Dynasty (1782–present)

[Known as the Rattanakosin period]

1	Phra Phutthayotfa (Rama I)	Apr 1782–Sept 1809
2	Phraphutthalertla (Rama II)	Sept 1809–Jul 1824
3	Phra Nangklao (Rama III)	Jul 1824–Apr 1851
4	Mongkut (Rama IV)	Apr 1851–Oct 1868
5	Chulalongkorn (Rama V)	Oct 1868–Oct 1910
6	Vajiravudh (Rama VI)	Oct 1910–Nov 1925
7	Prajadhipok (Rama VII)	Nov 1925–Mar 1935
8	Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII)	Mar 1935–Jun 1946
9	Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX)	Jun 1946–present

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And to my father and mother for their everlasting love.

Preface

Beginnings

It was late afternoon on the first day of November 1983. After I had put all the equipment back into the cupboard, I rushed out of the physics lab trying to get to the music club before Aacaan Caræncaj¹ arrived. It was my turn to unlock the door and to prepare some coffee and snacks for the senior teacher. I arrived at the music room only a few minutes before five, putting the kettle on and trying to do the washing up. The old white Mercedes was approaching the car park. It was too late; I didn't have time to buy a new packet of biscuits. Well, she'd have to eat the leftover ones. I could put them onto a serving plate and that would look OK.

I went to greet Aacaan Caræncaj at the parking bay in front of the student union building and helped her carry the rattan basket that she always used as a handbag. I gave her my arm for climbing the steps and, in the same position, I led her to the music room. Pii Jiñ, the head of the Thai music club arrived, which gave her company, so I had time to finish the washing up and prepare coffee.

When I came back with the coffee, they were talking about the lyrics we were going to use for the celebration marking the king's birthday on TV in two weeks time. Pii Jiñ read the letter from the TV station telling of the plan to broadcast it nationally. Aacaan Caræncaj had chosen three songs for that year's performance, and they would be joined together to create a suite; the lyrics had been newly written by a Thai Music Club member. My teacher sounded excited and enthusiastic about teaching her singers. One of the songs I knew already, but the other two I didn't.

More students arrived but none of the singers had turned up yet. The other teacher, Khruu Sömphoñ, also arrived so we started to practise the instrumental part of the song 'Thooñ Jón' which Aacaan Caræncaj wanted to use to begin the suite. I played the *cakhêe*, the three stringed zither, my favourite instrument. When we could remember the song 'Thooñ Jón', Khruu Sömphoñ taught us the other two songs: 'Wêedsükam' and 'Khèeg Bóorathêed'.

¹ Aacaan Caræncaj's full name is Caræncaj Süntharawaathin. *Aacaan* is the Thai term for teacher, and we generally use first names for everybody.

It was half past six and more people had arrived, but there was still no sign of the singers. Everyone finished the instrumental parts of the three songs and was eager to hear the vocal part. Aacaan Carəncaj became more and more frustrated, and you could feel her disapproval without even looking at her face. Pii Jiŋ made excuses for the singers: that their faculty was a long way from the student union, and that the lecture might have been extended. She also suggested that we could run through the suite without them, and asked Aacaan Carəncaj to sing for us. Someone had told me that she was one of the best singers in Thailand.

I felt excited, as it was going to be the first time I had heard her sing properly. (I had only overheard her humming when she was teaching the singers, and some of her recordings, but not live singing.) I, and the other players, did not usually pay much attention to the singing. We just wanted to know the ending of the vocal line so we could come in at the right time. But this time would be different. The singer was Aacaan Carəncaj, the most respected singer in the whole of Thailand.

Khruu Sömphon started the first song on the *ranāad èeg* and everybody joined him after a few bars, and when we finished the introduction, Aacaan Carəncaj began to sing. The first sound she sang hit me like a thunderbolt. I had never heard anyone sing this way before. It was hard to explain. It was the combination of calmness, powerfulness and confidence, and she held the complete attention of everybody. Every word she sang became meaningful and this made the whole lyrics sound full of conviction. I was drawn into her hypnotic sound from start to finish; when the instrumental part took over, I couldn't wait for it to end so I could hear more of her singing.

I must admit that, before that day, traditional singing had never interested me at all. I had heard quite a few acclaimed singers since I started learning Thai music but none of them had impressed me. In fact, I had found it boring, and the strange voice production and funny wordless vocalisation or *yyan* had often made me laugh. But Aacaan Carəncaj's singing revealed the beauty of *yyan* to me and the weird sounds *əə*, *yy*, *ŋəə*, *ŋəəj* etc. began to make sense. I have to say that she opened a gate into the world of Thai singing for me. A year later, I left the Faculty of Education and entered the Music Department of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts.

During my second year in the music department, there was a lack of male singers in the department. I was persuaded by the head of department to change my main study from the *cakhèe* to singing. I had no hesitation in doing this, because I had been dreaming about it ever since that day in the music club. Best of all, they were going to send me to learn with Aacaan Carəncaj, my favourite singer. To begin with, Aacaan Carəncaj felt unable to teach me, telling me that: 'a singer needs an outstanding voice, and you do not have one'. Another factor not in my favour was that usually, in order

to gain a BA in vocal music, training has begun in childhood. Eventually, however, she sang the song ‘Phamâa Hâa Thôn’ for me and I made a tape recording of her voice, took it away and learnt the song by heart. After a week, I went back to her and sang the song. She was satisfied and cautiously accepted me, but only with the reasoning that: ‘although your voice is not remarkable, by studying my singing and teaching styles and preserving them this will be of more importance than becoming a great singer’.

Aacaan Caræncaj will be referred to by her surname of Süntharawaathin from now on, as will other Thai teachers and academics, as Western tradition dictates. Süntharawaathin will appear often in the text, obviously because of the large amount of direct experience which I have of her work and teaching methods. Without this experience, this book would have been almost impossible.

Scope and aims

The music described in the previous section belongs to what Thais call *dontrii thaj dæm*, which can be translated as ‘Thai classical music’. This genre is also known as ‘Thai court music’ (*dontrii râadchasămnâg*), because it was nourished and perfected during its golden era at the royal court of Bangkok. I have chosen to call it ‘classical’ here because the genre is found widely throughout Thai society, not only in the court. In this book, I will be focussing on the vocal music of this genre. Thailand also possesses a wide variety of regional and popular vocal traditions, some of which interact with Thai classical singing, but I will be unable to cover these here.

Due to the near-total absence of European-language studies of Thai classical singing, I will cover a wide range of aspects. These will include the historical dimension, the fundamentals of Thai vocal music, the lyrics and poetic forms, and the current and past methods of teaching. All in all, the study will, it is hoped, form a sound basis from which further and deeper research in this field can be attempted. The information used has been gathered from varied sources (both Thai and English), with much of it deriving from my own experiences of learning, teaching and performing Thai singing in Thailand and, since 1991, in the UK.

Thai vocal practices which can and cannot be defined as singing

There are four terms used to refer to the four different kinds of vocalisation: *kaan khàb*, *kaan pháag*, *kaan sùuad* and *kaan r’óŋ* which could be

translated respectively as: ‘reciting’, ‘narrating’, ‘chanting’, and ‘singing’.² Each of them belongs to a particular genre and has specific functions.

The term *khàb* by itself in musical usage refers only to a ‘recitation’ performed to a *sěephaa* melody.³ In everyday usage, *khàb* means ‘to drive’ or ‘to make things move’; therefore, we might say *khàb* refers to the idea of ‘driving’ words forward. The Royal Academy of Thailand defines the term *khàb* as:

A kind of uttered performance that tells stories to an uncomplicated tune. Because the emphasis is on the story, the pattern of *khàb* melody is therefore unfixed. However, the audience can recognise different kinds of *khàb* from the outlines of the melodies. (Râdchabanditajásathään [The Royal Academy] 1997:23)

The *khàb* melody is ‘unfixed’ (within the melodic outline) because it is a ‘textful’ vocalisation in which the melody is subservient to the clarity of word tones and the need to communicate a story to the audience; in other words the melody can be changed in order to get the meaning of a word across more easily. This is also the reason why it is classed as a recitation rather than a song, even though it might sound like the latter to Western ears, and can be notated with precise pitches, unlike speech. On the other hand, while following a melodic outline, there is a definite feeling of metre, relating to the reading aloud of poetry. There are three types of melodic outline: *sěephaa thaj*, *sěephaa laaw* and *sěephaa mɔɔn*. This number of types came about originally because the main characters in the classic poem *Khũncháaj Khũnphěen* came from the three peoples of the Thai, the Lao and the Mon.

The term *phâag* or *kaan phâag* refers to a kind of vocalisation that is used exclusively in the Thai mask plays known as *khõon*. Haas (1994:369) defines this term *phâag* as ‘to speak the part of an actor’. The term is also used to indicate speech overdubbing for foreign films. The function of *kaan phâag* in *khõon* plays is not only the speaking of the lines of the dumb actors, but also the description of their actions. *Kaan phâag* in *khõon* plays (known as *kaan phâag khõon*) uses melodies, whilst *kaan phâag* in filmic terms is merely speech. *Kaan phâag khõon* also requires a special kind of voice production which emphasises word pronunciation over other styles of vocalisation, through the use of harshness, volume and exaggeration. In most educational institutions such as music colleges and music departments in universities, *kaan phâag* and *kaan khàb sěephaa* are part of the same course, separate and distinct from singing courses. Both genres make use of only a few melodies, and therefore students learn examples of each

² The word *kaan* preceding these terms is merely an adjective that changes a verb into a noun.

³ This is different from the term *sěephaa mahõorii* which refers to entertainment music.

melody and then apply them to new texts by themselves. Even though most all-round singers learn the techniques of *kaan phâag*, they don't usually perform it. The people who perform *kaan phâag* are called *nág phâag* or *khon phâag*, meaning narrators. It is said that people who are trained to specialise in *kaan phâag* are unlikely to excel at singing because of the constraints imposed on their voices and the damage to their vocal cords this can bring.

The third kind of vocalisation is *kaan sùuad* or chanting. This includes all kinds of religious chanting, mostly Buddhist. It is not regarded by either lay Thais or Buddhist monks as singing. Monks are forbidden by the eighth precept of Buddhism to make music – neither can they listen to it or gain enjoyment from it. Despite this, Buddhist chanting makes use of many melodies known as *thamnōṅ* (for example, *sùuad thamnōṅ sōrāphanjā*) which involve singing in parts and leads to instinctive harmonising, a practice which comes close to most definitions of singing. This in turn leads to musicians jokingly remarking that chanting monks are ‘singing their songs again’. There is no fixed scale for Thai Buddhist chanting, but it seems to adhere to poetic metre and is therefore rhythmical. Different functions are accompanied by different rhythms and melodies, reflecting the nature of the occasion, with different voice qualities employed also, e.g. funeral chants are slow and sombre and low in tone.

What is left after these three quite narrow definitions is by far the largest type of vocalisation, known as *kaan rōṅ*, or singing, and it is into this type that Thai classical singing falls. One thing that distinguishes *kaan rōṅ* from the other three categories is the large number and variety of melodies employed and the functions to which they are put. Thais instinctively know into which category a vocalised piece belongs because of their life-long experience of these different kinds of ‘performance’, and where, how and when they occur. Another common term used for singing in general is created by inserting the term *khàb* (which we translated above as ‘recitation’), as in *kaan khàb rōṅ*.⁴ The term *khàb* is also combined with other terms to create new expressions for singing, such as *khàb klōm* meaning ‘to build up an atmosphere’, and *khàb sō* (northern dialect term) meaning ‘to sing’.

Previous works

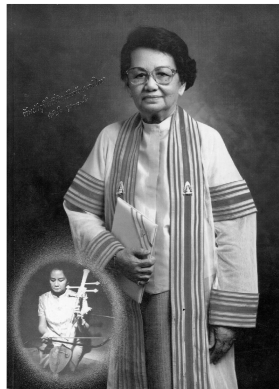
So far, there have not been many books written about Thai music in English that include vocal music. Those written in Thai that deal with singing are

⁴ Another expression for singing is *khàb lamnam*, but it is rarely used. The term *lamnam* means ‘poem to be sung’; it is exclusively used for songs but not for other kinds of vocalisation, even though they all make use of poems in their practice.

usually internal communications between native singers and musicians, excluding most of the wider populace. Caræncaj Sūntharawaathin (1987b,c) and Thúam Prasidthíkun (1992b,c,d), the most experienced singers in Thailand, have both written articles about their experiences of learning and performing songs, and of the basic theories involved, i.e. voice use, singing interpretation, vocal techniques etc. These articles are, perhaps, the most valuable sources for Thai singing written in Thai, and they await revelation to a larger reading public. A translation of Sūntharawaathin's article is given in Appendix V, while some parts of Prasidthíkun's article are quoted in the main body of the text. In 1998, the students of Phajthuun Kidtiwan, another distinguished Thai singer, gathered articles together written about their teacher's life and published them in a book to honour the day of her cremation. The book doesn't include singing techniques or any theory, unlike the two sources mentioned above, but the articles reveal a fascinating biographical insight into her life and demonstrate the close relationship that existed between Kidtiwan and her pupils. Reference is made to this book throughout the main text.

In 1992, the Ministry of Higher Education gathered together 'active' Thai music teachers in Thailand in order to standardise Thai music teaching in schools and universities and even in private lessons. As a result, a guide for teaching Thai music (including singing) and a school curriculum were printed in 1995. These include songs for different levels of attainment and competence and guidelines on presentation and technique. The curriculum came into use in May 1998, and its effectiveness would make for interesting future study.

There is a thesis written in English by a Thai scholar called Panya Rongruang (1999). This concentrates on the period 1930 to 1942 and gives interesting historical background from this time.



From left to right: Covers of books dedicated to Kidtiwan, Sūntharawathin and Prasidthikun

The standard work on Thai music in English is, perhaps, Morton's book entitled *Thai Traditional Music* published in 1976. Having access to a large collection of Thai melodies⁵ enabled him to analyse the structure of Thai music extensively. This book provides basic knowledge such as history, tuning system, metre, rhythm, tempo, instruments and ensembles, modes, forms and compositional techniques, and also includes a small section on vocal music. This work is like the trunk of a tree from which other research branches off. Morton discussed 'modulation' in Thai music and suggested the term 'metabole' instead (see Chapter 3 for a further explanation), for when a change of 'pitch-level' occurs. Pitch-level corresponds to the Western concept of key; it is talked about in detail in Chapter 5. Metabole and pitch-level has been increasingly used amongst analysts of Thai music.

In 1988, Tanese-Ito, a Japanese researcher, revealed some common features of vocal melody as affected by different speech tones in an article in the journal *Musica Asiatica V* (1988).⁶ This is a valuable treatise on Thai vocal music, as this aspect of it had never been analysed before. She discovered that the melody of a song is changed to keep the tones of the words correct. I have found that this practice seems to be natural for the singers involved, but difficult to understand for those who are not fluent in Thai. Tanese has also studied other basic concepts of Thai singing such as *ýyan*, but, unfortunately, the work is in Japanese. This book, even though doubtless repeating some parts of her Japanese work, will have a different approach to Tanese's, since it is undertaken from the point of view of a practitioner and an insider; it will also be in English. Moreover, recent information on *ýyan*, gained from Süntharawaathin and Prasadthikun will be taken into account and discussed.

Myers-Moro's latest publication *Thai Music and Musicians in Contemporary Bangkok* (1993) is an anthropological approach to Thai music and society. Apart from the elements and classifications of the music, her book covers the social organisation of Thai musicians, musical transmission, religious cosmology and the status of Thai music in society. As well as

⁵ He had access to the largest collection of Thai instrumental melodies written in Western staff notation. These were gathered together in a project under the patronage of Prince Damroñ and his daughter Princess Phádthanaajú in 1930. Senior musicians of the Fine Arts Department were gathered to play the 'to be preserved' tunes for a group of Western-trained musicians to notate them. As a result, more than 400 pieces of music were notated. It should be noted that this collection has only recently been revealed to the public in Thailand, and even now not in its entirety; the 'official' copy kept in the Fine Art Department had been said to have been lost in a fire in 1960. However, a full copy of this collection, obtained by Morton, has been preserved in the library of UCLA since the 1970s.

⁶ She also wrote a brief article on *ýyan* or wordless vocalisation in Thai singing which appeared in Koizumi (1980:181–4).

citing very useful details of the fundamentals of Thai music, Myers-Moro discusses some significant concepts which help the reader to gain a better understanding of Thai musicians. For example, she explains the term *hǐuaŋ wíchaa*, the concept of ‘guarding knowledge’, and differentiates between *prachan* and *prakiuaad*, two types of music competition. My book will take her work into account, and expand her discussion of these concepts and several others.

Silkstone’s unpublished thesis is the most theoretical study on Thai music yet available. He examines how Thai musicians, in this case fiddle players, learn to improvise. He concludes that ‘practitioners conceptualise formulas, organise them in memory and choose between them . . . on the basis of a grammar of elaboration’ (Silkstone 1993:248). Even though his study is about the improvisation of instrumental music, it examines a concept which is also significant in the creation of Thai vocal melody. His theories on the conceptualisation of the basic instrumental melody and the idiomatic elaborations that ensue can be applied to the creation of Thai singing, since both vocal and instrumental parts share the same basic structure, although the vocal melody is a composed and not an improvised melody.

Most analysts including Morton and Silkstone confine their study to *phleeng pròbkàj*, which is considered by Thai musicians also as the major genre of Thai music. The significant song form in the *phleeng pròbkàj* category is one with a fixed number of rhythmic cycles, a form that gives analysts a clear framework to examine. My work too will use *phleeng pròbkàj* to explain the general features of Thai vocal melody, but will also attempt to reveal the vocal melodies of other genres such as *phleeng thajǎj* in order to illustrate a wider view of the subject.



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Chapter 1

The Historical Dimension

Singing during the Pre-Sukhothai, Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods (up to 1767)

The study of the history of Thai song melodies is somewhat difficult due to the fact that they come from an oral tradition; some old lyrics were written down, but the melodies were handed on through the generations by oral transmission, from teachers to pupils and from old singers to young.

Morton says that:

what we know today of Thai music is in actuality only of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the ‘classic’ or Bangkok period [which] can be considered as a culmination of musical evolution that probably started . . . in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with the rise of Ayuthaya [Ayutthaya] as the capital (Morton 1976:1).

Being a strong power with many fierce and successful warlords allowed the Empire of Ayutthaya to maintain a high degree of unity for nearly two hundred years (from the 15th–17th centuries); this provided a fertile soil in which cultures flourished.

The history of the people of present-day Thailand can in fact be traced back further than this, to a time before the Ayutthaya period, a time when large numbers of peoples with separate identities were scattered all over the Indochinese peninsula. Historians identify Thai people as people who share a common linguistic and cultural identity known as *Tai*. Wyatt says:

. . . the people who brought the core elements of the contemporary Thai identity to what is now Thailand did not even arrive in that central portion of the Indochinese peninsula until a thousand or so years ago . . . Only over many centuries has a ‘Thai’ culture, a civilisation and identity, emerged as the product of interaction between Tai and indigenous and immigrant cultures (1984:1).

The indigenous cultures were the Mon and Khmer, while the immigrants were Chinese and Indians. Evidence of this interaction can be seen by the comparison of the musical instruments used by these races, e.g. the Thai *saw dūuaŋ* with the Chinese *erhu* fiddle, and the Thai *taphoon* with the